

# INTO Submission

## The Teaching Council: Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education

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Submission on behalf of the INTO

The Teaching Council

On the  
Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher  
Education



## Introduction

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process associated with the review and accreditation of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes under the Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education. With over 50,000 members across both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the INTO, as a key stakeholder in the primary education sector, wishes to be proactive in ensuring that its members voices are heard.

At the outset and considering the ongoing teacher supply crisis and the accommodation crisis in urban areas, the Teaching Council must address the pressing demand for additional teachers in the coming years. The Teaching Council must take decisive action to address this shortage by committing to train at least 300 extra teachers (including increasing places on Irish-medium teacher education programmes) annually between 2026 and 2030. This would ensure that schools are adequately staffed to meet the needs of all pupils.

Where current ITE colleges are unable to accommodate the increase in teacher training places, the INTO believes that the Teaching Council must consider accrediting new programmes of study. Any new programmes should be designed to provide access to students from all areas of Ireland, away from the traditional areas of teacher education, ensuring that students from underserved or rural areas, have access to teacher training.

We acknowledge the conclusion of the second cycle of ITE accreditations in accordance with the Céim standards. However, we wish to make the following submission as it is our view that there is a critical need for a continuous review and adaptation process for ITE programmes in the coming years, particularly considering the imminent changes to the primary curriculum and the need in our schools to facilitate the inclusion of all pupils.

## Diversity in the Irish Teaching Profession

Graduates from ITE programmes in Ireland tend to be a homogeneous group. Our education system must reflect the diversity of the world in which we live. It is essential that our teachers represent this diversity, ensuring a teaching workforce that mirrors the broad range of backgrounds and cultures present in Ireland today.

The INTO believes it is vital that the Teaching Council and ITEs work together to develop programmes that actively encourage and support individuals from various socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to pursue a career in teaching. This should include specific initiatives to enable those from traditionally marginalised or underrepresented groups to take up teaching positions in primary schools. While acknowledging the work of existing programmes, measures must be taken to ensure that all ITEs support students from diverse backgrounds in their journey into the teaching profession.

Equally important is the need to establish pathways into the profession for teachers who come from outside of Ireland. At present, the requirement for fluency in Irish acts as a barrier for many qualified teachers from other countries who wish to teach in Irish primary schools. While it is crucial to maintain the special status of the Irish language, alternative pathways must be explored to allow non-Irish-speaking teachers to enter the profession.

The Scrúdú le haghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge/Tréimse Oiriúnaithe don Ghaeilge, organised by Marino Institute of Education is a tried and tested model. This programme effectively meets the Gaeilge requirements for primary teachers. We recommend that similar models be adopted across all ITEs to support prospective teachers in achieving the necessary language proficiency. The Department of Education must meet its responsibility to ensure that every teacher is equipped to teach Irish in line



with our national curriculum and should provide funding to cover all aspects of this upskilling process. Consideration should also be given to organising preparatory tests and modules for candidates through the Education Centre Network which would increase accessibility across the island.

The INTO also recommends that the development of these programmes offering Irish language training to prospective teachers should not delay or prevent them from stepping into the classroom. These teachers should be allowed to begin their teaching while completing their language training and be able to avail of in-school support, ensuring that they can contribute to the profession without any delay.

It is also vital that teachers from abroad have ready access to courses required to address qualification shortfalls to ensure their smooth transition into the Irish system.

## *Preparing Teachers for the Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*

The procedures for professional accreditation indicate a shared responsibility between the Teaching Council and ITEs in promoting continuous improvement in the quality of education and professional training. This shared responsibility is essential in ensuring that the evolving needs of both the community and professional practice are addressed. ITE programmes, designed to prepare students for entry into the teaching profession, must closely align with the continuously changing landscape of primary education, particularly as significant changes are introduced through the redeveloped primary curriculum.

It is critical that ITEs and the Teaching Council maintain a close and ongoing partnership to monitor these changes and respond proactively. The upcoming redeveloped curriculum must be considered and effectively integrated into teacher education programmes to ensure that graduates are fully prepared for the demands of the modern classroom.

Several key areas require immediate integration to ensure that graduates are well-equipped to meet these evolving needs.

1. **Modern Foreign Languages (MFL):** The INTO requests that the Teaching Council and ITEs work closely with the NCCA and OIDE support services to ensure that MFL is carefully embedded across the continuum of teacher education, ensuring a consistent and confident approach to language instruction.
2. **STEM:** As part of the redeveloped curriculum, there is an increased focus on technology, engineering, coding, computational thinking, etc. It is crucial that ITE programmes evaluate the level of instruction provided in these areas to ensure teachers feel comfortable and competent in delivering these new topics.
3. **Wellbeing:** The wellbeing specification, which includes important topics like consent, ERB and RSE, must also be fully integrated into ITE programmes. Comprehensive instruction in all new wellbeing topics is essential to equipping teachers with the tools they need to foster healthy, respectful, and inclusive learning environments.
4. **Playful Pedagogies:** The concept of play as a pedagogy at all levels of the primary school is fundamental to the redeveloped primary curriculum. While the value of play has long been recognised in junior classes, ITEs must now ensure that beginning teachers are equipped with the pedagogical skills to ensure that play is embedded in their pedagogical approaches in all classes.



The INTO would also insist that state support for teacher education encompasses all stages of the professional learning continuum. Adequate human and material resources must be provided to ensure that teachers, from initial training through to ongoing professional development, are fully equipped and supported to manage and deliver the redeveloped primary curriculum.

## **Special Education in ITEs**

The INTO believes that the Teaching Council must play a pivotal role in strengthening the focus on special education within ITEs, ensuring that NQTs are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to provide an inclusive educational environment for all pupils, particularly those with additional educational needs.

The explicit preparation of student teachers to work in special classes and special schools is an imperative. While there is a broad emphasis on inclusive education in most ITE programmes, there must also be a specific focus on the distinct experiences presented in special education settings.

ITE programmes should provide student teachers with the opportunity to engage with special education settings. The INTO strongly advocates for all student teachers to have the opportunity to complete at least one school placement in a special education setting during their time in ITE. These placements will provide hands-on experience in working with children with a range of needs. These experiences may also inspire student teachers to consider pursuing careers in special education.

Embedding inclusive practice into all teaching should be a cornerstone of ITE programmes. Inclusive practises promote flexible approaches to teaching that can be adjusted to meet the diverse learning needs of all pupils. By embedding inclusive practises, we can prepare future teachers to create inclusive learning environments in mainstream and special education settings. Inclusive education should not be seen as a specialised area but as a fundamental part of teaching.

## **Gaeilge**

Gaeilge holds a unique place in our national identity and ensuring that it is strengthened in all primary schools must be a priority. However, the level of Gaeilge proficiency among teachers, particularly in mainstream primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht areas, varies greatly. Successive reports from the Chief Inspector have expressed concerns regarding the quality of the teaching of Gaeilge in schools. The Teaching Council must explore how to provide comprehensive supports to both current teachers and student teachers to enhance their ability to teach and promote Gaeilge.

ITE programmes must receive targeted support to help student teachers improve their Gaeilge. This effort should go beyond basic fluency and aim to empower teachers to confidently use Gaeilge as a teaching tool across the curriculum, creating a more authentic language learning experience. Improving both confidence and competence among teachers will greatly enhance the learning experiences of our pupils.

## **Embedding Sustainability**

The INTO believes that sustainability should be a guiding principle in ITE programmes. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainability and prepare pupils to become environmentally responsible citizens. The Teaching Council, in collaboration with ITE providers, has a unique opportunity to embed sustainability as an underpinning philosophy in all aspects of teacher education.



ITE providers should emphasise the development of teaching strategies that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Student teachers must be taught to use sustainability as a framework to foster pupil engagement, inspire action, promote activism and cultivate lifelong learning in sustainability practices.

This also means exposing student teachers to environmental and social justice issues on a global scale. By embedding global citizenship education within sustainability teaching, student teachers will be prepared to help their pupils understand the interconnectedness of our world and their role in fostering a sustainable future.

## Conclusion

The INTO strongly calls for the Teaching Council to take an active and leading role in ensuring that the evolving needs of teachers are supported across the entire continuum of teacher professional education, not only initial teacher education. This support must address the growing demands in key areas such as special education, Irish language proficiency, sustainability and curriculum change.

Alongside the proposals outlined above, the INTO urges the Teaching Council and ITEs to consider the following INTO recommendations to take meaningful steps toward addressing the current teacher shortage in mainstream and special class settings:

- Subsidise teacher education programme fees, provide financial support to students in their final year of pre-service education, and build more on-campus student accommodation with costs capped at realistic and affordable levels.
- Substantially increase the number of places on special education diploma courses to ensure that more teachers are equipped to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
- Launch a targeted campaign to encourage mid-career professionals from other fields to transition into teaching.
- Commit to sustainable funding and support for Path programmes and other alternative routes to primary teaching.
- Award scholarships to students from minority and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to foster greater diversity within the teaching profession, ensuring it better reflects the society it serves.
- Increase the budget for the Student Assistance Fund for PME students and extend it to include Bachelor of Education students.