

# Joint INTO-Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Seminar

**Colleges of Education / Initial Teacher  
Education Providers and Schools**

**School Placement: Experiences, Challenges and  
Possibilities**

April 2016

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School Placement: Experiences, Challenges and Possibilities

Saturday, 23 April 2016



*A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people*

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# Foreword

The INTO and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, were delighted to organise a joint seminar on the theme of experiences, challenges and possibilities between schools and colleges of education with regard to school placement. This seminar was the second in a series of seminars on school placement. The term school placement has replaced the older term of teaching practice, as it more adequately reflects the broader experience encapsulated in school placement in the new models of initial teacher education courses. Schools continue to offer placements to student teachers in the colleges of education in addition to students from Hibernia College.

The partnership relationship between colleges and schools is based on goodwill – goodwill that is generally forthcoming. Primary teachers have a strong tradition of providing informal mentoring to student teachers placed in the classrooms, and may resist moves to formalise relationships. There is no doubt that the increased number of placements required as part of the reconceptualised initial teacher education programmes creates additional challenges for the system. There are more periods during the year where student teachers are in schools. They are spending longer periods of time in schools. Schools' infrastructure is not always suitable for a large influx of students spending short intensive periods of time in schools. School budgets have not been increased and school placement tends to place additional financial demands on students.

The purpose of this second seminar on school placement is to identify the merits and the challenges associated with the revised school placement procedures and to seek resolutions.

We are still in the early stages of the revised arrangements and feedback from teachers, principals, college tutors and students is essential to enhancing the school placement experience for all.

Our thanks are due to the organising committee: Professor Teresa O'Doherty and Neil Ó Conaill of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith with Maeve McCafferty and Joe O'Reilly from the INTO, and the students who assisted on the day. These proceedings include the presentations made during the seminar in addition to a report of the discussions which took place in the groups. Many views were expressed and a variety of perspectives were heard. Conversations and sharing of opinions will continue as the colleges and the teaching profession strive to ensure that school placement provides a valuable learning experience for student teachers, as part of the process of ensuring a quality education for all our pupils.

Sheila Nunan  
General Secretary  
INTO

Professor Michael Hayes  
President  
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

December 2016



# Introduction

**Professor Michael Hayes, President, Mary Immaculate College**

Fáilte,

Good morning and welcome to Mary Immaculate College, for this, the first joint seminar between the INTO and Mary Immaculate College on School Placement.

I am delighted to welcome Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith and Rosena Jordan from the INTO. Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith and Mr Neil Ó Conaill, Director of School Placement, will address you shortly in relation to the current policy on School Placement.

School Placement is a vital component of all education programmes and this year sees the first cohort of B.Ed students and the first cohort of PME students in their final year of the revised reconceptualised teacher education programmes. The new programme structure has significantly increased the amount of time students spend on school placement.

The purpose of this seminar is to discuss experiences of school placement and to identify the challenges that need to be addressed from the perspectives of principals, class teachers, student teachers and other colleges.

There are many issues to be discussed here today in relation to the length and structure of School Placement and this forum will afford you the opportunity to discuss and share your experiences with all parties involved.

This collaborative event was organised by the INTO and Mr Neil O Conaill, Director of School Placement here in MIC. Through collaboration with the INTO, the other colleges of education, the principals, teachers and students we can build on the partnerships that we have already established and help deliver the best school placement experience for our students.

I wish this seminar well.

Beir bua agus beannacht.

**Rosena Jordan, Uachtarán INTO**

Ba mhaith liom fíorchaoil fáilte a chur romhaibh go léir maidin inniu go dtí an seimineár seo, comheagraithe ag Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann agus Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál. Anseo linn inniu tá ionadaithe ó na coláistí oideachais, príomhoidí scoileanna, agus múinteoirí ranga chun ábhar atá an-tábhachtach dúinn go léir a phlé.

School placement is that critically important interface between Initial Teacher Education and full responsibility for our young teachers. As Professor Hayes has outlined, the new programme structure has significantly increased the amount of time students now spend on school placement, so it is timely that we examine how the structure is working.

This seminar offers an opportunity for all delegates to discuss the development of the school placement experience for student teachers. Today is about hearing the different perspectives of the colleges, principals, classroom teachers and students and listening to each other.

# Presentations

## **Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Director of Education and Research, INTO**

Dia is Muire daoibh ar maidin. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an tUasal Michael Hayes as an bhfáilte chroíúil a chuir sé romhainn anseo inniu. Táimid ag tógáil ar an seimineár deiridh a bhí againn ar shocrúchán scoile i gColáiste Phádraig, breis agus bliain ó shoin. Cuid lárnach den chúrsa oiliúna is ea an cleachtadh múinteoireachta – tá cuimhne agam féin ar roinnt de na tréimhsí a chaith mé i scoileanna éagsúla ag foghlaim na ceirde agus ag cleachtadh na gairme.

It is timely to hold our second seminar on school placement, this time in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College. As Professor Hayes has said, in September, we will have the first graduates from the new B.Ed and postgraduate programmes. As students, they will have experienced the new arrangements for school placement throughout their years in college. Schools will also have hosted students from first year to fourth year of the new B.Ed and from the two year post-graduate course. College tutors and lecturers will have worked with students as they progressed through their courses.

Eighteen months ago, we were half way through the new arrangements as outlined in the Teaching Council's policy and guidelines. At that time there were concerns about the proposed arrangements for the latter half of the teacher education programmes, a lot of apprehension and a fear of the unknown. Now that we have experienced the new school placement arrangements across all years of the new programmes, we will hear about these experiences from yourselves and from our panel participants.

Some of the issues we hear about concern the lack of consistency between colleges and the different approaches colleges take to school placement, though perhaps there is a richness in this variety. On the one hand it is optional for schools and individual teachers to host students, but on the other hand, colleges struggle to find sufficient school placement places. The amount of time students must spend on school placement has increased significantly under the new model of initial teacher education – a quarter of their time on the B.Ed. This is certainly a factor in the increased pressure to find placements for student teachers. I estimate we have about 5500 student teachers in our system each year, between the four year B.Ed programme, the two year post-graduate programme in the colleges of education and the postgraduate course in Hibernia. That is a lot of school placements!

The Teaching Council's guidelines are grounded in a partnership approach and outline expectations for all parties in school placement. The INTO has consistently argued for the recognition of class teachers' contribution to student teachers' learning about teaching. Our current system of school placement relies on the goodwill of schools and teachers, which is always forthcoming, in the good tradition of primary schools, but cannot be exploited. Therefore, we need to ensure that whatever supports are required – whether in schools or colleges – are identified and put in place.

In our previous publications on teacher education, the INTO argued that serious consideration should be given to the concept of an extended school experience as part of initial teacher education (INTO, 1993, p. 92). We now have longer placements during the final year. The INTO also argued that teachers should have a structured role as mentors to student teachers during teaching practice – but this interface between class teacher and student teacher is still being explored. Teacher Education policy is at a stage where ideas, concepts and suggestions that have been around for a while have a channel for expression through policy and guidelines now that the Teaching Council has responsibility in this area. But new approaches or practices don't just happen. Any change process requires investment, which is not sufficiently forthcoming at present.

We circulated the proceedings of our last seminar to inform our discussions today. Some of the concerns highlighted then may no longer be concerns while new concerns may have arisen.

Issues raised at our previous seminar include:

- The need to enhance communication between colleges and schools regarding processes and expectations – colleges don't seem to have sufficient resources to build relationships with schools and teachers are not always clear about what is expected of them.
- The challenges for schools of developing partnerships where more than one college is involved – and there are mixed views on this matter.
- The need for professional development for class teachers who host student teachers – this would help to clarify expectations and enhance teachers' skills in observing and giving feedback.
- Preparation of students for school placement in DEIS schools – students may not always be familiar with the range of programmes used in DEIS schools.
- Recognition for teachers who host students – in terms of career progression, credits for participation, for example. We have yet to carry out research seeking teachers' views on school placement as suggested at the last seminar.
- Barriers to hosting student teachers, such as WSE, standardised tests.
- Supporting and responding to the weaker student – where do responsibilities lie and possible implications for pupils.
- Student sourced v college sourced placements – not all students have access to friends and relations already in the teaching profession.
- The need for clarity around expectations of all parties to the process.

Today is another opportunity to bring together the collective experiences of teachers in schools, tutors and staff in colleges, and the student teachers themselves. School placement is about supporting student teachers along the road to becoming fully fledged professionals. It's an essential part of the pathway to becoming a teacher. But what school placement should be and how it should be supported is open to discussion and dialogue.

Tá deis againn inniu cur leis an bplé agus leis an díospóireacht – múinteoirí, mic léinn agus lucht coláiste. Beidh dhá thuirisc againn ansin le plé leis na h-údaráis chuí – An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta, An Roinn Oideachais agus an HEA.

Leanaimís orainn ag cur agus an cúiteamh.

## School Placement: Experiences, Challenges and Possibilities: Reflecting on Four Years of Placements

**Neil Ó Conaill, Director of School Placement, Mary Immaculate College**

I am delighted to welcome you all to Mary Immaculate College for the second INTO/ College seminar on school placement.

As school placement is the biggest off-campus undertaking by any HEI, and as more schools participate in school placement and for more often, seminars such as this one provide valuable opportunities for sharing perspectives and insights.

The first cohort of students graduate from the four year B.Ed courses this year, therefore it is appropriate that the seminar addresses the Experiences, Challenges and Possibilities associated with school placement in the new programmes. Inevitably, with every experience comes challenges and possibilities.

While all aspects of the B.Ed programmes changed to meet the requirements of Teaching Council accreditation, perhaps it is in the area of school placement that change is most visible and significant. Before the Teaching Council published its *Criteria for Programme Providers (2011)*, the Department of Education and Skills (2010), had signalled its preference for four year programmes at undergraduate level. Regarding school placement, the DES advocated that new four year programmes would include at least an aggregate of one year of which is a school-based professional development experience (DES, 2010, p.18). Though it was announced in a draft *National Plan for Literacy and Numeracy*, (a curious forum for the announcement of the most far-reaching policy change in teacher education for decades), this essentially was the first indication that undergraduate primary teacher education programmes were to move from three to four years and that time in schools would increase by over 100%. The Teaching Council followed up the DES announcement in June 2011 with the publication of the *Criteria for Programme Providers*. With a starting date of September 2012, colleges were given a very ambitious target to ensure that new programmes were planned and approved within such a short space of time, while also continuing with the three year programme.

Even though placements could now be spread over four years, the duration of 30 weeks had to be achieved. Despite the short lead in time, both the *Criteria* (Teaching Council, 2011) and the Teaching Council's *Policy on the Continuum* (2011a) required that "new and innovative school placement models should be developed using a partnership approach, whereby HEIs and schools actively collaborate in the organisation of the school placement" (Teaching Council, 2011, p.15). Both documents envisaged teachers becoming involved in providing "mentoring, supervision and constructive feedback on practice" (2011, p.15). No reference was made to training for teachers to undertake such roles. With regard to the capacity issue, the Teaching Council stated that "all recognised schools would be expected to host a student on placement" (2011a, p.13) but this expectation was not included in the *Criteria* document (Teaching Council, 2011). Not for the first time, inconsistencies in the language within policy documents led to different interpretations of meaning and requirements.

The *Criteria* (Teaching Council, 2011) promoted a partnership approach to placement and emphasised the roles and responsibilities of all partners in the placement process, including the co-operating teacher. While many calls have been made to recognise the valuable contribution co-operating teachers can make to student teachers' learning (Kellaghan, 2002, DES, 2005), the Teaching Council's inclusion of the co-operating teacher as a partner in the placement process, though a norm internationally (Clarke et al, 2014), is noteworthy as the first recognition of their role in the Irish context. One year into the new programmes, the *Guidelines for School Placement* were published, (Teaching Council, 2013) and these listed the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders in the placement process and for the first time refer to the role of the co-operating teacher. As a starting point, the *Guidelines* reference roles and responsibilities, but the provision of guidelines in themselves do not foster a commitment to partnership. Indicating to teachers or school communities what they should do with placement students does not promote engagement which is underpinned by a principle of partnership.

To meet the necessary 30 weeks of placement, the undergraduate degrees in MIC, include school placements in six of the eight semesters. Each placement is preceded by a period of observation and classroom assisting so that the student teacher has the opportunity to become familiar with the pupils, class routines and the teacher's classroom

management approaches prior to beginning teaching. The first placement is a non-teaching placement, allowing students the opportunity to assist and observe in classrooms without any teaching responsibilities. It is testimony to the professionalism, commitment and understanding of all the teachers who engage with these First Year students that having students in their room in a non-teaching capacity has not deterred them from taking students. On their second placement, the students begin to teach, beginning with two lessons per day and their teaching commitment increases to the full day shared with a partner. Their first and second teaching placements are graded on a Pass/Fail basis so that mentoring rather than evaluation underpins the student-tutor conversations. The MIC placement programmes involves both partnered (i.e. sharing the teaching commitment with another student) and non-partnered placements and includes placements sourced by the college and others directly by the student. Students are required to teach at all class band levels, Infants, Middle classes and Senior classes, and in a multi-grade class. Their Extended Placement enables them work at a whole school level, in team teaching, learning support and in a curriculum project, as well as teaching a class. The extension of the programmes to four years has allowed for appropriate emphasis on inclusive practice by beginning teachers and for the inclusion of education elective modules and specialism. Both of these enrich the student's school work, especially on the Extended Placement. Over their four years of placements, the students are visited by school placement tutors on a minimum of 15 occasions, which is the equivalent of almost a visit for each teaching week.

The schedule of placements has to pay due regard to the Teaching Council requirements, coherence on the programme and schools' timetables and priorities. Inevitably, in trying to satisfy all perspectives, and fundamentally when required to meet criteria over which one has no control, the timing or duration of placements will not always meet the preference of some stakeholders. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that given the unprecedented increase in the amount of school placement, colleges and schools have done remarkably well to meet the challenges of the new placement landscape.

Having gone through one four year cycle of the placements, we can now reflect on the overall schedule. In MIC, Year One placements have occurred on four occasions, thus allowing for revisions to occur annually. Similarly, we have had three cycles of the second year programme and two of Year Three and one of Year Four, the Extended Placement. As with any educational endeavour, commitment to review and evaluation is integral to the process.

Looking back at the schedule, without doubt the new model would not be feasible without the co-operation and goodwill of the schools and individual teachers who decide to get involved. However, with an unregulated number of students entering primary teaching courses, it is important to recognise that the DES imposes a cap of student numbers only on the colleges of education, it is timely to question the feasibility of demanding that programmes include 30 weeks and 24 weeks of placement (undergraduate and postgraduate, respectively). In the academic year 2014/2015, there were 21,419 mainstream classes in the country (DES, 2015) and an estimated 8,660 school placement opportunities (Ó Neill, 2015) must occur in these classes. When one removes from the 21,419 classes those that are geographically remote from students, those not available due to leave/subbing arrangements and those taught by non-probated teachers, one can appreciate the difficulty experienced by students when trying to source classes and the difficulty experienced by schools which are inundated by placement requests.

The crisis in capacity, all too familiar to colleges which arrange placements, students who seek placements, and schools that choose to become involved, has led to a competition for placements rather than planned participation in placements. Perhaps the formal recognition by the DES of teachers who participate in school placement, and formal recognition in schools' evaluations and inspections, would indicate that participation in school is recognised as a valuable contribution to the profession. Similarly, Teaching Council recognition through Cosán may incentivise greater participation by teachers. Such national recognition is important, as partnership is a Teaching Council policy rather than a policy to be associated solely with the colleges. National policy should have central support, not simply be imposed from above. These steps towards recognition of participation in placement may eventually lead to teachers' participation as collaboration in placement, rather than co-operation with placement. The opportunity, from September 2017, for all NQTs to participate in a formal induction process, as envisaged in Droichead, also enables the review of the insistence on 30 or 24 weeks placement for student teachers. From the colleges' perspective placement schedules, as outlined above, planned to ensure that, on graduating, students would have the best possible range of placement experiences, will have to be reviewed in light of the increasing difficulties in sourcing classes.

The *Criteria* (Teaching Council, 2011), do not require that students teach at all class levels, in fact, just a minimum of two placements is required, though it is difficult to see how 30 weeks can be achieved with just two placements. Fewer but longer placements may be preferable.

A collaborative initiative such as school placement, involving students, lecturers, tutors, co-operating teachers, school principals and pupils, has to balance pragmatism with principles of pedagogy. School pupils and college students are not best served by a system which dilutes its principles in the face of pragmatism. Partnership as a concept for school placement, and developing the role of the co-operating teacher, supporting tutor – co-operating teacher dialogue and student – co-operating teacher dialogue are all at a very early stage of development in Ireland. Conversations such as today's may assist in identifying how best to nurture and sustain commitment to partnership on placement.

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## **Perspectives of a Principal Teacher**

### **Dr Susan Frawley**

My name is Susan Frawley and I have been a principal for the past 16 years. I was a teaching principal for a good many years in a Band one DEIS school and I am now an administrative principal in a 15 teacher rural school. I have experience of teaching practice during the three year BEd and now as the four year BEd.

In my previous school and in my current school we would have had and currently do take a lot of students. As best I can, I facilitate student placement for past pupils, Mary Immaculate College students, both undergraduates and postgraduates, and students from other colleges also. Generally, each class would have one block per year of student teachers.

School placement should be an enriching experience for student teachers. School placement should be an exciting time for student teachers where they learn about teaching, where they learn how a school actually works, where they put the theories into practice. I always say to students 'you are here to learn, it's a teaching practice, your aim over the weeks here is to improve your teaching'. I feel now with the introduction of the four year programme, teaching in a school has finally become central to the education of student teachers. It asks a lot of the school but if students take it seriously and work hard then it is of benefit to both.

The following are my thoughts and my staff's thoughts on student placement:

### **Strengths**

#### ***Extended placement:***

1. The BEd degree is now a four-year course, giving ample amount of time to the practical side of teacher education. The increased amount of teaching practice is a good experience for student teachers. The student gets a real understanding of the workings of the school not just the classroom. It allows them to put theory into practice.
2. The observation section of the extended placement and teaching practice in first year is a positive introduction as it does give students experience of initiatives in schools e.g. literacy lift-off, Aistear, Mighty Maths, Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, Accelerated Reader, Toe by Toe etc. It gives the student a chance to observe the LSRT teachers and the class teacher teaching, observe the practicalities of classroom management, time-management, content and length of lessons.
3. Having a student teacher doing the extended placement is of benefit to the school as they are an extra staff member while they are in the school.
4. It is wonderful to watch a student teacher who is needy, and needs to be scaffolded initially, progressing to a student teacher who is competent and confident.

#### ***Shorter placement:***

1. Having a student allows the class teacher to give time to children who are struggling.
2. It allows the class teacher to observe their class from a different perspective.
3. Teachers often get nice ideas from students.
4. Children do enjoy the student placement.
5. Teachers find the block time for the class teacher during the teaching placement is good and it gives the class teacher time to set and correct homework.
6. The first teaching practice for the first year students is good, it gives them lots of time for observation and assisting in the classroom before they teach their lessons.

## **Challenges and Possibilities**

1. In order for teaching practice to be effective for students it requires a big commitment from staff. As a principal, this can be a challenge for the school.
2. I do find the times in the year that students come to our school a bit disjointed. The old system was far more organised in so far as students came to the school before Christmas and before Easter.
3. Teaching practice needs to be more realistic. Students need to reduce the planning and the notes. They are still producing copious notes and fancy folders. Class teachers and the pupils would prefer energy used in the class lessons rather than solely on the administrative work – no use burning the midnight oil doing plans and not having the know-how or energy the next day to deliver them.
4. Students, especially after their first year in college, need to be more 'individual' in their approach. No sharing of plans, notes, lessons.
5. Students need to be accurate in their teaching of Gaelige.
6. It can happen, and I have had experience of students 'performing' for the supervisor, receiving good grades and for the rest of their time in the school doing very little. This is why conversations are needed between the supervisor and the class teacher and these should be formalised.
7. It can be very annoying for class teachers if the student is particularly weak and not coping. There needs to be a formal structure to deal with this.
8. I do feel the amount of visits from the supervisors is limited. If this is to be a learning experience then the more advice they receive to improve their teaching the better.
9. Teachers in my school felt that, in general, the supervisor who has taught in a class for a substantial number of years was better equipped to supervise the student. Retired principals and retired teachers who supervise are more open and interested in the class teacher's opinions and are more intuitive with the students.
10. The paperwork from the colleges can be confusing, especially the paperwork that came from the extended 14 week teaching practice. One of the students put it into table form which I felt was an easier document to come to terms with. Many of the letters from the colleges are too long and often the important information is lost among the paragraphs. As a principal, what I need to know is the classes they will be teaching and how much or how little of the other initiatives the student is expected to experience so I can ensure their time in my school is productive for them.
11. Students rely a lot on guidance from the class teacher and I feel this can be a very positive experience for the student providing the class teacher is willing to engage with the student. It is extra work for the class teacher but most teachers feel it's payback as they would have received guidance from colleagues over the years themselves; therefore, it is our responsibility to guide good practice in our student teachers. Teachers would like to become more involved, but the challenge here is this involvement to be within school time. This maybe something for the Teaching Council to examine e.g. a more formalised input from teachers to guide, help and support the student teacher but not to grade.
12. With the increased amount of teaching practice, schools are limited as to the amount of students we can take. I do feel embarrassed at times when I have to refuse students who are looking for student placements and I cannot facilitate them due to logistics.
13. Why do some schools not facilitate student teachers? They feel it is ok for other schools to support their future teachers. This point could be taken up with the INTO/IPPN.
14. Schools give a lot to accommodate student teachers. Teachers and principals do it because in a few years from now these student teachers will be teaching alongside us as our colleagues. Schools that are directly linked to colleges should be formally acknowledged in a small way. e.g. a certificate for the school affiliating them with the college. This maybe something to be discussed with the Teaching Council.
15. In an already overloaded curriculum, teachers feel that giving their class to a student for a month may result in the class teacher having to play catch up when the students are gone. And if the student is not of a good standard it can be very frustrating for the class teacher.

16. Students need to be educated from the get-go in best practice e.g. Mata sa Rang, Literacy Lift Off and writing genres. Teachers are not seeing this.
17. With regard to the observation in the first and fourth year student placement, I would be of the opinion that Students should be taking on the role of a classroom assistant, being active in the class rather than sitting down observing teachers. Maybe the word 'observation' could be removed. This might be something the Teaching Council might address.
18. Teaching placement in May (PMEs and second years) is too late as classes have standardised testing to do. There is no substitute for thinking on your feet in front of a class. No theoretical essay or exam can prepare for that and none can give you the experience gained or the confidence that comes with practical teaching. It is very beneficial to see how classes are motivated and the challenges that their dynamic, background or age help or hinder this. For a student to witness how another teacher approaches behaviour or classroom management is invaluable. Teachers are learners themselves and love to be exposed to what works and doesn't work with pupils. Student placement gives students a good insight into the demands of appropriate planning and thinking creatively to stimulate a group. It gives students the opportunity to learn how to teach.

## Perspectives of a Co-operating Teacher

**Grace Fitzgerald, Teacher, Holy Family NS, Rathmore, Co Kerry**

### Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities

Dia is Muire daoibh. Good morning everyone.

I am delighted to be asked to be part of what I believe will be a very insightful and beneficial morning discussing school placement.

I suppose I should give some background information on my educational experiences to date. I attended Mary Immaculate College from 2000 to 2003. I was then offered a full time temporary position in June of 2003 before schools even closed. Was I lucky? Absolutely, but I believe you create, or at least, you HELP create your own luck. I have no doubt but that the grade that I received in my TP helped me get called for that interview and that's half the battle. I then got a second year permanent position as a resource teacher in my parish, and was subsequently offered a permanent job in Rathmore, where I remain teaching today.

In my 13 years, I have taught fifth class, resource, junior infants, first class and for the coming year, fourth class. It is, therefore, important to experience teaching a variety of classes while in college.

On my third year teaching and my first year in Rathmore, I had my first teaching practice student. Reflecting on it, I think I was more nervous about it than the student was. All I could think of was 'oh this supervisor might come or he/she might come'. I almost felt that my teaching, my classroom layout, the behaviour of the children were going to be judged and that it would all be a reflection on me, and to be truthful, it is a reflection on you.

I have had a student every year for the last ten years. We have introduced a cap on teaching practices in our school to one per teacher per year and this works very well.

### Questionnaire to Colleagues and Friends

In preparation for my presentation today, I issued a short questionnaire to colleagues and friends. I would now like to share with you some of their views.

#### *Positives of Teaching Practice from a Class Teacher's Perspective*

1. Students bring a fresh and interesting perspective with a variety of new ideas and methodologies.
2. It gives the class teacher an opportunity to focus on individuals.
3. It allows the teacher time to plan lessons for their class.
4. It gives the teacher an opportunity to observe the children – to really listen to them answering and discussing. It allows the opportunity to see from a distance who participates and who doesn't.
5. It affords a teacher time to do extra work around the school.
6. It provides time to evaluate and reflect on your own teaching.
7. Teachers can give some of their knowledge, experience and expertise to student teachers.
8. Individual testing can be completed by class teacher.
9. Pupils experience a variety of different topics and varied lessons that might not be taught otherwise.

#### *Challenges*

1. Catching up on work not covered in our own plans.
2. Disciplining the pupils if the student teacher fails to have control.
3. Time is taken from Sacrament preparation.
4. When topics are taught by students they may not be well covered and have to be revised by the class teacher, creating added pressure for the teacher.

5. Timetabling: the students seen unaware of the amount of time per subject and do not give subjects their allocated time.
6. Students not knowing how to approach lessons e.g. not knowing what should be taught in a literacy lesson and not knowing where to start.
7. Some teachers feel five weeks of teaching is far too long for pupils to be away from their class teacher.
8. ICT – this can prove a huge challenge for student teachers. They may arrive to the class with no software for interactive whiteboards and not having any idea how to source it. This can result in added time, effort and hassle for the class teacher and colleagues.
9. No experience with using interactive boards; no lectures in college.
10. Giving constructive criticism to student teacher – everyone needs guidance and support and student are no different. Don't get into the habit of doing it all yourself and not asking for help of guidance or not accepting guidance when it is offered you. If you start out this way you will have a very lonely teaching career.

### Differences/Changes in Teaching Practice Noticed

1. Some students are not prepared as well as they should/could be.
2. Relaxed attitude; punctuality can be a problem i.e. returning from staffroom on breaks.
3. Supervisors texting and contacting students to let them know when they will be coming – this does not do the student any good and does an injustice to the pupils in the class who may get a great lesson for that half hour and that's it.
4. Student teachers seem to need far more guidance in how to approach lessons than in my time. They seem very unsure of lessons and lack ideas in approaching lessons.
5. Little or no 'Fearas'. Do they even know the word anymore? I haven't seen a student bring in a poster in years and not only that, but they are not even motivated to set up display tables in the room.
6. Attitude of 'if they can get away without doing it, they will.
7. Dress code is an issue for quite some time, including inappropriate clothing for the classroom and inappropriate tracksuits for PE lessons.
8. Students seem far less prepared by their colleges for teaching practice.
9. Seem to be less visits (four weeks TP and two visits) and when they are visiting, they stay for half hour but spend up to an hour writing report up in another room!
10. Placement is far too long – ten weeks in one room – and on top of that, students had to teach other students' classes to complete a strand module!
11. Standard of student teaching is generally high, however lately it is becoming less reliable, unfortunately.
12. A lot more ICT in classrooms now and students need to be prepared for this.
13. Not reflecting on their lessons – there is a lot to be learnt from reflecting on the positives of a lesson and the concerns with a lesson.
14. Students don't seem too concerned about using other students' lessons and powerpoints, even if they are not appropriate to the age group.

### Positive Changes

1. Students are more confident.
2. Some students display some very innovative approaches to teaching.

### Concerns for Teaching Practice in the Future:

1. New model of placement and increased number of weeks involved is putting a huge strain on a very busy school life.
2. Students will know when supervisors are coming and will 'perform' for a half hour.

3. Saturation of system with student teachers; there is not one month in a school when we are without a student teacher!
4. Class teachers are concerned that their report will become part of the student's grade.
5. Class plans not completed and work having to be revised when student finished.

Colleagues feel they do not want to be involved in assessing the student, but do want greater engagement with the supervisors. A teacher can give insight into how the student is getting on when supervisor is not there, which is the majority of the placement.

### Going Forward What we Would Like to See

1. More visits to students and all colleges following the same level of supervision.
2. More knowledge of ICT – interactive boards and software.
3. Technology can amplify great teaching but great technology cannot replace poor teaching.
4. Students should not have to pay for programmes being run in the school. They should be compensated by the college or union.
5. Class teachers to have greater engagement with supervisor to give insight into the students teaching.
6. Students to be more prepared, have lessons ready for the week, art supplies, photocopying etc should all be ready the evening before or morning of the day, and not during the lesson.
7. Colleges to prepare the students better so they feel confident about teaching practice, give practical ideas to use.
8. Have experience of multiclass teaching
9. Introduce a mentoring programme for students who are finding teaching practice difficult: qualified teachers in localities that would meet with students once a week.
10. Work to be taught by student teacher to be more in line with the class teacher's programme and to be accepted by the colleges.

Ireland has an extremely positive outlook for teaching careers in the future. In 2006 the OECD did a survey on the percentage of 15 year olds who wanted to work in the teaching profession – Ireland ranked fourth out of 41 countries surveyed. The average for these countries was 4.8 and Ireland was 12%. These figures were released by PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) in 2015.

Therefore, it is vital that the training for our future teachers is up to the standards that are and will be required of them. Not only is it important to look after the students but also the class teachers who are giving their time, their expertise, their patience and their class to the students.

*"Leadership in any context, including that of the professional, is a lifelong journey, a process of learning."  
(Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director, Teaching Council).*

## Perspectives of a Student Teacher

### Eoin Hamell, Fourth Year B.Ed Student, Mary Immaculate College

Dia dhaoibh a chairdre. My name is Eoin Hamell. I am honoured to have been asked here today to speak briefly about school placement from the students' perspective.

If I was asked about my experience of school placement on my final day, my perspective would have been different to what it is now. I would have spoken about my late nights raiding the recycling bin for my art lesson or attempting to drink a five litre bottle of water to use as a container in my maths lesson. Or, I would have also spoken about how my non-Mary I friends could never understand why I had to get them to cut out 30 different shapes for every child in my class. Or how could I forget that one night when my mom had a fight with the laminator when the fifth sheet got stuck that night? Now, I am aware that these stories may seem humorous, but they take their toll on students.

Now, standing here as a fourth year student who had his last lecture ever yesterday, I can now say, that we are still discussing these exact stories. However, as time went on and the bags under our eyes finally began to disappear we soon learned that placement is not the end of the world as we may have believed.

Having completed seven school placements in five different schools, I have taught almost every class level in primary school. I will never forget the first day my partner and I walked into Newport Boys' School to meet a group of 24 fourth class boys. This is where it all began. Then, I was nearer to home for school placement three (SP3) in which had second and third class. It just so happened that, in fact, the rest of my schools for placement were very near my home. For SP4 we were partnered again and I had fifth and sixth class. Following this, I was on my own teaching junior and senior infants. Finally, my last school was St Joseph's Primary School in Templemore in which I had third and fourth class and then junior infants. This list highlights one of the great things about the new B.Ed degree and that is the many opportunities to go on school placement and to teach in a variety of settings. I have been in single sex schools, mixed schools, rural schools and DEIS schools and these experiences have helped me on my journey of becoming a primary school teacher.

One of the main reasons why it is so beneficial to be in so many schools is that you get to meet a wide variety of teachers. I have found that every teacher has their own valuable store of knowledge that they can pass onto you. Teachers can be the most valuable asset at your disposal to set you up for your school placement. However, some teachers have different opinions on their role as the class teacher. I have had some teachers who give you the independence to look around the classroom as much as you want and to teach what you want. While it is nice to be given this autonomy and freedom, in my personal opinion, I found it much more beneficial when they were accompanied with meetings in which the class teacher took the time to sit down with me and discuss my lessons and plans with me. The class teacher will be able to tell you specific strategies for meeting the needs of the children in the class, specific books in the class that are very helpful and about other resources that they have built up over the years. These are invaluable pieces of information and the reason why the class teacher is such an important part of school placement.

Another huge part of placement is the inspector you get for placement. This is the person who determines the grade you get and therefore it is the person who keeps you awake at night trying to guess when they might walk through your door. Over the four years I have had six inspectors and three floats. That is nine people who have observed and assessed my teaching and all had different things to say. I have found, and many of my fellow students have found, that different inspectors place different emphases on different parts of teaching. I had one inspector firmly believed that 'Gaeilge neamh-fhoirmiúil' was an essential part of every lesson and was always encouraging me to use more. However, I had another supervisor who did not comment on my use of 'Gaeilge neamh-fhorimiúil' at all and instead focused on my use of assessment and the variety of assessment tools I used in my lessons. It must be said that there were also many similarities in what they pointed out but I feel that during your initial meeting with your supervisor, they should outline the key areas that they emphasise as being essential to a good lesson.

In teacher education colleges, I don't mean to generalise, but I feel that the majority of students aim to get an A. I have never heard a student say 'ah sure as long as we pass it'll be grand' when it comes to placement. For this reason, students are forced to make sure that every lesson they do is the best lesson they do as they do not know when their supervisor shall visit to see those two vital lessons. This is why student teachers are up till the late hours of the night – to ensure all lessons are inspector worthy. But think about what that involves for the student? An average day has seven lessons, so that equals 35 lessons in a week. Can an inspector really see a true representation of all this work in two lessons? I had a float on my final placement who asked about some of the lessons I had taught previous to their visit. I was shocked when I heard this. I had never before, that I recall, been given the chance to talk about all the work that goes into the two bulging folders you are forced to carry around for three weeks or to demonstrate the ability to reflect on my teaching. It was made even better by the fact that not only did the inspector listen to me talk but also took it into account when filling out my assessment sheet. I think that all inspectors should try to facilitate meetings such as this where both parties enter into a dialogue to discuss the student's teaching. If this occurs, I feel like the supervisors will also be able to impart their knowledge in a more effective manner which will also benefit the student more.

As my time here in Mary I draws to a close, I will certainly never forget the workload involved with those dreaded words 'School Placement'. However, I can now also say that I will never forget the skills and knowledge that I gained on each placement along my journey to become a primary school teacher. Each placement gradually introduced a new element to becoming a teacher and supported me as I grew and developed as a teacher. I think that school placement is one of the most beneficial aspects of the B.Ed. programme as it truly allows you to put into practice every thing you learn in the lectures. However, it has also made me realise that this is just the beginning. W.B. Yeats once said that "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire". My four years in Mary I have only sparked this fire and I look forward to seeing what the next step has in store for me.

## **Perspectives of a HEI School Placement Tutor**

**Dr Richard Bowles, MIC Lecturer and School Placement Tutor**

### The Tutor's Role in School Placement

"It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters, in the end"  
(Ursula K. Le Guin)

This quotation, I think, is very apt in describing the developmental journey that our students take while in college during their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and, subsequently, when they enter the teaching profession. While it is important to have clear goals and objectives, the experiences they encounter along the way are crucial in shaping the kind of teacher they will ultimately become.

During the course of my presentation this morning, I will outline the multi-faceted role of the school placement (SP) tutor, beginning by providing a brief overview of SP in general.

Our current SP structures acknowledge the developmental nature of students' learning. Their initial experiences on SP1 and SP2 prioritise observation and reflection, progressing to initial teaching experiences within the context of pass/fail grading structures. This should ensure that these early SP experiences align with the 'Student as Learner' focus of our other modules, and is conducted in a supportive, scaffolded environment. The expectations then increase throughout subsequent placements, culminating in SP6 and SP7 when students display a significant level of independence during this period of extended placement. It is worth noting that subject specialisms and elective modules undertaken in Year Three and Year Four of the programme allow students to build on their own interests and talents, with the potential to develop leadership qualities in school communities. Additionally, the variety of settings chosen during the Alternative Educational Experience module, along with the possibility of undertaking placements in international contexts if students elect to engage with Study Abroad possibilities in semester five, can all contribute to a rounded experience of placement during ITE.

The SP tutor, then, has a central role in supporting students' learning throughout the process. The tutor also supports the important link between the school and the college, facilitating dialogue with the principal, class teachers and other members of the school community. This engagement with the school community is crucial: without the support of host teachers, the whole SP process would be undermined. In my own case, my role as an SP tutor benefits me in my other role as a lecturer in physical education. Observing students teaching on SP helps me to engage in regular reflection on how our teaching in college supports our students' teaching in schools. In addition, the informal conversations with teachers 'on the ground' may prompt me to adjust my own teaching, in order to address the challenges and possibilities of teaching in primary schools. As a result, my SP tutor role keeps me connected to the primary classroom.

The tutor-student relationship evolves over the course of the SP continuum. Initially, the focus is on mentoring, so that the student can be supported effectively in the early stages of the SP experience. Effective mentoring encourages student reflection, an important quality that helps to sustain us throughout our teaching careers. While a focus on mentoring is evident at all stages of SP, assessment takes on greater importance as time goes on. It is vital that this assessment role is conducted fairly and transparently, and in a way that supports student learning. In this context, progressive grade descriptors, and the possibility of a 'second opinion' provided by consultant tutors, help to ensure a degree of consistency that benefits students on each placement.

A few weeks ago, Liam Moggan, from Coaching Ireland, conducted a workshop with our fourth year PE elective group. Speaking about how people learn in coaching and educational contexts, Liam noted that we learn "not all in the same way, and not all on the same day". This, for me, is a very apt summary of the teacher education process. Our students learn in different ways, and at different paces. What is crucially important, however, is that we nurture this learning so that they can become creative and inspiring teachers.

# Report from Discussion Groups

Participants attending the seminar were divided into discussion groups to explore the opportunities and challenges arising from the school placement programme. Reports from the different groups have been collated and are presented below under a number of thematic headings.

## Introduction

There was a general view from all the discussion groups that school placement is an integral and valued part of the continuum of teacher education. It allows for a period of growth for the student and the time spent on school placement encourages the student teacher to observe, reflect and question. Participants expressed many views regarding school participation in the school placement programme. Some argued that there is an onus on schools and teachers to engage with school placement as a way of intergenerational solidarity in the profession. It was agreed that participating in school placement ensures a continued and valued spirit of partnership between schools and the colleges of education. A representative from one of the colleges of education remarked that the general feedback from schools in relation to school placement was positive. Participants expressed the view that the experience of participating in school placement can be an enriching experience for the whole school community as students bring a range of ideas and diversity to the school. Many students reported that they felt valued as professionals during their placement and gained significant experience in the process. School placement was commended for allowing students the opportunity to put the theory into practice. One teacher suggested that the placement allowed her, as a class teacher, to observe her class from another perspective. Many of the groups felt that student teachers were well versed in competencies of teaching by the time they completed their final teaching placement.

## Schools

It was acknowledged that schools generally do their best to take students, but this is not always possible. However, participants in the groups expressed frustration that school policies often inhibit their flexibility in facilitating school placements and they are confined to criteria such as past pupils. A number of participants questioned the intensity and frequency of school placement. Representatives from schools proposed that schools need to know the timing of the various college of education placements in order to allow the principal to outline the schedule of school placements at the beginning of the school year. Different points were raised in relation to the systematic challenges that may impede the smooth implementation of school placements. The additional workload schools are being asked to undertake in relation to accommodating student teachers on extended placement was also called into question, particularly from a leadership perspective. The additional duty placed on a principal of co-ordinating a school placement visit (particularly the final visit which may involve many teachers in the school) was of concern to some in attendance. There was unanimous agreement that more resources, funding and staffing is required to facilitate the school placement programme. Many of the teachers present felt that there was a dearth of evidence-based research in relation to the impact of school placement on schools.

## Securing School Placement

There was a general consensus in relation to a concern around the capacity of the system to meet the required number of places needed for school placement. The shortage of places for school placement is an ongoing issue for all the stakeholders particularly the colleges of education. The current system whereby schools participate voluntarily in the

scheme and provide their time and expertise without any remuneration or recognition was viewed to be inequitable by many in attendance. The school placement programme needs to be more attractive to ensure increased school participation. One suggestion was that schools should receive an acknowledgement of participation in the programme. Another suggestion was that teachers should be afforded the opportunity to use Croke Park hours for the purpose of facilitating reflective meetings and future planning. Other suggested incentives included awarding course days, providing additional principal release days and remuneration. However, there were conflicting views on whether schools should be formally incentivised to participate. The discussion groups acknowledged that formalizing the school placement programme could erode the culture of goodwill that is currently in place. Many delegates argued that the system in Scotland of paying teachers to participate was not ideal. One group agreed that teachers appreciate their participation in school placement as a professional responsibility to their younger colleagues.

### Broader school contexts

In order to maximise participation in the school placement programme, it was proposed that the colleges of education need to target schools from a wider geographical remit and from various contexts. There was a general consensus that students should gain school placement experience in a variety of settings including DEIS, special education, rural, multi-grade, scoileanna gaeltachta agus gaelscoileanna. It was highlighted that college-organised placement was generally assigned in a single-grade urban context. There was widespread agreement that students need exposure to a diverse range of experiences to better reflect the reality of teaching in schools in Ireland. However, it was argued that larger schools are sometimes better placed to meet the needs of a student teacher who would like to specialise in a particular subject across a variety of class settings but this proved more of a challenge for smaller schools.

### Participating Teachers

There was general agreement that teachers should be consulted in relation to school placement in order to ensure the culture of goodwill and intergenerational solidarity remains. Participants were concerned that, if the participation of teachers was formalised, that the current practice of volunteerism and generosity would be eroded. Occasionally, teachers are reluctant to give up their classes for extended placements and some teachers felt under pressure to 'catch up' after a period of placement. There were conflicting views on whether the classroom teacher should have the opportunity to provide feedback to the college of education tutors during school visits. Some felt dialogue between the tutor and class teacher is crucial as it provides a more holistic perspective of the student's capacity while others were reluctant to be involved in evaluating their colleagues.

One participant remarked that student teachers have varying experiences in respect of their relationship with the class teacher. Some teachers are eager to be actively involved in supporting the student teacher and they adopt a pastoral and advisory role while others are less involved. However, it was agreed that more CPD and training would help address the issue.

### CPD

Particular concern was expressed about CPD or the lack thereof. It was proposed that the teacher facilitating the school placement should have access to properly organised CPD, which could be structured in a variety of ways. One delegate suggested that the colleges of education could provide a substitutable day of training for the teacher hosting school placement to ensure teachers can support the student in the best possible way. However, representatives from the colleges of education highlighted that they were reluctant to burden teachers with additional impositions and expectations. Another suggestion was the provision of a free summer course by the colleges of education to participating schools that would be recognised for three EPV days and have a focus on the class teacher's role during the school placement period. This would lead to more consistency in the delivery of the school placement programme and could also lead to the programme becoming more attractive to schools. One delegate proposed the idea of online video tutorials for teachers participating in school placement.

## Student Teachers

The participants acknowledged that the students were generally well-organised and prepared for placement and, on the whole, they made many positive contributions to school life. However, particular concern was expressed regarding the wellbeing and welfare of students during school placement. Time spent preparing planning notes and resources was identified as a key issue for students. There was a view that there is huge pressure to secure a good grade in placement to enhance future job prospects. There was agreement that while school placement experiences are important, we should not get totally caught up with the assessment, but take into account the whole experience.

One student present argued that the cost of placement was prohibitive. Another student remarked that there was an onerous amount of time spent on paperwork and planning. It was argued that the time spent planning was not necessarily reflected in the tutor's assessment sheet. Students expressed the view that they would like to be informed about their provisional grade during initial visits and advised on how they could improve. A view was expressed that students who wish to appeal their final grade should have an opportunity to do so in a transparent, impartial manner.

A participant proposed that the assessment records could be used as a catalyst for dialogue between the student teacher and the classroom teacher. With consultation from the tutor, assessment sheets could act as a start point to examine areas for improvement between visits. It was also suggested that assessment sheets from previous school placements should also be made available to class teachers at the beginning of a school placement. This would help identify areas for improvement at the outset of a school placement and also help inform the class teacher as to how best they can assist the student teacher during their school placement.

## Colleges of Education

There was a general agreement that consistency and standardisation across the colleges of education would be valuable to all involved in the school placement process. However, it was highlighted in one group that the ethos of the college often takes precedence and therefore colleges cannot ensure uniformity across the board. Another participant proposed that the lack of consistency across the colleges may indeed allow for a richness in variety. There was a general view that tutors should take cognisance of the challenges and contexts of particular schools when evaluating the student. Consideration should also be given to the year and level students are at regarding their expertise. If students are placed in a challenging environment, it was proposed that this should be taken into consideration when assessing them. The fact that some supervisors don't have direct experience of teaching arose as an issue. Some delegates outlined that the expectation on student teachers to adhere to a strict timetable during a placement visit was rigid and did not reflect the reality of the classroom.

Overall, there was agreement that school placement is an enriching and valuable experience for all the stakeholders. It was agreed that schools have a fundamental responsibility to facilitate new colleagues entering the profession. Nonetheless, many challenges arise for principals, teachers, students and colleges of education in meeting the demands of school placement. Most notable is the shortage of school placement places. It was suggested that the lack of capacity could be addressed by encouraging colleges of education to broaden the scope of the schools that are targeted for school placement. Teachers play an integral role in school placement and, therefore, should be consulted and provided with professional development opportunities to allow them to better support the student teacher. Furthermore, the integrity and wellbeing of student teachers should be safeguarded during their school placement period.



# Concluding remarks

## Reflections on School Placement: Experiences, Challenges and Possibilities

**Professor Teresa O'Doherty, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick**

A Chairde.

Thank you for your attendance and active participation in today's seminar. It is heartening to see so many teachers, principals, school placement tutors, student teachers, elected members and staff of the Teaching Council, and colleagues from other initial teacher education colleges, giving of their time to discuss school placement and its enactment in our schools. This has been a most productive and informative day and I wish to thank Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith and Neil Ó Conaill for organising the event. I also wish to thank Rosena Jordan, Uachtarán INTO and Professor Hayes, President of Mary Immaculate College for their support and presence today.

Is iomaí athrú atá tagtha ar oideachas ábhair múinteoirí le cúpla bliain anuas. I measc na n-athruithe seo agus ar mholadh agus faoi threoir na Comhairle Múinteoireachta caitheann ár mic léinn fiche-cuig faoin gcéad den am anois ar shochrúchán scoile. Ba mhaith liomsa an deis seo a thapú chun mo bhuíochas ó chroí a chur in iúl do na scoileanna agus do na múinteoirí ar fud na tíre a ghlacann lenár mic léinn ar shochrúchán scoile. Ní bheimis in ann ár gcúrsaí a chur i gcrích gan an comhoibriú iontach a fhaighimid uathu. Each year Mary Immaculate College is in communication with more than 900 schools in relation to school placement. We are indebted to the schools and boards of management throughout the country that accept our students on placement and we are very appreciative of the generosity exhibited to our students and our tutors by co-operating teachers and the staff of these schools.

As you are aware the Teaching Council has prescribed that school placement must constitute the equivalent of 25 percent of the duration of undergraduate programmes and 40 percent of postgraduate programmes; in real terms this represents a change from approximately 13 weeks' teaching practice to approximately 30 weeks' school placement experience during the period of teacher preparation, with at least one of these placements being for a minimum of ten weeks' duration. In addition the nature of placement has moved from 'teaching practice' to 'school placement'. This represents a real philosophical shift away from just teaching in a classroom to one where the student teacher is also given an opportunity to contribute more holistically to the life of the entire school community.

In its directions to teacher educators on the design of new and reconceptualised programmes the Teaching Council (2011) stipulated:

New and innovative school placement models should be developed using a partnership approach, whereby HEIs and schools actively collaborate in the organisation of the school placement. Such models would be actively fostered by providers based on a written policy on partnership with schools and would involve:

- host schools being communities of good professional practice;
- greater levels of responsibility being devolved to the profession for the provision of structured support for student teachers. Structured support should include mentoring, supervision and constructive feedback on practice. In that context, students should be afforded opportunities for critical analysis of the experience, as well as observation of, and conversations with, experienced teachers;
- whole school approach to supporting student teachers, under the guidance of principals as leaders of learning;
- an enhanced partnership between the HEI Placement Tutor and the Co-operating Teacher (Teaching Council, 2011, pp16-17).

In the 2011 policy the Teaching Council is very definite in its views on the content, nature and duration of placement and of the level of partnership required between the schools and the colleges in order to deliver the desired school-based support to student teachers. However, in the specific *School Placement Guidelines* which were subsequently published (2013) the level of expectation has been reduced. The *Guidelines* recognise "the goodwill of

teachers and other partners and the voluntary nature of their participation” (Teaching Council, 2013, p.10). Further, it notes the benefits accruing to students when co-operating teachers and school principals provide structured support to student teachers, but recognise that this support is only possible “having regard to capacity” (p. 15). While the *Guidelines* are very useful conceptually, they make no reference to the time, resources and supports required to implement these radical changes. No resources were provided to mediate this policy change, to provide CPD for teachers, to enable school-based teachers to mentor student teachers, and no recognition was provided to schools in exchange for their becoming sites of more frequent and much extended placements. This change was implemented during a phase of severe economic exigencies and MIC like all other colleges has experienced a significant decrease in its budget allocation; MIC’s core allocation from the HEA declined by more than 50 percent during the period 2008 to 2014. It has frequently been commented that colleges should provide some sort of reward or incentive to schools that provide placements for student teachers; despite an increase in funding to colleges in very recent times, HEIs do not have the resources to allocate to co-operating schools. This policy was conceived and implemented by the Teaching Council as a resource neutral change in practice.

Secondly, the *Guidelines* offer no interrogation of what constitutes a genuine partnership between schools and HEIs and provides no framework to underpin such a partnership. The voluntary nature of schools’ participation in the provision of placement opportunities for students was copper-fastened, and the role of the school and class teacher as facilitator of the student teacher was re-affirmed, while the responsibility for the design, management and assessment of school placement has been assigned to the colleges. The retention of an approach where decisions in relation to school placement are made exclusively by HEIs, where responsibility for finding placements, for management of all the placement aspects including exclusively grading and assessing students’ competence in the absence of school input, does not promote a shared and equal approach to placement. On foot of the change in school placement, many schools have now established policies in relation to the number and frequency of student teachers each class in a school can take. Non-probated teachers cannot host a student and, in some cases, schools may decide that individual classes might not accept a student due to other factors. In addition, the actual number of student teachers has risen exponentially and schools are at saturation point. While HEIs are mandated to place students for specified periods, or lose recognition by the Council; schools are at liberty to refuse or accept students. The term ‘partnership’ assumes an equal responsibility and shared processes between both the schools and the HEIs. This current inequality in the roles and responsibilities of both the schools and the HEIs is a major stumbling block to the roll-out of the policy as envisaged, and steps to create a real and genuine partnership have not been addressed by the Teaching Council to date.

Today has been very useful in providing us in MIC with an opportunity to hear about teachers’ and schools’ experiences and perceptions of school placement. Participants today have criticised colleges for their lack of communication, their inconsistencies of approach in relation to school placement, the shift from teaching practice to school placement and the additional school-wide commitments undertaken by students, the imposition of additional responsibilities on teachers as teacher educators, and the expectation that schools would absorb the additional number of students for extended periods in schools. While some issues are outside our control, others are not. We recognise that communication is a distinct concern for all involved – however, MIC is very aware of how busy schools are, of the many pressures on schools, and of the fact that we are reliant on the goodwill of teachers, principals and boards of management to continue to accept our students, each term, each year. Our letters are numerous and probably too long – we are conscious that we are asking for a gift of each class, a gift which may or may not be given. One action arising from today’s event will be a review of our communication process with schools and to ensure that we invest more time and effort in visiting schools and teacher groups to discuss the facets of school placement for MIC students.

Finally, I wish to re-iterate my appreciation to all who participated today. The conversations were at all times frank, open and constructive. Our students were exemplary in their capacities to both present to the audience and to participate in the round-table discussions. They are the reason why we are all so exercised about school placement, and their performance today illustrates the exceptional personal and professional qualities of those who wish to teach. We attract the most talented candidates to teaching in Ireland; this is not always the case internationally. We all need

to invest more in the wellbeing and education of our young teachers who are our future educators and leaders in education.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh uilig.

Teaching Council (2011). *Initial teacher education: Criteria and guidelines for programme providers*. Maynooth: Teaching Council

Teaching Council (2013). *Guidelines on School Placement*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.



# Appendix 1

Four discussion groups were asked to consider and discuss a selection of the following questions:

- ⌘ What is the purpose of school placement for students and are current models adequate for these purposes?
- ⌘ In the context of a policy which espouses partnership, what should be expected of schools – principal teachers, class teachers – in relation to supporting students on school placement? What are the challenges inherent in these expectations and how can they be addressed?
- ⌘ What do schools and HEIs need to support students on school placement?
- ⌘ What are the best options for structuring the school placement experience for students from first year through to completion of either the B.Ed or the PME?
- ⌘ What types of school engagements can school placement offer that were not feasible on the previous ‘teaching practice’ models, for example co-teaching?
- ⌘ In the context of a policy which espouses partnership, what are the challenges facing HEIs and what can be done by various stakeholders to ameliorate these challenges?
- ⌘ What are the challenges that arise for students / teachers / tutors / lecturers / administrators in relation to school placement?
- ⌘ To what extent is it feasible, or desirable, that all students have placement experience in a DEIS school, a non-DEIS school, an Irish-medium school, a special school and in a school with multi-grade classes?
- ⌘ In the context of an unregulated number of student teachers in the system, should all schools be required to make a reasonable effort to host students? In the context of a partnership policy, should schools’ participation in school placement be monitored and if so, by whom?
- ⌘ To what extent should schools’ partnerships with colleges be restricted to one college per school? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach?
- ⌘ How can tutor / co-operating teacher / student dialogue be promoted?
- ⌘ To what extent have the Teaching Council *Guidelines on School Placement* guided participation in school placement by various stakeholders?
- ⌘ Should participation in school placement by schools be recognised formally in WSE– type DES inspections and should individual teachers’ participation be recognised as CPD?
- ⌘ Should the role of the co-operating teacher be developed, and if so, by what means?
- ⌘ In the context of HEIs experiencing increasing difficulty in meeting the mandatory 30 weeks and 24 weeks SP requirements, what is the consequence for HEIs, students and schools if this situation worsens?



# Appendix 2



2006 survey OECD, PISA 2015 (Programme for International Student Assessment).





