

# **Joint INTO-Froebel Department of Education and Early Childhood Education Seminar**

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

**School College Partnerships – Four Years of Progress**

April 2018



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Colleges of Education/Initial Teacher Education Providers and Schools

School College Partnerships - *Four Years of Progress*

Saturday, 14 April 2018

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



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# Foreword

The INTO and Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, were delighted to organise a joint seminar on the theme of school college partnerships, four years of progress. This seminar was the third in a series of seminars on school placement. The purpose of the seminars is to explore the experiences of teachers, of students and of the colleges regarding the guidelines and arrangements for school placement following the review of the criteria for initial teacher education programmes by the Teaching Council. 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 facilitate placements for student-teachers in the colleges/departments of education and from Hibernia College.

The Teaching Council published its policy on the continuum of teacher education in 2011. This policy was followed by the publication of *Guidelines on School Placement*. The decision to lengthen Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses and to increase the amount of time each student spent on school placement created additional demands on the system. The teacher education colleges and faculties were obliged to follow the guidelines, however, there was never any formal process for mediating or negotiating the guidelines with schools. Expectations of schools and teachers were never fully discussed and or their meaning explored and there has been no additional investment in supporting school placement. Schools are expected to have a whole-school approach, collaborate with student-teachers in reflecting critically on their experience, and to host students for 10-week periods. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are expected to provide professional development for schools and to develop meaningful partnerships with schools. Changes in expectations, processes and understandings need to be explained, negotiated and supported.

The INTO seminars, organised jointly with a higher education institution, gave both the colleges and teachers an opportunity to share experiences, in the absence of formal consultations or clarity around expectations. The Teaching Council recently established a working group to consider school placement. A report of this work was published, but many questions remain. School placement continues to operate on the basis of goodwill and teachers continue to work with HEIs to provide meaningful learning experiences for student-teachers during placement, as they have done for generations.

Our thanks are due to the organising committee: Séamie Ó Néill, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University and Deirbhile Nic Craith with Maeve McCafferty from the INTO. We are grateful to our presenters, in particular to our guest presenters Amanda Corrigan, Director of Student Experiences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow and Michael Maher, Principal, St Thomas' Junior National School, Lucan. We also appreciate the contribution of Vera Timmons and Rebecca Boyle from the Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and of Ann McConnell and Michael McConigley, INTO for their assistance on the day. These proceedings include the presentations made during the seminar in addition to a report of the discussions that 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.

John Boyle  
General Secretary  
INTO

Professor Marie McLoughlin  
Head of Department  
Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education,  
Maynooth University

December 2021



# Introduction

## **Joe Killeen, Uachtarán INTO**

Ba mhaith liom fíorchaoin fáilte a chur romhaibh go léir maidin inniu go dtí an seimineár seo, comheagraithe ag Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann agus Rannóg Froebel don Luath agus don Bhunoideachas – Froebel Department for Early Childhood and Primary Education. Anseo linn inniu tá ionadaithe ó na coláistí oideachais, príomhoidí scoileanna, miocléinn agus múinteoirí ranga chun ábhar atá an-tábhachtach dúinn go léir a phlé. Today's event is part of our celebrations for the INTO's 150th anniversary since our foundation in 1868. The INTO is delighted to collaborate with Froebel for this event, in this wonderful new building on the Maynooth University campus.

School placement is that critically important interface between Initial Teacher Education and the real world of the school. The school placement experience offers a great opportunity for student-teachers and schools alike. It allows student-teachers to connect theory and practice and to learn from experienced teachers. But student-teachers also bring a wealth of innovation and richness to schools.

This seminar is the third of its kind and continues the conversation of previous seminars in St Patrick's College and Mary Immaculate College. Today offers an opportunity for all delegates to reflect on and discuss the issues that are arising for schools, colleges and students around school placement, including the extended placements. It's also an opportunity to revisit its purpose. Today's seminar is about sharing our different perspectives and hearing the views of the colleges, principals, classroom teachers and students.



# Presentations

## Teachers' Perceptions on School Placement

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

Dia is Muire daoibh ar maidin. My purpose here today is to present some of the findings of our recent survey of teachers which sought to explore their views on school placement. I will focus on a few key points to inform our discussions this morning.

Our survey was issued to 1,500, members who were selected randomly from our database. We had a response rate of 30% – 69 principals and over 300 teachers. While not a large number, the responses are indicative of the views of teachers in relation to school placement. While the majority of respondents hosted student-teachers, we got some insight into why some schools don't host students. Some principals said they were not approached by a college of education or a student, or that they were a small rural school with multi-grade classes or that they were too far from a college of education.

First of all, for both principals and teachers, their experience of school placement is generally positive, though perhaps we should be a little concerned that about one in 10 teachers disagree.

### Policy

Let us remind ourselves of what the Teaching Council policy is regarding school placement. Two key points. First, the Teaching Council advocates a partnership approach – between colleges and schools. Partnership has many meanings depending on context. In the case of school placement partnership refers to the processes, structures and arrangements that enable the partners involved to work and learn collaboratively in teacher education – but is not otherwise defined.

Secondly, the amount of time spent on school placement is set at 30 weeks for B.Eds and 24 weeks for PME's with a 10-week placement to take place in the second half of the course. Feedback on how the current policy and guidelines are working for teachers, students and colleges is essential to inform future policy development. Surprisingly, perhaps, just over half the principal teachers were aware of the Teaching Council's *Guidelines on School Placement*.

The Teaching Council recommends that schools should have a policy in relation to school placement. However, only 15% of principals stated that their schools had a written policy. Most class teachers didn't know, though it is clear most schools had a de facto informal policy through custom and practice. Sometimes placements are organized by the college and other times they are sourced by the students themselves. Many schools try to accommodate past pupils who seek placements. They also don't want to be confined to hosting students from one college only.

	Principal	Class Teacher
Written School Policy	15%	
Informal (Custom and Practice)	75%	
Optional for Class teachers	87%	70%
<b>Criteria</b>		
– Past Pupils	72%	49%
– Relatives of teachers	36%	33%
– No placement in September	25%	9%
– Local Colleges	20%	7%

into 150

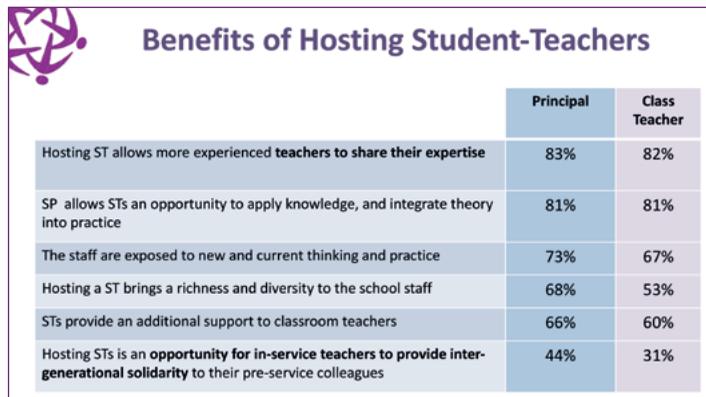


There is no obligation on schools or teachers to engage in school placement. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of respondents stated that it was optional for teachers to host a student. School placement has always operated on the basis of goodwill. There is not a strong support for making it obligatory for schools or teachers to host students with only half the respondents agreeing that all class teachers should host students regularly throughout their career. Principals, in their comments, reflected a pragmatic approach to school placements and the demands made on schools, for example: teachers may only host one student per year or not have a student every year.

	Agree		Disagree	
	Principal	Class teacher	Principal	Class teacher
All fully-registered teachers should be obliged to host student teachers on a regular basis throughout their career	48%	53%	37%	30%

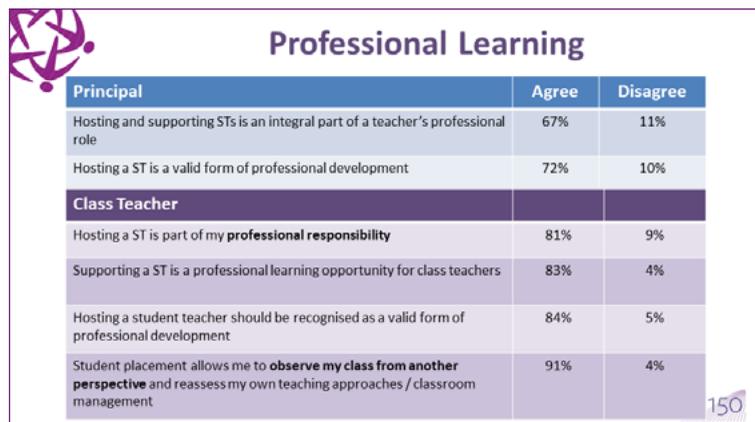
### Professional

There is a recognition that there are many benefits to hosting student-teachers in schools and classrooms. School placement is seen by a majority of respondents as an opportunity for experienced teachers to share their expertise, which is very re-affirming for teachers. It's disappointing, in my view, that fewer than half of the respondents see school placement as an opportunity to show solidarity with the next generation of teachers. Somehow, I expected a higher response here.



	Principal	Class Teacher
Hosting ST allows more experienced teachers to share their expertise	83%	82%
SP allows STs an opportunity to apply knowledge, and integrate theory into practice	81%	81%
The staff are exposed to new and current thinking and practice	73%	67%
Hosting a ST brings a richness and diversity to the school staff	68%	53%
STs provide an additional support to classroom teachers	66%	60%
Hosting STs is an opportunity for in-service teachers to provide inter-generational solidarity to their pre-service colleagues	44%	31%

Class teachers are more likely – one in four – to see participation in school placement as part of their professional responsibility, as a professional learning opportunity and as a valid form of professional development. It is also interesting that nine out of 10 agree that hosting a student-teacher enables them to see their own class from another perspective and to reassess their own approaches to teaching.



Principal	Agree	Disagree
Hosting and supporting STs is an integral part of a teacher's professional role	67%	11%
Hosting a ST is a valid form of professional development	72%	10%
Class Teacher		
Hosting a ST is part of my professional responsibility	81%	9%
Supporting a ST is a professional learning opportunity for class teachers	83%	4%
Hosting a student teacher should be recognised as a valid form of professional development	84%	5%
Student placement allows me to observe my class from another perspective and reassess my own teaching approaches / classroom management	91%	4%

## Challenges

There are of course challenges. The duration of school placement is considered a challenge by two thirds of principals. In their comments, many stated that three to four weeks was the ideal duration for school placement. Ten weeks was seen as too long, particularly in small schools. Timing is also an issue for both principals and class teachers. September placements are not welcomed. A small number of respondents – less than one in five – acknowledged that school placement is demanding on schools, impacts on pupils' learning and creates an additional administrative burden for principal teachers. Of more concern is the fact that one in three teachers agree that school placement puts pressure on class teachers to revise topics covered by the student-teacher. From a class teacher's perspective their primary responsibility is to their pupils and their learning. It is stressful for them if they feel their pupils are losing out.

	Challenges	
	Principal	Class Teacher
The <b>duration</b> of placements is unsuitable	66%	41%
The <b>timing</b> of placements is unsuitable	59%	46%
Hosting STs is too <b>demanding</b> and impacts negatively on pupils' learning	17%	13%
Previous poor experiences of hosting STs	19%	21%
SP puts <b>pressure</b> on teachers to revise topics covered by the ST	34%	33%
SP places an administrative burden on the principal teacher	14%	4%

Class teachers expressed mixed views regarding the 10-week placement. While half of the teachers see the 10 weeks as offering students an opportunity to experience the reality of classrooms and school life, one in four disagree and 61% consider it disruptive. However, 81% state that the 10-week placement should be spread across a number of classrooms and special education settings rather than being spent in one classroom. This approach is common practice, I gather, but, perhaps it is time to revisit the purpose of the long placement based on experience.

	Duration – class teacher	
	Agree	Disagree
The 10 week placement is an ideal opportunity for students to experience the reality of schools and teaching	53%	27%
Spending 10 weeks in one classroom as part of student's final placement is disruptive to school	61%	17%
The 10 week placement should be spread across a number of classes and SEN settings	81%	8%

## Tensions

There are tensions around relationships between schools and colleges. While almost two thirds of principals acknowledge that colleges are appreciative of schools that host student-teachers, one in five are of the view that colleges don't give schools guidelines around expectations of schools regarding school placements. Over half of the principals, though only one third of class teachers, are of the view that colleges expect too much of schools.



 **Tensions – Role of Colleges**

	Agree		Disagree	
	Principal	Class teacher	Principal	Class teacher
Colleges / ITE providers are <b>appreciative</b> of schools facilitating SP	62%		13%	
Colleges / ITE Providers provide clear <b>guidelines around expectations</b> of schools regarding the hosting of STs	45%	57%	22%	31%
Colleges/ITE providers <b>expect too much</b> from schools in relation to hosting STs	54%	33%	15%	48%
Colleges /ITE providers generally give sufficient notice in relation to hosting STs	68%		5%	

Two principals referred to Droichead<sup>1</sup> in their comments. One expressed frustration around the synergy between colleges and schools regarding Droichead, expressing the view that schools should have more information about what colleges do and that the Droichead process should start in the college. The other principal would like processes developed as part of Droichead to be extended to school placement. There is obviously more to be discussed around this issue.

I am annoyed at the lack of recognition given to schools who continuously provide school placement opportunities for ITE colleges. I am also worried about the lack of information regarding the content of these ITE and PME programmes and the link they are supposed to be providing between them and us with regards to Droichead ... I was under the illusion that the Droichead process began in the colleges when the B.Ed and PME courses were extended

We have a PST team trained through the Droichead Induction process. It would be very beneficial to extend the induction format to the teacher placement where class teachers would use the same templates to support student-teachers

### Role of the teacher

According to the *Teaching Council Guidelines*, class teachers should afford the student-teacher opportunities to observe them teaching, and it is good to see that the vast majority of teachers (93%) are comfortable with students observing them teaching.

Also according to the Guidelines, teachers are expected to observe the student-teacher's practice and provide oral or written feedback to the student-teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner. The majority of teachers are very happy to give informal feedback directly to student-teachers, but also to their supervisors. Teachers, however, are more reluctant to provide written feedback. The majority of principals don't agree that teachers should give written feedback but class teachers are more divided on the issue. The responses from class teachers regarding evaluation are also interesting. Almost a third of class teachers are of the view that they should not be involved in the evaluation of student-teachers, but half of the teachers disagree with this statement. These responses regarding feedback and evaluation are worthy of more indepth discussion regarding the role of teachers in supporting school placement. Teachers certainly have views as we can see from their comments. Their comments centre on the need to be consulted by supervisors regarding students' progress and suitability to teach. Teachers are there all the time with the students while the supervisors visit periodically, and perhaps not often enough according to some respondents.

<sup>1</sup> Induction programme

Class teachers need to be involved and consulted by visiting inspectors for full transparency of candidate's suitability to teach.

Teachers are given very little/no opportunity to formally feedback on a student's progress to the university. Oral feedback to visiting inspectors is often overlooked or seen as having little value.

Supervisors should meet with the class teacher to discuss the student's progress as the class teacher is present all the time, as opposed to the one-hour observation a supervisor is there for. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

Supervisors should have a more in-depth discussion with class teacher to discuss how the student is getting on overall.

### Teacher expectations

While colleges may have expectations of schools, teachers also have expectations of student-teachers and colleges. Over half of the respondents agree that student-teachers are always well prepared for their school placements. Though it is of concern that almost a quarter of principals disagree.

Teachers' comments provide some illustration. According to the teachers here, students are not always prepared, or understand what's expected of them. Focusing on school placement as an exam can take away from the experience and more practical advice from supervisors would be welcome. There were a few comments relating to the standard of Gaeilge among student-teachers.

I feel the students are not sufficiently prepared and do not know the academic standards expected of them and the students. Frequently the topic is not covered correctly and the class teacher has to revisit the topic.

The student appears only to be concerned about the visit of the supervisor and not their teaching generally; there's too much of an atmosphere of 'an exam' about their placement as opposed to an experience.

I feel it is the responsibility of the colleges to support/prepare student-teachers. We had an instance where the college inspector told the class teacher to get the student to an acceptable standard before the next visit!

Helpful practical advice on how to improve performance would be appreciated from supervisors.

The standard of Gaeilge must be addressed. My fourth class pupils have a higher standard of Irish than the average student-teacher.

Other issues raised in comments included, discipline and professional relationships.

Only a third of teachers agree that colleges provide them with clear expectations regarding the student-teachers' school placement experience. I think it is also of concern that only 41% of class teachers agree that they are clear regarding what to expect from first year students in comparison to fourth year students, while an equal number disagree.



While the *Teaching Council Guidelines* state that the class teacher should assign the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student-teacher while retaining the primary responsibility for the progress of the learners, there are some tensions around this as evident in teachers' comments:

Student-teachers should adapt to the structure of lessons given by the class teacher in order to ensure a smooth transition. Veering off course and doing their own topics becomes very messy for the class teacher.

Some years, students arrive in with a list of expectations from the college. These do not blend in with what is expected in the classroom. The class teacher and student-teacher are then caught – give the college what it wants for a good grade or follow what is already happening in the school/class.

These tensions around what students should teach and how they should teach when they are being hosted by class teachers who have their own plans, methodologies and schemes of work for the year need to be teased out more.

There are also mixed views among teachers regarding whether they should join the staff for breaks in the staff room, participate in staff meetings or 'Croke Park Hours' or shadow the hosting teacher on yard duty and other supervision duties.

### Concerns

We know that teachers constantly complain about the amount of paperwork that has crept into teaching over recent years. Teachers are also concerned about the wellbeing of student-teachers and the demands being placed on them. Three out of four class teachers and two thirds of principal teachers agree that there is too much emphasis on paperwork and planning during a student's placement.

### Supporting schools and teachers

The majority of principals (85%) agreed that schools should receive a grant from the Department to cover the cost of hosting student-teachers. When offered a list of possible ways to recognize schools' contribution to school placement, four out of five principals recommended an allowance for the

	Principal	Class Teacher
An allowance payable to the school	79%	44%
EPV days	59%	66%
The use of 'Croke Park hours' for reflective meetings with student teachers	50%	67%
CPD provided by the colleges	50%	44%
Recognition of school placement participation/cooperation in school inspections	50%	46%
Recognition of School Placement through Cosán	36%	19%
Certificate of acknowledgement	34%	23%

school. Both principals and class teachers would welcome EPV days, and interestingly two thirds of class teachers would welcome the use of 'Croke Park Hours' for reflective meetings with the student-teacher. The Teaching Council Guidelines refer to the class teacher's responsibility to encourage, support and facilitate the student-teacher in critical reflection on their practice, the use of a variety of teaching methodologies, and in engaging with and responding appropriately to feedback from learners.

## Conclusion

We continue to have challenges and concerns, and today is about exploring these issues further. I would like to conclude on a positive note with this comment from a teacher about the mutual benefits of school placement.

In the pursuit of excellence in education I really like the potential of student placement for the opportunity for mutual learning it provides/professional development

Go raibh maith agaibh.



## Perspectives from Student-Teachers and Initial Teacher Education

**Séamie Ó Neill, Head of Education and Director of School Placement, Froebel Department**

I feel a bit overwhelmed. I felt like jumping up at each particular point but I'm sure that we will have lots of opportunity to do that in future weeks and months. It is great to come to an event like this where we have actual feedback data because sometimes these types of events can feel like groundhog day. We've been there before and discussed the same thing again and again.

There are a number of questions that I would like to pose – some questions around initial teacher education that may not occur to people working in the primary school and then I'll give a little feedback from the student's perspective. Not all these questions will be answered today. As you know over the past 10 years, we have what John Coolahan has described as a paradigm shift in initial teacher education – a lot of change resulting in programme change and in incorporations and so on have taken place. I think firstly, we need to look at and examine (though we are not going to do all those today) how is initial teacher education (ITE) understood, supported, positioned and politicised in the context of the university? John Furlong speaks of the contemporary university as being characterised by different multi-vocalism and diversity of ideas and principles and there is a sense the ITE providers are somewhat unsettled, possibly unsure of themselves and constantly looking over their shoulders to be something that has not really been fully imagined as of yet.

Secondly, I think we need to examine how ITE will hold onto its core and flourish amid the tensions of a research performativity culture at third level where the holy grail seems to be peer-reviewed journal articles and where faculty are expected to be research intensive – but to what end? If institutions become primarily research-focused the learning environment that it historically supported – student-teachers – can become defused and possibly fragmented.

Lunenberg and Korthagen<sup>2</sup> have listed the five key roles of teacher educators as teachers of teachers, followed by researcher, followed by coach, curriculum developer and gate keeper. Notably they have placed the 'teacher of teachers' role top of the list. I think discussions need to take place around that – what is the key role?

As we head for a new round of accreditation, what is the effect of mandatory programme elements as outlined by the Teaching Council policy on HEI's ability to be creative and imaginative around programme delivery? Is it all about the delivery of core knowledge, skills and competencies or is it about, as Biesta describes it, the professional formation of student-teachers? What are the conditions and learning environments that are essential for that professional formation to happen?

Finally, in terms of today's seminar, how can, not alone partnerships, but collaborative partnerships, be developed between schools and colleges? Teresa O'Doherty, the newly-appointed president of Marino, questioned the limited concept of partnership that has emerged from the policy context and cited the absence of investment and resources as a significant impediment to the development of a meaningful partnership model<sup>3</sup>. While we would have what I would consider excellent relationships with our placement schools, resources have not been provided to allow extensive collaboration between colleges and schools. In the case of Froebel, I would reckon we have ongoing collaborative relationships with a handful of schools, these have been very fruitful but collaborative partnerships on the wider scale have been very limited.

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<sup>2</sup> Lunenberg, M., Dengerink, J. & Korthagen, F. (2014). *The professional teacher educator: Roles, behaviour, and professional development of teacher educators*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> Teacher Preparation in Ireland: History, Policy and Future Directions

When we think of partnership around school placement, we often think of the school as one partner and the college or university as the other. However, there is one other key element, the meat in the sandwich, and that is the student. Our poor students when they come back in from teaching practice/school placement, they arrive into us worn out and for today's seminar I wish to dwell briefly on the experiences of our students based on their feedback in our surveys.

First of all, the world of the student-teacher on school placement is a very complex world. They can find themselves in schools that support the culture of the college, in our case the Froebelian philosophy, or schools that may not even be aware of what the Froebelian philosophy is. There can be cognitive and emotional distance between college, coursework and the reality of practice.

This ties in with a point made by Deirbhile, this is from one of our year three B.Ed students and she said:

Firstly, the children were in rows which made group work a little bit more challenging. The teacher, although quite young, was very traditional in her methodologies. She did not teach drama or music, an external teacher taught music once a week. And (she) relied heavily on the textbooks. She followed each textbook as a guide for her fortnightly plan and this made it quite difficult to introduce different teaching styles in the classroom, however, she was very open and allowed me the freedom to try out any methodology that I wanted to. She was particularly happy with the drama and PE, which was dance, the SPHE lessons that I taught and said that she had learned a lot from my lessons and style which was very encouraging to hear. Although there were many barriers to be Froebelian during school placement, I feel that I was lucky to have a class teacher who was flexible enough to allow me to be the teacher that I wanted to be during my time here.

Now I think that encapsulates some of the college and school experience. I think in this case both partners, the teacher and the student-teacher displayed remarkable openness and flexibility – but you could imagine how this could have gone horribly wrong. As Britzman's<sup>4</sup> comments "marginally situated in two worlds the student-teacher as part-student part-teacher has a dual struggle of educating others while being educated themselves". In other words, they have to teach while they themselves have to learn to teach.

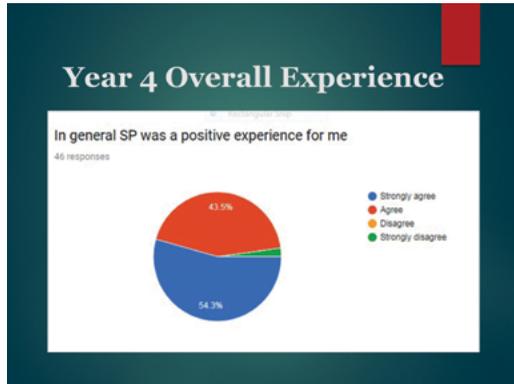
The Irish term for student-teacher is 'ábhar oide'. I think there is a lot of depth of meaning in that phrase as it signifies something unfinished. The phrase could be translated as the makings of a teacher and sometimes there is an expectation that students are the finished article, that a second year student is as far along their educational journey and development as a final-year student. Much has been written about the emotional burden on student-teachers during placement. Britzman laments that placement is not a neutral zone, it is one laden with difficulties, dilemmas and challenges as the student-teacher attempts to negotiate his or her way along a tightrope of competing school and college practices. The student quoted above was a mature student who brought her own particular agency to allow her to negotiate the dilemma that she found herself in.

## Survey results

We do a survey of students. There was quite a good response rate: 92% of first years and 73% of fourth years, but at the same time some key findings have emerged from the data. Like Deirbhile's survey data, students generally find school placement a positive experience. It's the same way with year four – a very positive experience.

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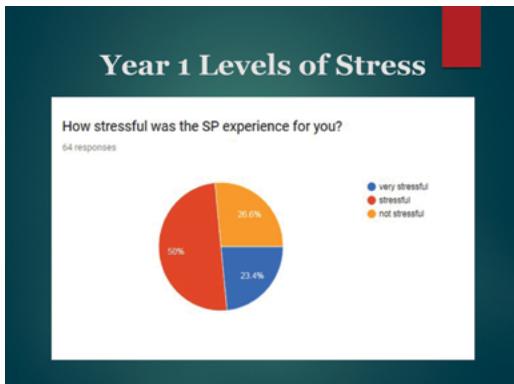
<sup>4</sup> *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* Deborah P Britzman (State University of New York Press) 2003



I took year one and year four as a snapshot. Year one reported 100% support from the school – probably because they went back to their home setting and were very well looked after by a near relative in the school or often had attended the school themselves. With year four the support from the teacher was very encouraging and supportive.

The school principal was supportive and encouraging – 96-97%. Support from the school mainstream class teacher was again very high. Our year fours are in a SEN setting for four weeks as part of their extended placement. One hundred per cent of our students found the school supportive and encouraging. Support from school supervisors was not quite as high but we are still in the high 90s. Our school placement supervisor was supportive and encouraging, we’ve to give them the bad news especially when they fail. Year four also reported very high, but not 100%, support from supervisors.

Interestingly in terms of levels of stress, we asked the question, ‘did you find school placement very stressful, stressful, or not stressful?’ Now 25 of our first years are particularly laid back by the sound of this as one quarter of them didn’t find it stressful at all. A quarter found it very stressful which I think we need to be cognisant of. Year four similar again – very few found it not stressful 17% - but you wouldn’t expect them to find it not stressful.



Interestingly, (in answer to) ‘how many paid hours of work did you undertake during placement?’, about 35% of first years worked during school placement and this, I think is a key point that we may need to consider. That figure goes up to over 50% in fourth year where students are working in other employments at weekends during placement.



In terms of the most frequently mentioned causes of stress, and this ties in with Deirbhile's data as well, number one was paperwork and planning. I have highlighted the factors which have most stress for year four students:

- ż Paperwork and planning workload
- ż Cost/having to work at weekends
- ż Supervision-related
- ż School placement based assignments
- ż Behaviour/classroom management
- ż Lack of sleep
- ż Personal issues
- ż Pressure to get high grades
- ż Pressure from teacher

The response from year one students was quite similar as well:

- ż Paperwork and planning workload (maybe we need to look at that)
- ż Supervision-related
- ż Other assignments
- ż Behaviour management
- ż Lack of confidence
- ż Long hours/tiredness
- ż Pressure from teacher
- ż Pressure from school to do substitute work

The stressors are quite similar, but the only difference really is that in year four more students work during placement. Fifty per cent of year four students work for the equivalent of a full day or more at the weekends during school placement and I think that is really significant. It is also significantly different than when I undertook my teacher training back in the 70s when teacher education was a publicly-funded State sponsored project as such. It didn't cost us a whole lot to go to teacher education college in those days.

Overall, on this placement I found the class teacher, school and supervisors to be very helpful and realistic in their advice, which in turn took a lot of stress off me. Definitely would recommend the (redacted) school for students in the future!



Students generally felt well supported in schools – by principals, class teachers and by their supervisors.

My principal could not have been more welcoming, accommodating and supportive over the 10 weeks

My class teacher was very helpful and kind. She supported me throughout my placement and was always willing to answer my questions or offer me her help.

I found my supervisor was very encouraging and supportive, especially since the extended school placement was new to us and she was open to questions and well-informed in her answers.

Now I would say that the little bone of contention with students was that sometimes they would say that supervisors are not consistent. That reminds me of an incident that happened a few years ago where this student started off in placement and was like a little lamb and wasn't particularly assertive. The first supervisor said, "you need to be more assertive, have more presence" and so on and by the time the second supervisor arrived she had turned into an Alsatian. By the time the first supervisor went back again and said, "I think you need to think about being a sheep dog". So sometimes you get differing opinions, however, in fairness I think it is impossible to get complete uniformity among supervisors, but I do hold it as something that the students would be concerned about.

In terms of the paperwork and the workload that would be something that students definitely find to be stressful. Finally, the main causes of stress would be paperwork and cost of having to work at weekends.

Each evening was very stressful as there was a large amount of work/organisation needed for the following day. I had to take off work for the four weeks of mainstream placement, which also contributed to financial stress.

We have to realise that we might have come out of a dip in the economy but very many of our students are working because they have to work. That is putting a huge pressure on them, and I have every sympathy for them.

### Summary

The key findings that will hopefully inform our conversations later on:

- ż Students generally have a very positive experience of school placement.
- ż Students generally feel very well supported in schools.
- ż Students generally feel very well supported by college supervisors or HEI tutors.
- ż Most students find school placement to be a stressful experience.
- ż The main causes of stress are paperwork, cost and having to work at weekends.

## School Placement: A Whole School Approach

### Michael Maher, Principal, St Thomas' Junior National School, Lucan

Good morning everybody. This morning I want to come to you from the point of view of the impact of placement on the school and how we deal with it. I would also like to complement the scientific data that Deirbhile provided this morning because it rings true with our experience as well. I think for any work we do in schools, it is very important to start with the data and see that our anecdotal evidence actually matches up. So that was an excellent start.

To give you a picture of our school, we are a suburban school west of the city, a junior primary school. We have 45 staff – 21 mainstream teachers, eight special education teachers, three EAL teachers, 10 SNAs, three ancillary staff, 576 pupils and 35 nationalities. To give you a flavour of the school socio-economic band, we have 80% private housing and 20% social housing. We did a social profile for the Department about three years ago and was surprised that we weren't as advantaged as we thought we were. About 33% of the families had medical cards which was the marker for us as the level of affluence in the area. That is just to give you a picture. I will give you an actual picture now.



This was two years ago. I think sometimes when you look at a lot of text it is nice to get a physical picture – this was during the 1916 commemorations and I suppose really it caught us by surprise as a school because we had planned properly for the celebrations. Everybody was involved in it – parents, children, students who were on placement were heavily involved with it and sometimes it made us stop and think a little bit about what school actually does apart from the normal daily work. There are these other events that impact on the school and have a huge influence on the nature of the school. We certainly were all taken a little bit by surprise by the impact it had on us as a professional staff, but I will come back to that later. I wanted to give you a flavour of it.

We have nice temporary accommodation on site as well so there was a whole range of issues impacting on young students coming into placement.



### *What's the goal of placement in school?*

A goal of placement for us as a school is that we provide a meaningful experience for both students and the school. The school benefits from the student experience as well. We take in 15-16 students per year right across the board from first year to fourth year. Séamie was recounting his earlier experiences, and when I think back to my first placement experience, one of the first things that comes into my head is the Stardust tragedy – so you can carbon date me. I suppose all of those other things that are happening at the time and maybe the first teacher you got on practice or the first class you had – that stays with you a long time and it is very important that we get it right. When a student comes into school for the first time, that they are dealt with professionally, that they get a professional introduction to the school, because there is a huge opportunity there if it is handled properly.

I don't have scientific data in my presentation this morning – it is more narrative, but hopefully gives you a flavour of what we see happening with placement in our school. You have all the practical knowledge and skills that they acquire from all of the team around them, an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and we would very much try to accommodate our students together as a group. We have a very tight staffroom so we have split shifts, students are in and out, but they are not separated from the main staff. We try and keep it that they are part of the main staff once they arrive. We like to say to them, "you are here as part of your placement but keep your eyes and ears open and be exposed to the broadest range of activities that are happening in the school on a daily basis". Because really that is the beginning of their experience.

Then as they start to teach, they reflect on the experience that they acquire. I think the processes in the colleges have been very positive in that regard with student diaries, pupil diaries and that has fed into the whole Droichead process as well and into our own class planning. We stop and pause and look at what we are doing well and look at what we are not doing so well. I think the real core element is to start thinking about 'what am I doing here'. because people can end up in colleges of education, maybe it was not their first choice of career or profession and really it is only reinforced when they come out on placement. That sense of after two or three weeks, 'I can do this, this is something that I am interested in', that is the person that we are looking for. We are looking for that person who is going to be committed to the profession going forward and, as Séamie says, there are other pressures there like having to work through college. We have young teachers coming out now that have qualified in Ireland, but they are not teaching in Ireland after two or three years. We have to make this an attractive profession and it is very important that from day one when they walk into the school that they see the opportunities that they are presented with in the profession. There is a broad range of opportunities there.

### *How do we achieve this meaningful experience?*

In our school we deal with Froebel, DCU, Marino and Hibernia – broadly speaking this is where we are getting students on placement. We don't differentiate or discriminate. I think it is very important that schools don't differentiate or discriminate. We really want to see those students coming in and being interested in our school. The first thing is that we need a whole college approach to placement. I know that it came up with Deirbhile earlier just how students access placement in the first place and it is quite piecemeal at times. Yesterday in my daily emails there were three applications from students looking for placement next year. You get that sort of drip feed right through the year and I'm not sure it is the best way to deal with it. I would prefer a more consistent approach whereby you are getting, during a block period of the year, applications for the coming year. At the end of May you know your class teachers for the year, and you can allocate your placements so that you can balance out the students into your school in such a way that it complements the calendar of the school year. That would mean you are not under pressure from the start, you are not taking too many students. In our case, I would ask every individual teacher once they know their class for the coming year, "are you interested in taking a student?" There is no compulsion, and you are not forced. We get a very high uptake. I think generally 85-90% of our teachers would take a student every year.

### ***What happens when the students arrive?***

When they come out on their preliminary visit once they have been offered a place, we do practical induction and orientation. I would do that and in my absence the deputy principal would do it. Really it is about the broader picture, from the moment they arrive they get a sense of the school. Nowadays with social media they will Google the school, they will have a good picture of the school from the website, they will have anecdotal evidence, maybe friends who have worked in the school or neighbouring schools. They will have their homework done, a lot more than when I went out on my first work placement. I didn't know where I was going or what the school was like.

What we try and do in that practical induction – we talk about the context and the ethos of the school, the level of support and staff that is there, the physical layout of the building, those little things that throw off students or a new pupil, the daily routines, where they go for the tea and coffee. All the practical stuff we get out of the way – how they access the school, where they park their car and most of them have cars now. School policies and procedures are key, that they get a sense from day one what are the compulsory policies that the school has, and why are those policies in place. They don't need all the details as they won't read them all then, but they may go back and reflect on them afterwards. Code of behaviour, health and safety, duty of care, child protection – because we want to treat them as a young person entering the profession and they need to start learning that from day one. I know I often ask the students coming in if they covered 'Children First' in college, and maybe that is something that is core now but probably wasn't there historically. I think that is hugely important as students coming into us now are involved in clubs and lots of other activities outside the school and that (child protection) language should be the same across all of those activities as well. Data protection is a huge area of course and we have new guidelines coming.

Differentiation is something that we spend a lot of time on because they are in for a short period of time. They are coming in and looking at what they see as a class grouping. We try and get them, from day one, to get a sense that there are 28 or 29 individuals in the classroom, and it is all the practical things getting to know their names, getting to know something about the individual child, getting to know something that is going to connect them to the child so that they get a meaningful experience while they are there. We also talk to them about access to physical and network resources in the school. We are conscious that students, a lot of the time, are fighting to get at the same physical resources in college so we would have a resource room, not dedicated to them, but dedicated to the teaching staff. When they come in, they have a sign-out/sign-in book, and they can use any physical school resources while they are there. Also, I'm sure principals and school representatives here this morning will be conscious of the value of network resources where they can just pop into a curriculum resource and they can see other activities and presentations that have been saved by previous teachers and previous students. We find that they are starting to use that a lot more over the past five to 10 years.

We also talk to them about pupil, staff and school confidentiality so that as they move through their placements, they become aware of the appropriate behaviour for a student-teacher, the appropriate behaviour for a young teacher, the appropriate behaviour for an experienced teacher, in terms of how we relate to all the other stakeholders and the community. We keep reiterating that we want them to have a positive experience when they are here. How do you achieve that? Developing a good rapport with the pupils, getting to know about them quickly, a lot of advance planning and preparation especially around those who have particular needs in the class whether diagnosed or undiagnosed. Also, looking at the class teacher from day one – "you are working with the class teacher, they are inviting you in, so you show that appreciation, you work closely with them and develop a rapport with them over time and you will have a positive experience".

The school placement experience should be seen as an opportunity. In our case, we have about 16 student-teachers every year and our staff has grown by maybe one or two every year. Currently out of our teaching staff, about a third have done a placement in the school at some stage. I always say that we are watching the students, not in a threatening way, but in a very positive way. We are looking for something in that student and we hope the student is looking at the school and finding something in the school that is going to bring them back there. It is a two-way relationship.



It is relatively new what schools are doing with fourth year placement. The first year that we had a fourth year student coming on 10-week placement we got an excellent student. We did a lot of advanced planning, and that student got a lot out of the placement and we got a lot out of the student. We said to ourselves that we will go slowly with the fourth years as it is a big block. We will take one or two students from fourth year per year, and we'll take a lot more third years, second years and first years. But the fourth year placement we found really positive. First of all, they get an opportunity to see the broadness of a school's work, so we wouldn't be in favour of putting them in a classroom for a long period. Over the course of the 10-week placement – we are a junior school – they would probably be in an infant class, first and second class for maybe three-week blocks, they also work with our SET teachers, they work with our EAL teachers, but it is all the little details in between that you don't often see on placement. Some of the things that they would be doing:

We get them to sit in on class-planning. We have five teachers at each class level, so we let them sit in and see how the teachers plan together.

Also, we review one subject every term so if they are there, they can sit down with us. We have vertical planning going on so we will have teachers from junior infants up to second class and support teachers and they sit in on that as well and they see how we review a subject.

They are also picking up how we identify pupils for support in the first place, and how we support special education and EAL provision.

Normally the 10-week block coincides with our parent-teacher meetings, so they are sitting down with the class teacher while they are preparing pupil diaries. They are seeing how we construct those pupil diaries and how they carry forward to the formal reports at the end of the year. We look at the formal reports as well.

When you walk into a new school in September, you really have to have a system in place or be aware of a system. All the language that we are talking about here this morning requires consistency across schools when students come into schools and consistency across colleges when colleges are sending students out. The more consistency we have I think those percentages will change.

We see the 10-week placement as an opportunity to expose the student to as many things as possible that is happening in the school without overloading them. At least once in the 10 weeks they come down to Friday assembly. Every Friday I would take a different group for a class assembly, and I give the teachers a chance to talk to each other – the teachers and support teachers can talk to each other. They will be out for assembly, and they will go back in and sit in on a teacher and support-teacher meeting where they are discussing pupils in the class. Also, we try and involve them in anything that is happening. I mentioned 1916 before, or Seachtain na Gaeilge, or Active Schools Week. All schools that you walk into are very busy places. I think sometimes parents come in and don't realise how busy the school is when they want to see the principal, or they want to see the class teacher. But I suppose schools have selected those busy things because they fit in with the curriculum programme. These are some of the areas that our students have access to – Active Schools programme, Green Schools programme, and Digital Schools programme. We have links with lots of local clubs. We do lots of things in a structured way with each class level as well – whether going on a library or gallery trip or park trip. We have all these on our doorstep, and we are very fortunate in that regard. We also have links with other schools, and we try to develop international links.

We are only a junior school – so it is probably not an obvious marker – but we would hope that the students, the day they walk into the school – can see all those opportunities. I'm really selling the profession as well because I know Dan O'Brien was talking during the week that we have so many people who want to do teaching that there shouldn't be an issue about paying them less. I will ask

Dan O'Brien one question, where are all those people going when they are qualified? If they are satisfied, why are they heading off? It is very easy to attract somebody into college to qualify but if you don't retain those people in the profession? I will just give you one figure – the senior school beside me has, out of 32 teachers, eight teachers away at the moment. We have applications in for eight teachers to be away next year. The long-term impact of that on a school is huge, because very often they are teachers who have at least three to five years' experience and they really should be bedding into that middle body of staff. I think the media certainly won't pick up on that because it doesn't have any physical impact on the replacement teacher, but the quality of education is certainly suffering in that regard.

### ***Shaping the profession***

Looking ahead and shaping the profession going forward – what are we looking for? If placement is the practical introduction to the profession it needs to be built on consistently – and that is by the schools and the colleges over the four years that the student is on placement. I think communication is critical in every organisation. It is harder when you have different bodies in different groups, so I think it is really important that schools and colleges talk to each other. Séamie mentioned the example there of students under pressure because they are working too much outside of college and then there are students who may not be suited to the teaching profession. I think in the past, historically, you have too often let them drift. They have got through the four years and all of a sudden there is an issue in the first year. Now it is falling back on the schools to deal with that under Droihead. I think it is very important that intervention happens early on. If the schools and colleges are not talking to each other there is a danger that intervention won't happen. It is a small number of students but at the end of the day they have a huge impact over a 40-year teaching career if they are in the wrong job.

The human factor – protocols around what happens when a supervisor comes into school. I have had experience in the past of supervisors coming in, ignoring the principal's office, ignoring the secretary, heading straight down and asking the first adult they meet, "where will I find this student?" It is just common courtesy. We wouldn't come into the college and expect to walk down into somebody's lecture hall the same way. They are the little things. There are protocols for both sides. I think it is also nice to pick up the phone to somebody in the college of education about a student issue – perhaps a student who hasn't turned up in the morning. It is nice to have a human link as we are all busy people, and we appreciate building up human relationships over time.

I think everybody has to acknowledge the pressures in schools to accommodate all the people who are coming in. We have students coming into our school for transition year (TY) experience, Leaving Certificate Applied experience, SNA experience, teaching practice experience, all at different times. It makes the school busy, and it creates administrative workload for the school. Apart from the induction markers and the placement markers that should be there for schools, I think there should be some form of accreditation for schools. I know it was alluded to by Deirbhile and Séamie before. I think that if an inspector is doing a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) of the school, they should be able to say that this school is a teaching school, this school is assisting students who are starting out in the profession the same way hospitals are acknowledged as teaching hospitals or some similar marker. I think it is professional work that is very valuable. Some schools make the choice maybe not to engage in this and some schools make the choice to engage and take on the responsibility – and if they do there should be some form of acknowledgement.

I would hope that if we manage placement properly it will lead directly into the Droihead programme in school. The student that is coming in as a fourth year student is going back the following year and there is a team in the school and those links could certainly be made closer. I know *Cosán* is the broad title that is there at the moment, but I would like to think that longer term there is a form of accredited CPD for every practicing teacher so when they walk in on day one into school, they can see a career path ahead of them. I think the problem is certainly with the lack of posts and many other things that happened over the last 10 years – there is no definite career path there.



## Learning from the Experience of School Placement in Scotland

**Amanda Corrigan, Director of Student Experiences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow**

It is really good to be here and I'm very excited to be here, I love to come back to Maynooth. One of the things I forgot to say in my bio is that I am one of the external examiners here in case you are wondering, 'how did they find her?' I am one of the external examiners and I am coming to the end of my term here in Maynooth. It is one of the places that if a job came up and I could commute by air, I would come to work here as I enjoy it so much. I know it will take some of you a while to tune into my accent – I've a broad Glasgow accent with very flat vowels so to help you to tune in I am going to tell you a story. When I first became an external examiner in Maynooth, Séamie Ó Neill, took me out to visit some of his students in school. Lots of things that were happening I would expect to be happening in Glasgow but around about 10.30 the teacher said to the children in the class to take out their lunch. So the children took out their lunch: rolls the size of their heads, boxes with curry in it etc., and I whispered it is half past ten! Then they start to eat their dinner and the teacher started to panic after about 10 minutes 'stop stop stop – now remember this is only your small lunch'. I was left wondering what type of appetites do the children in Ireland have – they have a small lunch and then later on they will have a big lunch. The boy in front of me had eaten a roll the size of his head and he still had something later. I did find out later that children in Ireland learn about ratio and proportion very early. They learn to eat some of their lunch and hold it back but these were very young children who just thought it was time for lunch. So, I hope with that story you have started to tune into my accent.

I was asked to do some kind of comparison between Scotland and Ireland but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to provide you with information about what we do in Scotland and I will allow you to make the comparisons yourselves. I like working in Ireland very much because the colleagues that I have here are very much like the colleagues I have at home and there are lots of things that we do that are very similar and we also have a similar history and background. However, there are some things that are very very different and you will see that through the presentation.

Let me tell you a wee bit about our history. We started back in 1837. A man called David Stowe decided that the children working in the factories in Glasgow needed to have an education. Now that in itself was not particularly unusual but he wanted very good teachers to teach these children so he started his own training system, and his training system became so popular that people would arrive from all over the world to see this teacher training system in action. He believed in things like restorative practice, he believed in things like the teachers going outside to play with children and there is a beautiful illustration of the schoolmaster out swinging around the maypole with a huge top hat on playing with the children.

That didn't last particularly long before the church got involved and the church decided that the church was going to govern the training colleges. At the turn of the last century that became expensive for the churches and the government decided to get more involved in teacher training and to try and standardise that across the country. In Glasgow, a number of the different colleges came together to create Jordanhill College of Education. Now St Andrew's College of Education was also in Glasgow and that was for Catholic teachers. There was a Catholic training college which has since been taken over by the University of Glasgow and Jordanhill College of Education did not provide the qualification needed to allow you to teach in a Catholic school. If you wanted to teach in a Catholic school you had to go to a Catholic college, if you wanted to teach in a non-denominational school you went to Jordanhill College of Education. In the 1970s it was the biggest provider of teachers in the whole of the UK. We continue to be the biggest provider of teachers in Scotland. In 1993, before what happened here in Maynooth, the college became part of the University of Strathclyde and there was a move for all the teacher colleges in Scotland to be taken into a university. What was interesting was that Glasgow University used to provide the degrees for Jordanhill College of Education, but Glasgow University decided to adopt St Andrews and the University of Strathclyde

approached Jordanhill and asked if we could become the Faculty of Education. That was fine until 2012 when the university decided what it was going to do was to merge the Faculty of Education with the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Science so we are now the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and there is a School of Education within that.

In Scotland the difference between training and education is very important. This is not teacher training in Scotland, it is absolutely teacher training in most parts of England but from the definitions in the dictionary:

- ž To **train**: teach (a person or animal) a particular skill or type of behaviour through sustained practice and instruction.
- ž To **educate**: give intellectual, moral, and social instruction to (someone); to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically especially by instruction.

There is something different there. If there is somebody going out to watch you, Fiona, they are watching what you are doing and just becoming a clone of you. But somebody who comes out to watch what you are doing but also takes on what they have learned in university – the research and the theory – they work with you, and they take all of these ideas and they become the person that they want to become. Someone who can make decisions for themselves based on their own understanding. There are expectations from the children in front of them, they have expectations from the school, there are expectations from the government but there is an awful lot more autonomy when you are educated than when you have simply been trained. We stick to that very purposely because we don't want it to turn into training; we know it is happening across the border from us in England – it is very prescriptive. It is week three of term four, here is what we are going to be doing today and everybody does it. You don't need to use your brain for that because you were trained. You saw it being done and you just copy what they did. Our profession is much more than that, our profession is about people who can be thinkers, people who can make a difference, people who can think far beyond what used to happen in the past and make a real difference.

But that is a problem for some people in the profession. Sometimes when I go out to visit students in school and the class teacher will look at me with a very sad face and say, "when I was a student, we did x, y and z". And I say, "do you think our students should do that?" "Oh yes!". And I say, "did you like your teacher education?" Oh no, they didn't like it, but they think, "it produced me and if it produced me then I think you should do all that kind of thing to that student there because it will produce lots of me".

I was that teacher for a long time as well – a bit sniffy about people coming out and telling me how to do my job – but I was a proud teacher too. So, if you had produced me as a good teacher then why not do all those things to new teachers – but it is not like that, life has changed. The teacher education that our students are getting now needs to continue to change. The future belongs to the nation that best educates its citizens, but this is not an education for 1950. You can't educate them for 1950 – lots of us know that if you look in a classroom now it doesn't look that much different than when you did your own teacher education, it doesn't look that much different. We are trying to think about the future, we are trying to move forward, and we don't always take everybody with us because some people are welded to what happened in the past

Now that doesn't mean that some of the things that happened in the past are no good. It just means that life is changing – but there is a problem with that. You will all know this – there is a curriculum, and that curriculum is far more detailed than it was ever in the past. If you started teaching in the 1920s you taught children to read, write, count and sometimes you may have taught them to sew, or a wee bit of art, or take them outside and do a wee bit of nature, but your focus was on the 3Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic. Then it was decided that schools were going to be much more than that, they were going to be much more than places where you learned to read, write and count – you were going to fix all of society's ills too. We now get this thing regularly from the world, 'don't worry the teachers will fix this for us'. Children are too fat – don't worry the teachers will fix that for us. You now have to wait for everyone to run a mile around the school before the teaching can start in the morning! One of our policies is 'Getting it Right for Every Child' – so can you now get it right for every child, please? Do you think you could be more like Finland? But we don't have the same history, we don't have the same politics as Finland. Who cares? Look at their results!

The *Additional Support Learning Act* – that presumption of mainstreaming in Scotland – if the parents want the child in the mainstream classroom the child is in the mainstream classroom. Standardised testing has come back into Scotland and is causing a huge furore, we want everything to be equitable and, and, and. Just in the last month the children’s cancer charities in Scotland, maybe the UK, would like us to add children’s cancer into what we teach. A woman whose son was stabbed and killed in London, she would like knife-crime to be included in what you are teaching. The gambling charities would like you to be teaching now about gambling also. This morning I got a message from somebody who was in Beijing asking, “Amanda, do the students in your university have modules that teach them about looking after themselves?” And part of me thinks that they would need to be at university for 120 years to learn everything that everyone would like them to know. We have to do what Séamie says and see that time in initial teacher education as exactly that, initial teacher education and not everything that you are going to know. You need to see yourself as a teacher on a journey – that you are going to continue to learn. You all know that, because we are regularly presented with things that nobody ever taught us and we are used to being flexible and changing and reading and thinking and going to things that are going to help us to become much better. And if we claim to be a profession, we must do that. If I go to a doctor with a cough and he said, “I finished university in 1981, let me write you a prescription, I haven’t actually learned anything since I graduated, I’ll just write you a prescription for something from 1981”, I would be furious. But we do still have some people in education who thought that teacher education was it. ‘You didn’t teach me that when I was in college or university how am I supposed to know it.’ But we must see this as part of a longer journey.

So here we are as part of society (see slide 1), and society thinks this is you carrying the weight of the world on your back, one of these stoic teachers, but unfortunately this is what you feel like (see slide 2) with the weight of society and the world on your shoulders and that constantly changing landscape that is out there.



Slide 1



Slide 2

So initial teacher education from Scotland, this is not the diagram from Scotland (see slide 3), I chose it on purpose. In Scotland, in our standards we have professional skills and abilities, professional values and personal commitment, and professional knowledge and understanding. But I chose this diagram because in Scotland each of those things (professional skills and abilities, professional values and attributes, professional knowledge and understanding) is equally important. Now that is a big shift from the past

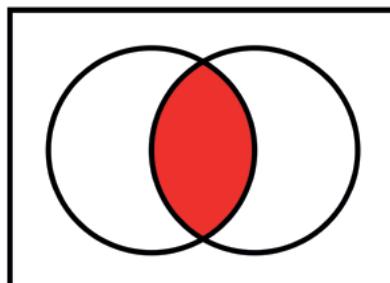


Slide 3

Professional skills and abilities used to be the most important. You stand up and keep the class going, have no behaviour management issues and make sure the content of the learning is good. That used to be the most important thing (on placement). However, now if you don't have a good professional knowledge and understanding you can't provide a rationale for the way you are teaching. If you can't link it back to theory and research and your own way of thinking about things, then you can't pass your placement. That was different to the past. If you could keep your class quiet and never bother the head teacher that was sometimes enough as a student, "oh she is great just because she shuts that door, and you never see her." You could be running Hogwarts in your classroom but as long as you were quiet and didn't bother your principal things were fine. All of these things are very important now. The model in Scotland has those values in the centre and everything goes around it, however, values are very difficult to measure. One of our values in Scotland is courage. If I came out to visit you in school, how do I test that? Unfortunately, values are often easier to measure when they are not there, so it is a difficult thing for us to measure values and to prove that we have values if it is not borne out in practice. Being able to tell everyone what the values are is not the same as being able to make sure that these things are actually in place. You know that is the case because people tell you that they are really committed to equity in the classroom and then have a table for the 'poor wee souls' and treat them as 'poor wee souls' – then they put a growth mind-set poster up on the wall, but they will leave them across the room waiting on the classroom assistant to come in. The classroom assistant in Scotland is getting paid £15,000 and does not have university education but we will leave the 'poor wee souls' across there and she can teach them. But then the teacher will say, "see what my values are, I believe in an equitable experience for all children".

Slide 4

#### Teacher Education in a University Setting



Somebody hinted, Séamie I think it was you, that teacher education in university settings has changed very much – luckily for us in Scotland and probably for here in Maynooth as well. (See slide 4) If you imagine the circle on the left-hand side is schools, schooling and teachers, we are here because we are teachers. And if this is the university circle here and then I went to university, unfortunately we don't just land in this place here (university circle – see slide 3) because lots of us maintain the identity of teacher. We feel like teachers; we feel defined by that term. Although I haven't been a teacher in a classroom for 13 years I still feel like a teacher. However, many of my colleagues in school don't see me as a teacher now. I think some of them think I'm sitting with my feet up on the desk twiddling my thumbs waiting for the days when I get to go out and visit my students. Some of them think I sold out and some of them think I work in an ivory tower.

In terms of schools, I can't be right in this circle here because I don't work in schools and some of my colleagues still working in schools don't want me to be there. When I moved to university – and Séamie spoke about this – when you move to university everything is about research where we want everything to be about teaching but in university everything is about research. But we need to hang on to our teaching as this is what we do. So even when in university we don't sit particularly comfortably there – and sometimes we sit in this difficult position in the intersection on the Venn diagram – we feel like teachers that people don't want us to be, we'd like to be in university, but they think we are sitting up in the school of education playing in the water trough making pictures with glitter. It is an uncomfortable position to be in sometimes. Which means at Strathclyde our staffing profile has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. It used to be that the staff in the school of education did a bit of teaching, a bit of research, a bit of knowledge exchange which is CPD work. But now we are in jobs' families. The people who have committed to teaching are teaching fellows, we are all General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) registered and every five years we have to show the GTCS that we have managed to update our skills and that we can maintain our registration with them. We have researchers who work with us too and those researchers are allowed to do some of the teaching, most of them don't go out to visit the schools because their job is to keep up that part of the bargain that the university wants us to have, and we have knowledge exchange fellows who will do some research and teaching, but they are in charge of CPD.

*Who are our students?*

## Who are the students?



Well, I will tell you something, they are not that crew up on the left-hand side, particularly undergraduate primary education. They are mainly all one colour, white. They are mainly all one gender, female. They are mainly all white girls. What we have become much better at over the last few years is widening access – people who normally haven't got into university – we have become much better at that. We are managing to bring in people from families where it wouldn't have been an aspiration to become a teacher. We are good at that. We are not good at getting people in from different ethnicities. We are not good at attracting men into primary education. We are a wee bit better on the post-graduate programme, and definitely better at secondary education, but that is a problem for us.

It is very difficult to get into teacher education for primary teachers. The government pays for all fees for us in Scotland, for home students and all EU students, so for us it is about selection rather than recruitment. We will have 10 applications for every place in our undergraduate programme (primary education) and we will have 10 applications for every place on our PGCE primary education programme. We can choose the brightest and the best. We have the third-highest entry requirements in the whole of the UK after Cambridge University and Glasgow, then it is Strathclyde – that was last year. We can set a very high tariff. We put the tariff up in 2013. You used to have to have four Bs at the end of 5th year, the same as your Leaving Certificate. We are now AAAB – a huge jump – and the number of applications went up. Last year we had 1,600 applications for 152 places. We were able to select the brightest and the best, but we obviously have some negotiation there for people who come from a care experience background or from an area where people normally don't go to university.

Everything we do is set around the GCTS professional standards. This is going to be very different for you. In Scotland, we have a student placement system (SPS). It is hosted by the GCTS. The local authorities manage the placement availabilities. The local authority will have X number of schools. Those schools every year will tell the local authority, "we are happy to take three, or 10 this year or we can take two". The local authorities make the decision. And if a school has a low number of places this year the local authority coordinator might come back and say, "why are you only taking two?" They might be told, "we will only have seven classes, we have two probationers, somebody off on maternity leave and Mrs such and such can't take somebody". And then that's okay. But the local authorities do all of that and send all of those figures into the GCTS. The system then allocates students to schools. All schools are expected to take students. It's not an option. There is an expectation in Scotland that if somebody took you as a student then in return you are going to take somebody back. Somebody hosted you when you were a student, whether good, bad or indifferent, it is your turn now to make sure you are taking on that role. However, as a university we are not allowed to contact the schools. We can't phone you up and say, "can you do me a wee favour and take another two". We can't do any of that. If we don't have enough places, we have to go to the local authority who then goes back to the schools. It doesn't always work. It became such a big issue last year that there was a question in the Scottish parliament to the Deputy First Minister because we had people when the placements had started who weren't placed. We haven't had that problem this year and we are hoping that it has been rectified. Students cannot find their own placements. They cannot be in a school where they have any relatives – students have to write down all the schools where they know anybody.

Have a think about the reason for that. We have a widening access agenda at Strathclyde and bringing people into university who don't know anyone who has ever been to university, who don't know anybody who is a teacher, with a pal in teaching, who can say 'I'm from a teaching family – you get that in Ireland as well? 'I'm genetically predisposed to be a teacher.' Does that mean I am genetically predisposed to be a blacksmith because that is what my daddy was? He was a blacksmith, and I could say to anybody, "well, I'm from a blacksmith's family". But we have this whole thing in teaching, 'we are from that kind of family and my mum works in such and such.' And the mum phones saying, "I will take her, or my sister is a teacher, she'll take her". No, she wouldn't bother. She will learn to go into a school where she doesn't know anybody and learn to be professional the



same as everybody on the course. That is the thinking behind it. It would be much easier for us, 'you go and find a school'. It would all be the school at the bottom of the road. They all pick schools that they want to go to. That is not how it works in Scotland. There is a tiny amount of funding that goes to local authorities. If you ask local authorities, they won't even know that they get it as it comes in a bulk grant.

In school, the class teacher is the mentor for the student. Many schools also have a regent. You wouldn't have that name unless it is in a secondary school but there is somebody in the management team who is responsible for overseeing the students and it might not be the head teacher or principal. Students and teachers are working with the same professional standard. Joe told you at the start that I was on the writing team. The standard for students and teachers is almost the same against most categories where you have a developing knowledge as a student and then you are extending your depth of knowledge as a teacher, so they are using the same standard. The focus is on meeting the standard rather than a grade. You can only be satisfactory or unsatisfactory because that is the standard that the Teaching Council requires. Did you meet the standard, or did you not meet the standard? Some people would rather see a student be excellent but then you wouldn't want to be graded that way as a teacher when a principal comes down and watches your teaching and they have a thing up on the wall in the staffroom of all the great teachers or all the ones in the green or amber or red this week! The teacher provides feedback and support to the student – a bit like Deirbhile was saying – sometimes you get feedback and sometimes you don't. However, halfway through the placement there is a focus for joint evaluation where you sit down with the student, and you look at the criteria from the GTCS that have been rewritten by the university to have that conversation - 'how am I getting on?' Now that is important because what used to happen in the past is that a student would be lulled into a false sense of security – "I'm doing fine. The teacher never told me that I'm doing anything wrong" – and then the tutor would come out and they would say to the tutor, "oh she is hopeless." "Did you tell the student?" "No, I didn't really like to as she is a lovely girl." Lovely girls! But I'm at the end of my tether. "Can she teach?" "No, but she is a lovely girl." Now the teacher has to write a report on the student at the end of placement. That report holds a lot of weight and gets presented at the grading meeting as part of the grade for that student. So, the report the teacher writes is very important.

Let me read this because Deirbhile asked me about this for teachers. This comes from the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers:

### *Duties of all Registered Teachers*

#### *2.8(g) maintain and develop knowledge and skills and contribute to the professional development of colleagues including probationary and student-teachers*

They are all registered teachers so that is why the Deputy First Minister said last year, "I don't know why this is a problem. All teachers should be taking students because it is written into the regulations."

The role of the university is the same as here – to prepare the students as well as we think we can. It's a bit like learning how to paint with different brush strokes and asked to put it on a big canvas – it doesn't always work out the first time. Given lots of knowledge and ideas in their heads about what teaching is going to be like and then they come to school, and it is quite hard work. They often believe that media image of Michelle Pfeiffer or Robin Williams, of standing and talking to people and people's lives will be changed. Then in reality there is somebody rolling around the floor, and they don't understand it, or children who don't understand how to do their reading. When I go out to visit, I do a joint shared assessment with the class teacher. When I come to visit, the class teacher and I watch the student teach. We are sitting together watching and then we come to an agreed decision about what that grade is going to be. We all know that students can pull lessons out of a bag, when they are dragging themselves in every day, and then when the tutor comes out, they

produce a fabulous lesson, and the class teacher is saying that that they never did that any other day. So, we sit together and have a look. One of the things that is beneficial about that, first of all, is that I can't come in and say, "you are failing", when you are actually great the rest of the time, because your practice is more than this lesson that I am coming in to see. The class teacher is also able to tell you sophisticated information that I wouldn't see by just watching the lesson. For example, "this child usually struggles but the student is trying so hard to work with her, that child very rarely speaks but look at him answering today, look at the child participating in this lesson because of your student." These are things I wouldn't see unless I was grading with the class teacher.

Occasionally, I have a head teacher tell me that the student is fabulous but often the only time I see the head teacher is when they want to speak to me, not to tell me about anything to do with the professional standards, but to tell me that they don't like the student's manners or their grammar. Those kinds of things head teachers notice, "her grammar is very poor," "she has a very broad accent." We have to have that conversation with students. Head teachers are very interested in odd things. "How's her teaching?" "I don't know, you will have to ask the class teacher." "Does she have a good relationship in the classroom?" "Who knows. I just know her grammar is very poor." So, we don't often have very much to do with the principal or head teacher.

Sometimes we are left in this position – where I go out to see a student that I don't think is doing particularly well, but the school thinks they are doing fine or vice versa. However, we have both sat and watched the same lesson, and we both have evidence in our notes of what we saw, and we can negotiate around what this grade is going to be. But that person, that teacher is working with that student all of the time. For me to come in, one time and tell the teacher the student is not satisfactory is not my job. My job is to go out and give the student a fair grade based on a range of evidence. Unfortunately – lots of you will know this – personalities often overtake requirements. "She's a lovely girl, she's in early every morning." "He's a great boy and he wears a tie." "Can he teach?" "Oh, so smart. What's his teaching like?" Some teachers can't keep their focus where it is supposed to be. Even when they are telling you, and they agree there isn't enough evidence to see this student passing, they will still say, "but she is such a nice girl, I don't really want to have to say that (she is unsatisfactory)." But what's important for us is – and you had this in your slides as well Séamie – we are the gatekeepers to the profession. I take that very seriously, because in Scotland it is a bit like Ireland, if I pass you and you are hopeless at probation year, people will ask "who passed the student?" "It was that Amanda Corrigan at Strathclyde." I won't have that against my reputation, they need to be good.

Bear in mind that they are going out to a Teacher Induction Scheme. Every teacher in Scotland gets a one-year training post in a local authority. That is administered by the GTCS in Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Government. You put down the five local authorities you would be happy to work in and they give you what comes up. The fifth authority might be 130 miles away from your house, you take it, or you don't take it. Probationers only work 0.8 of a full day because the rest of the time is for professional development: a whole year of having a day for professional development and mentoring all through the year with a starting salary of £22,866.



# 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 thematic headings.

## Purpose of school placement

There was a general view among delegates that the purpose of school placement was to practise teaching, that school placement was about applying knowledge and about becoming a professional in a school. Delegates also viewed school placement as an opportunity to experience the social and professional aspects of becoming a teacher from engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues to experiencing relationship-building with parents and other educational professionals such as therapists and psychologists. It was noted that there was variance in practice from school to school. Delegates stated that some schools are very proactive in ensuring that the student-teacher gains a holistic experience of school life while other schools, for various reasons, provide a more limited experience. It was suggested that student-teachers should be given the opportunity to engage in the incidental activities in the school day such as filling the roll book, engaging in extra-curricular activities and/or where appropriate allowing the student-teacher to sit in on parent-teacher/staff meetings.

## Progression

There was consensus that there should be different expectations of a first year student-teacher on placement than there would be of a final-year student. The student-teachers attending the discussion groups reflected on their own personal journeys and noted their development and progression over the various teaching placements. It was also argued that the required supports and mentoring should be put in place in the early school placements if a student-teacher appears to be struggling or underperforming to ensure they have every opportunity to improve.

## Variety of experiences

Delegates proposed that student-teachers should have the opportunity to experience a variety of teaching contexts during their various teaching placements. It was considered important that, where feasible, student-teachers gain experience in the following settings – DEIS schools; special classes/schools; rural/urban; single/multi grade; Gaeltacht agus Gaelscoileanna. Delegates stated that it was inevitable that many student-teachers would eventually gain employment in such settings, therefore, it was pertinent that they had opportunities during initial teacher education to experience these contexts. As some of these settings may be considered more challenging environments, it was suggested that colleges of education may need to incentivise students or offer additional supports to encourage student-teachers to opt for one of these contexts in their self-organised school placements. For example, the prospect of planning for a multi-grade setting may deter a student-teacher from seeking a placement in that context.



Groups considered the balance between school placement as an experience and opportunity to learn about teaching and the role of school placement as assessment for purposes of qualification. It was highlighted that the assessment element of school placement can act as a barrier to students seeking placements in more challenging contexts. It was suggested that in order to mitigate against this that some school placements should be non-evaluative to encourage student-teachers to focus on the alternative experience rather than the final grade.

### Observation visit

Many of the delegates present felt that the pre-placement, observation day was an important part of the school-placement process as it was an opportunity for the student-teacher to gain an insight into classroom management, structures and routines. The discussions, however, highlighted the need for more time and space to be made available for the host teacher to engage in professional dialogue with the student-teacher in advance of the school placement. Notwithstanding the lessons that can be learned from observing the host teacher, delegates acknowledged that student-teachers should have the opportunity to cultivate their own unique teaching style within the parameters of class and school policies.

### Demands for paperwork

Some delegates raised the issue of the demands for paperwork during school placement. While delegates acknowledged the need for planning, it was reiterated that it must be meaningful and purposeful. The view of several teachers was that the demands for paperwork was eroding the student-teacher's capacity and energy to teach. Planning expectations during school placement must be realistic and in line with general practice.

### Securing school placements

Several groups discussed the organisation of school placements across the system. Some delegates raised issues around the timing and duration of school placement. Schools would appreciate periods during the school year that would be entirely exempt from school placements such as September, June and Christmas. While it was acknowledged that each college of education had its own unique identity, ethos and approach to school placement, delegates highlighted the need for more consistency and strategic thinking involving all the stakeholders to ensure a less fragmented approach.

It was noted by a few delegates that the current system is neither sustainable nor equitable. Some schools accommodate large numbers of school placements on an annual basis while other schools either don't get the opportunity or refuse to facilitate school placements for various reasons. There was widespread discussion around the possibility of a third party being responsible for the co-ordination of all school placements from a centralised base. A system, similar to the one in Scotland, would require a vast amount of scoping work in advance.

### Droichead

Delegates suggested that Droichead had the potential to enhance the school placement programme as there are evident commonalities in supporting student-teachers and in supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Some of the delegates proposed that the mentor skills from the Droichead programme could be transferable to those involved in school placement or that a similar programme could be established to support host teachers and student-teachers. In light of the emergence of Droichead and other research on early-career teachers, delegates proposed that the Teaching Council *Guidelines on School Placement* be updated to reflect the changing context.

## The role of the host teacher

There was a strong view that the host teacher should be supported more to develop the skills required to mentor the student-teacher. The delegates welcomed the idea of a triadic approach whereby the tutor, host teacher and student-teacher would have the opportunity to input into the school placement process. Teachers were strongly of the view that their role should remain informal and non-evaluative although they would value the opportunity to provide feedback to tutors and to offer insights that may not be apparent during the school placement visits. Teachers believed that the informal nature of their relationship with the student-teacher was crucial in ensuring a positive working experience and that an evaluative role would erode the goodwill that is currently in the system. It emerged in the discussions that host teachers would like to see their co-operation in school-placement recognised with opportunities for professional development or by way of accreditation for teaching schools. It was stated that the role of host teachers should be considered within the context of any future development in *Cosán*.

## Conclusion

There was a palpable sense of support for student-teachers throughout all conversations in the discussion groups. Teachers are committed to ensuring intergenerational solidarity and to cultivating schools as professional learning sites for student-teachers. It was also noted that school placement is at a critical juncture and that robust discussions and tangible actions are required around harnessing the opportunities whilst addressing the challenges. A clear message from the discussion groups was that the voice of the student-teacher and host teacher must be central to any conversation on the future direction of school placement.



# Closing Remarks

## **Balancing on the Edge of a Tightrope: Negotiating the Complex Terrain of Policy and Partnership – All in the Name of ‘Progressive’ School Placement Provision**

**Professor Marie McLoughlin, Head of Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education**

### Introduction

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to a few people on behalf of the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. Firstly, I would like to pay a special tribute to Deirbhile Nic Craith, Maeve McCafferty and Ann McConnell from the INTO office who worked tirelessly to make this seminar happen. We really appreciate all their work. We are also appreciative for the partnership with the INTO in organising this series of seminars more generally, and specifically for Deirbhile’s very informative presentation this morning. From within our own Department, I would like to thank Vera Timmons and Rebecca Boyle – our two tremendous administrators. They are not here today but participated in organising this event too. We have a school placement committee – led very ably by Séamie Ó Néill – this committee has worked towards ensuring today’s event was successful. A special thanks is due to our guest speakers: Michael Maher who came with a very comprehensive presentation from a principal’s perspective, looking at a whole-school approach to school placement. Also, we had the stimulating presentation from Amanda Corrigan who brought an interesting perspective from another jurisdiction. I believe we have a lot to learn from Scotland. Also, to the Chair Joe Killeen – thank you so much for ably chairing today’s session. Thanks to our colleagues from the other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) – it is lovely to see you all. Finally, those of you who are from the school context, I know it is a considerable sacrifice to give up a Saturday – so many thanks for being here to contribute to the debate on this very important topic of school placement.

My role as rapporteur is to wrap up today’s session. I have called my presentation *Balancing on the Edge of a Tightrope: Negotiating the Complex Terrain of Policy and Partnership – All in the Name of ‘Progressive’ School Placement Provision*. Admittedly, it is a very long title. What I really want to focus on is this notion of ‘balancing on the edge of a tightrope’. The tightrope is the policy that essentially gives purpose to the relationship between schools and the HEIs. For the most part, however, we seem to be tip-toeing gingerly along this tightrope of policy. The tension on this tightrope is the effort required in the implementation of policy by the providers of initial teacher education (ITE) in co-operation with personnel from the co-operating schools. The placement co-ordinator is very often the one who makes that journey across the complex terrain between the HEI and schools, negotiating policy between two organisations.

### Policy context shaping significant change

In the last number of years, HEIs have seen a raft of new policy. Schools have too, it has to be said. I understand that schools have also been inundated with new policy demands arising from legislation. For HEIs, four key policy documents have influenced changes in relation to ITE programmes generally and school placement more specifically. I want to bring us all back to where this started, so that you can see the origins of various changes. After painting the policy backdrop, I then intend to tease

out some of the unresolved issues that exist within these policies which create the tensions and the balancing act required to keep good relations between the two parties so as to ultimately ensure the smooth provision of school placement opportunities for student-teachers.



***Strategy to Improve literacy and numeracy***

These are the four key documents which have really influenced where we are at right now. The first one, interestingly, was the *Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Children and Young People (2011-2020): Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*. For decades, HEIs had been asking for a four-year B.Ed. Out of the blue came an announcement from the DES, within the context of a literacy and numeracy strategy surprisingly, that ITE programmes were going to be extended: the B.Ed to four years and the H.Dip or the PGDE to a two-year degree. Furthermore, within the strategy, it stipulated that there would be at least an aggregate of one year dedicated to school placement or school-based professional development experience. This development started the ball rolling with regard to specified requirements for school placement.

This was not such a huge shift for Marino (Institute of Education), Church of Ireland (College of Education) or for ourselves in the Froebel College because we already provided a four-year B.Ed degree. However, the fourth year was taught on a part-time basis and there was no placement requirement incorporated into the fourth year of the programme. Students were very often in full-time employment whilst undertaking the fourth year on a part-time basis. The differences, therefore, required a shift to a full-time fourth year as well as the provision of additional placement experience. Consequently, from the five public ITE providers, there were 980 additional B.Ed students in the system requiring additional placements. The PMed (Professional Masters in Education) numbers did not increase. However, there was a gradual increase in Hibernia College’s intake over the years which now rest at c. 700 students. This too has contributed significantly to the intensification of school placement demands from schools.

***Criteria and guidelines for providers of initial teacher education***

Very shortly after the launch of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, the *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers of Initial Teacher Education* from the Teaching Council reiterated the extension of the ITE programmes. Furthermore, the time required for school placement was clearly stipulated which signified an upsurge in the school placement expectations. Twenty-four weeks were required for primary consecutive two-year degrees and 30 weeks for primary concurrent four-year degrees. Previously, it was c. 15 weeks for primary student-teachers which represents a significant increase in the amount of time spent on school placement.

The reconfiguration of programmes brought changes to the organisation of school placement as well. Not only was there an impact on the duration and number of placements, but changes to the nature of placements and the kinds of experiences were also required. For example, the guidelines recommend that students experience a variety of placement settings. Therefore, HEIs

now endeavour to source placements for students in SEN, Gaelscoileanna, mainstream, rural/urban, DEIS settings etc. This requirement, combined with the extension of the programmes and the additional time requirements, increased placement demands generally within the system. To give an example from the Froebel Department: prior to the reconfiguration, the director of school placement previously secured in the region of 280 placements. Following the reconfiguration of programmes, this figure rose to almost 800 placements, which is a very dramatic rise.

Other requirements have made further demands on schools. For example, school-based orientation, heretofore an informal feature, was now a formal requirement and yet another expectation of schools. Additionally, there was a requirement for student-teachers to engage in out-of-classroom activities. Michael provided a very clear depiction of the kinds of experiences offered in his school within his presentation. Furthermore, students were required to 'reflect critically' on their practice in collaboration with co-operating teachers. To this, I ask – does this happen in reality? Are teachers equipped for this? When engagement does occur – is it 'critical' and 'analytical' or is it a friendly piece of advice offered by the class teacher? Finally, one of the most significant issues that arose from the guidelines, was the requirement to roll out a placement which was a minimum of 10 weeks in duration in one setting. This development caused considerable stress and tension both for schools and HEIs which called for inventive implementation measures to satisfy schools and maintain good partnership relations.

Another example of the implications for policy implementation on the influence of HEI-school partnerships arises within the context of an interesting statement on page 16 of the *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers of ITE* i.e. "there should be devolution to the profession in the support of student-teachers – i.e. a gradual devolution of the role of support/mentorship by teachers for student-teachers". Additionally, there should be a "whole-school approach", that "there should be enhanced partnerships between HEI tutors and classroom teachers" and this is an interesting one i.e. that "schools should accommodate HEI tutors to update our teaching experience". Furthermore, there is a requirement for "CPD provision by HEI for schools". Now this is a tall order. For HEIs to provide CPD for all of the co-operating schools, potentially, we would need a dedicated team within our department to accomplish this. Our staff already have heavy workloads which include teaching, assessment, research, placement supervision, service and engagement.

### ***Guidelines on school placement***

Further to the issuance of the *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers of Teacher Education*, the *Guidelines on School Placement* were then developed and issued. I believe from your statistics, Deirbhile, less than half read these guidelines – which is not bad actually considering how it was mediated. This document outlines, in very prescriptive detail, the roles and responsibilities for tutors, co-operating teachers, HEIs etc. A statement in this document which I think is at the root of many of the school placement issues is as follows:

having regard to the extended duration of school placement and the facts that the system operates on a goodwill basis ... it is recommended that a more structured approach to the identification, involvement and support of host schools be put in place, following consultation with all stakeholders.

Have we had that consultation yet? We are engaging in some dialogue today I suppose but, realistically, has there been much consultation? The document continues by stating:

Such structured approach would bring greater coherence to, and address issues of imbalance and capacity in, the placement of student-teachers across schools nationally

This is an illustration, once again, of this policy context that we inhabit. A number of questions arise here (e.g. capacity, coherence, goodwill and consultation) which I return to later.



### *Sahlberg et al. report: teacher education within a university context*

The next policy document that impacted school placement came in 2013 i.e. *Sahlberg et al. Report (2013)* which essentially was the basis for restructuring teacher education provision in Ireland. As an aside, you can see that we in ITE, answer to the Department of Education and Skills, the Teaching Council and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The HEA announced proposals to restructure ITE bringing it into six centres of excellence. Part of the terms of reference was to ensure that:

teacher education would become research-driven, that graduate teachers would be capable of applying research into their work in a constructive and effective manner and that a relatively small number of institutions would be involved in ITE provision allowing for a critical mass to conduct research ... and the development of synergies between early childhood, primary and post primary.

These factors, while desirable and laudable, have implications for the nature and quality of teacher education and consequently school placement. One such factor was alluded to by Séamie earlier as he referred to the plight of teacher education within university contexts. As custodians of teacher education, ultimately, we want to preserve what we believe to be good practice in teacher education. Yet, teacher educators often experience tensions, particularly in regard to the perceived privileging of research over teaching within research-driven universities. Whilst we understand the value of research, we are caught in a dilemma between maintaining all the essential components of excellent teacher education whilst also finding the time to contribute to quality educational research. Many academics bemoan the loss of quality teacher education due to the pressures teacher educators face within universities to research and publish. Straddling this balance requires serious consideration and deliberation as solutions to this conundrum are complex and contentious. However, the potential for collaborative research opportunities lie in waiting within the context of School-HEI partnerships and carry the potential to enlighten practice and build on mutual interests.

### Brokerage of change – Negotiation? Consultation? Mediation?

Above, I have endeavoured to present some examples of the myriad of policy changes regarding school placement which directly affect schools and HEIs and have implications for the nature of the partnership. From a HEI's perspective, negotiating this policy terrain has been challenging. In reflecting on these policy changes – I ask: Who really are the change agents? Who is critical in ensuring that these changes are realised? Indeed – how is change negotiated or indeed mediated? More often nowadays, we are simply notified about change. Policy is often 'circulated'. It is sometimes 'delivered' or 'uploaded' or even tweeted and yet, change is not just expected. It is required as a condition of accreditation. We, in the HEIs, are often expected to be the mediators and the facilitators of this change. So, there is real pressure for providers of ITE not just to comply with policy but to enact it, to energise it and to be agents of the change as it is conditional on gaining and retaining accreditation. The next round of accreditation is due in 2020. As part of this process, HEIs will be expected to submit documentary evidence outlining all that is currently being implemented in accordance with the Criteria and Guidelines. If HEIs fall short of what is expected around school partnership, they are in danger of losing accreditation. This can bring not just reputational risk, but financial and consequently, employment risk. Real human factors are at play through policy implementation and thus, proper consultation, negotiation and mediation with the key stakeholder are required.

Reverting back to this idea of 'balancing the tight rope' and considering how to narrow the gap between policy and 'meaningful partnerships' (in the absence of a definition of what that means), I have questions to ask here again. I apologise for not offering many answers, but the number of questions reflects the need to continue this conversation beyond today. I believe school placement has been left in somewhat of a conversation limbo. ITE is one of the 'I's on the continuum of teacher education. Induction, another one of the 'I's, has recently been subjected to a robust national

discussion within the context of Droichead. *Cosán*, the framework for CPD or in-service education, the third 'I' in the continuum, is about to be subjected to another very robust national discussion. Policies drafted in relation to school placement have been largely omitted from national debate or perhaps it has been confined to fewer stakeholders. Instead, policy was 'delivered', 'handed over' to the HEIs to 'deliver'. Therefore, national discussions and debates are long overdue for school placement. To this end, I posit a number of questions below.

### Signposts for future dialogue

Firstly, I am sure we can safely assume that everyone here recognises the necessity and importance of school placement. It is a central component of ITE programmes. Yet, it is operationalised on the basis of 'goodwill'. The term 'goodwill' is actually cited in the policy documentation. Moreover, from a student and HEI's perspective, this is a high stakes, required component within the professional degrees. Today, I am asking: what if the goodwill runs out? What if HEIs reach a stage where HEIs cannot get the necessary placements?

Secondly, the word 'gatekeepers' has been used quite frequently today. We talk about the 'gatekeepers' of the profession, but who are the gatekeepers of school placement in actuality? One might assume the HEIs are the gatekeepers, but schools and teachers are the gatekeepers. They hold the key. We understand that there are many legitimate reasons for schools not 'turning the key' on occasions but unfortunately, without the co-operation of schools, the intensification of school placement demands does not lessen. HEIs are highly dependent on schools. Despite the high stakes and high dependency, we often go apologetically cap-in-hand to schools, feeling like a nuisance tiptoeing around the issue, literally begging for places. Therefore, I wonder is it time to look at the system that we currently have in Ireland? Is it time to look at a more co-ordinated approach to placements in schools? Michael, in his address mentioned the need for greater consistency in school placements. I think HEIs may balk at the idea of the standardisation of school placement across all HEIs. Granted – some co-ordination may contribute to sorting out some of the issues, but there is a need to ensure that HEIs still maintain a degree of freedom in planning for school placement in accordance with their values, schedules and programmatic principles.

Thirdly, policy recommends the formalisation of the mentoring role of the class teacher. However, currently, co-operating teachers, in the main, only engage in informal mentoring, if at all. This constitutes a policy-practice divide. Building capacity to undertake this role would be a significant undertaking for HEIs as would the requirement to offer CPD to co-operating schools, mentioned previously. That said, there could be opportunities emerging within the system which may support both of these objectives. NIPT has a proven track record in building mentoring capacity and likewise, the PDST has demonstrated excellence in providing CPD. Perhaps it is time to harness the skills and expertise that already resides within government agencies in order to help and support the development of mentorship and CPD associated with school placement.

Balancing the tight rope – closing the gap between policy and 'meaningful' partnership		
Schools	Implications	HEI
Operating a national policy on a 'good will' basis)	<b>What if the good will runs out?</b>	High Stakes Examinable Required Component of a Professional Degree
'Gatekeepers' of the schools placements (Reasons proffered: institutional affiliation; WSE; family connections; too many probationary teachers)	<b>Is there a need for National Co-ordination? (Consistency? Standardisation?)</b>	Intensification of the demands of SP HEIs highly dependent on schools YET - apolgetic nuisance - tiptoeing
Co-operating Teacher: Engaging mainly in informal Mentoring	<b>Are there agencies in the system that can be harnessed?</b>	Formal Assessment - the domain of the HEI Tutor

Fourthly, there is the fear that HEI staff may become too removed and distanced from the actual practicalities in schools. Frequently, we are criticised for not fully understanding what the realities of schools are like. Is there a way to avoid the risk of us becoming detached and aloof from school realities? Teachers and principals are deeply embedded in the realities of practice and there is potential to draw on this craft knowledge towards the enhancement of ITE. In short, we need to develop reciprocal relationships with schools. So how can we create ‘meaningful partnerships’ that are mutually beneficial? Can we be radical in how we carve out deep meaningful collaborations for the betterment of, not just ITE but, more generally, for the enhancement of our education system?

Fifthly, today, we heard about increased pressures on teachers to ensure that the curriculum is being ‘covered’. These pressures appear to be associated with, for example, WSEs and heightened parental expectations to ensure that the curriculum is covered. Such pressures can stymie innovation and dampen the spirit of generosity that has been at the heart of school placement heretofore. Naturally, there is a give-and-take relationship that exists between the two parties but do schools think we are taking too much? Are the HEIs giving enough back? Where is the reciprocity in the partnership? What needs to happen for this to be addressed? Does there need to be some exchange or is that the role of Department of Education and Skills? Who should be compensating schools for work that they are taking on in this regard and how should that be valued and compensated?

Finally, and this is what I see as the most significant issue: who brokers the policy – especially the policy which outlines the list of responsibilities and roles? Who brokers those roles and those responsibilities? HEIs have no jurisdiction over schools. We cannot assign responsibilities to teachers as we have no power or authority in this regard. Therefore, who brokers the roles and responsibilities of principals, teachers, boards of management etc. outlined in the school placement policy? This is a question that requires serious national debate with all the stakeholders.

<b>Balancing the tight rope – closing the gap between policy and ‘meaningful’ partnership</b>		
<b>Schools</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>HEI</b>
Deeply embedded in the realities of practice	Without meaningful partnership – is teacher education at risk of being “overly-theoretical”?	‘Ivory Tower’ – Distanced from the reality of the classrooms/schools; The ‘purpose’ of a University
Increased pressure on teachers to ensure the curriculum is ‘covered’ (WSE; parental perceptions)	Will this stymie innovation?	Affording the students opportunities to experiment, take risks in their practice
Give and Take...?	Where is the potential for reciprocity or recompense?	Take and give...?
Principals/BOMs responsible for distribution of responsibilities	Who brokers these roles? ITE in Limbo...	HEIs no jurisdiction over assignation of responsibilities in schools?

## Conclusion

To conclude, in order to retain the incredible generosity of teachers for the next generation of teachers, there is a need for further collaboration, dialogue and debate. There is, I believe, a need for system-wide coordination and a harnessing of the expertise of other agencies. Last, but by no means least, we need to address the issues raised by student-teachers and go some way towards ameliorating the concerns voiced today and in the survey which was presented earlier this morning.

# Appendix 1

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

- ž What is the purpose of school placement in Initial Teacher Education Programmes?
  - Is it about practising teaching? Applying knowledge of teaching learnt in college? Learning about teaching? Learning about the work of a teacher?
  - Does it differ depending on stage of ITE programme – beginning, middle, end?
  - How does the purpose of school placement impact on the organisation, structure and timing of school placement?
  
- ž The timing and duration of school placement are constant challenges for schools. Finding sufficient placements for students is a challenge for colleges.
  - What are the potential solutions to these challenges?
  
- ž What evidence is there, to date, that the increased amount of time on school placement is contributing to student-teacher's formation as a teacher? [25% of time on B.Ed and 40% of time on PME]
  - Given the pressure on the system, what would be the implications, both positive and negative, of reducing the demand for time spent on school placement, considering that newly-qualified teachers will be supported through induction (Droichead) and will not undergo probation by the inspectorate?
  
- ž What is the role of the teacher in supporting student-teachers on school placement? The majority of teachers are willing to provide verbal feedback directly to the student but do not see a role for themselves as evaluators.
  - What is reasonable for colleges to expect from class teachers?
  - What is reasonable for student-teachers to expect from class teachers?
  - What supports should be in place to enable teachers to meet these expectations?
  - What is the potential for exploring collaborative teaching between students and teachers?
  - Is it right that school placement should continue to operate on the basis of goodwill?
  - What are the implications of continuing with this approach?
  - How can the shortage of school placement places be addressed?
  
- ž There is strong support for encouraging student-teachers to experience a variety of settings as part of their initial teacher-education programmes. The fact that school placement is assessed can act as a barrier to students seeking placements in certain types of settings (e.g. multi-grade classes).
  - What is the balance between school placement as an experience and as an opportunity to learn about teaching and the role of the school placement as an assessment for purposes of qualification?
  - How can students be encouraged to select placements in what might be more challenging settings?



# Appendix 2

## Results and Findings of INTO Research on School Placement, 2018

### Introduction

The INTO undertook research on the topic of school placement in 2018, by issuing a survey to 1,500 members, randomly selected from the organisation's membership database. There was a response rate of 30%, of which, 69 were principals and over 300 were teachers. The level of response, both empirical and narrative, gave clear insight into the issues and concerns associated with school placement, as identified by class teachers and principal teachers.

The survey issued in spring 2018, the results were subsequently collated, and the main findings were shared at a joint INTO/Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education seminar on School Placement in April 2018.

### Policy

The Teaching Council's policy regarding school placement advocates a partnership approach between colleges and schools. Partnership has many meanings depending on context, and in the case of school placement, partnership refers to the processes, structures and arrangements that enable the partners involved to work and learn collaboratively in teacher education – but is not otherwise defined.

In addition, the Teaching Council sets the amount of time spent on school placement – at 30 weeks for B.Eds and 24 weeks for PME's with a 10-week placement to take place in the second half of the course. It is interesting to note that just over half the principal teachers who responded to the survey were aware of the Teaching Council's *Guidelines on school placement*.

The Teaching Council also recommends that schools should have a policy in relation to school placement. However, only 15% of principals stated that their schools had a written policy. Most class teachers didn't know whether their school had a policy on school placement or not. It was clear, however, that most schools had a de-facto informal policy through custom and practice. Sometimes placements were organised by the college and other times they were sourced by the students themselves. Many schools tried to accommodate past pupils who seek placements. They also did not want to be confined to hosting students from one college only.

Figure 1. School policy

School Policy	Principal	Class Teacher
Written school policy	15%	
Informal (custom and practice)	75%	
Optional for class teacher	87%	70%
Criteria:		
Past pupils	72%	49%
Relatives of teachers	36%	33%
No placement in September	25%	9%
Local colleges	20%	7%

## Participation

There is no obligation on schools or teachers to engage in school placement. This was reflected in the fact that the majority of respondents stated that it was optional for teachers to host a student. School placement has always operated on the basis of goodwill. There was not strong support for making it obligatory for schools or teachers to host students, with only half the respondents agreeing that all class teachers should host students regularly throughout their career. Principals, in their comments, reflected a pragmatic approach to school placements and the demands made on schools, for example: teachers may only host one student per year or teachers may not have a student every year.

It must be noted, that while the majority of respondents stated that their school hosted student-teachers (80% in the previous school year), not all schools did. When principals were asked what factors might prevent their school from hosting a student-teacher, reasons given included: not being approached by a college of education or a student, or that they were a small rural school with multi-grade classes or that they were too far from a college of education. However, the strongest reasons given were that the timing of placements was unsuitable, and that the duration of the placements was unsuitable.

## Benefits

There was a recognition that there were many benefits to hosting student-teachers in schools and classrooms. School placement was seen by the majority of respondents as an opportunity for experienced teachers to share their expertise, which is very re-affirming for teachers. However, fewer than half of the respondents saw school placement as an opportunity to show solidarity with the next generation of teachers.

**Figure 2. Benefits of hosting student-teachers**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Class Teacher</b>
Hosting student-teachers allows more experienced teachers to share their expertise	83%	82%
School placement allows student teachers an opportunity to apply knowledge and integrate theory into practice	81%	81%
The staff are exposed to new and current thinking and practice	73%	67%
Hosting a student-teacher brings a richness and diversity to the school staff	68%	53%
Student-teachers provide an additional support to classroom teachers	66%	60%
Hosting student-teachers is an opportunity for in-service teachers to provide inter-generational solidarity to their pre-service colleagues	44%	31%

Class teachers were strongly of the opinion (82%) that hosting a student-teacher was part of their professional responsibility. A positive finding was that nine out of 10 teachers agreed that hosting a student-teacher enabled them to see their own class from another perspective and to reassess their own approaches to teaching.

## Challenges

The duration of school placement was considered a challenge by two thirds of principals. In their comments, many stated that three to four weeks was the ideal duration for school placement. Particularly in small schools, 10 weeks in school was seen as too long a placement. Timing was also an issue for both principals and class teachers. September placements were not welcomed. A small number of respondents – less than one in five – acknowledged that school placement was demanding on schools, impacted on pupils' learning and created an additional administrative

burden for principal teachers. Of more concern is the fact that one in three teachers agreed that school placement puts pressure on class teachers to revise topics covered by the student-teacher. From a class teacher's perspective, their primary responsibility is to their pupils and their learning. It is stressful for them if they feel their pupils are losing out.

**Figure 3. Challenges identified**

Challenges	Principal	Class Teacher
The duration of placements is unsuitable	66%	41%
The timing of placements is unsuitable	59%	46%
Hosting student-teachers is too demanding and impacts negatively on pupils' learning	17%	13%
Previous poor experiences of hosting student-teachers	19%	21%
School placement puts pressure on teachers to revise topics covered by the student-teacher	34%	33%
School placement places an administrative burden on the principal teacher	14%	4%

Class teachers expressed mixed views regarding the 10-week placement. While half of the teachers saw the 10-weeks as offering students an opportunity to experience the reality of classrooms and school life – one in four disagreed. It was considered disruptive by 61% of teachers. However, 81% believed the 10-week placement should be spread across a number of classrooms and special education settings rather than being spent in one classroom.

### Tensions

There are tensions around relationships between schools and colleges. While almost two thirds of principals acknowledged that colleges are appreciative of schools that host student-teachers, one in five were of the view that colleges don't give schools guidelines around expectations of schools regarding school placements. Over half of the principals, although only one third of class teachers, are of the view that colleges expect too much of schools.

Two principals referred to Droichead in their comments. One expressed frustration around the synergy between colleges and schools regarding Droichead, stating that schools should have more information about what colleges do and that the Droichead process should start in the college. The other principal wanted to see processes developed as part of Droichead to be extended to school placement:

I am annoyed at the lack of recognition given to schools who continuously provide school placement opportunities for ITE colleges. I am also worried about the lack of information regarding the content of these ITE and PME programmes and the link they are supposed to be providing between them and us with regards to Droichead ... I was under the illusion that the Droichead process began in the colleges when the B.Ed and PME courses were extended.

We have a PST team trained through Droichead Induction process. It would be very beneficial to extend the induction format to the teacher placement where class teachers would use the same templates to support student-teachers.

### Role of the teacher

According to the Teaching Council Guidelines, class teachers should afford the student-teacher opportunities to observe them teaching, and this was certainly the case, as almost all teachers (93%) were comfortable with students observing them teaching.



Also, according to the Guidelines, teachers are expected to observe the student-teacher’s practice and provide oral or written feedback to the student-teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner. The majority of teachers were happy to give informal feedback directly to student-teachers, and also to their supervisors. Teachers, however, were more reluctant to provide written feedback. The majority of principals did not agree that teachers should give written feedback, but class teachers were more open to providing written feedback to the student-teacher in their classroom. The responses from class teachers regarding evaluation are also interesting. Almost a third of class teachers are of the view that they should not be involved in the evaluation of student-teachers, but half of the teachers disagree with this statement. These responses regarding feedback and evaluation are worthy of more in-depth discussion regarding the role of teachers in supporting school placement.

Figure 4. Role of the teacher – principals’ views

	Principal	
	Agree	Disagree
Teachers who host student-teachers should give informal verbal feedback to student-teachers	83%	7%
Teachers who host student-teachers should give a formal written report to student-teachers	10%	81%
Teachers who host student-teachers should give a informal feedback to student-teachers’ placement tutors	78%	13%

Figure 5. Role of the teacher – teachers’ views

	Principal	
	Agree	Disagree
I am happy to provide constructive verbal feedback directly to student-teachers	89%	4%
I am happy to give written feedback to student-teachers	42%	40%
I am happy to discuss student-teachers’ progress with their supervisor/school placement tutor	85%	5%

The comments centred on the need to be consulted by supervisors regarding students’ progress and suitability to teach. Teachers are there all the time with the students while the supervisors visit periodically, and perhaps not often enough according to some respondents.

Class teachers need to be involved and consulted by visiting inspectors for full transparency of candidate’s suitability to teach.

Teachers are given very little/no opportunity to formally feedback on a student’s progress to the university. Oral feedback to visiting inspectors is often overlooked or seen as having little value.

Supervisors should meet with the class teacher to discuss the student’s progress as the class teacher is present all the time, as opposed to the one-hour observation a supervisor is there for. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

Supervisors should have a more in-depth discussion with class teacher to discuss how the student is getting on overall.

## Teacher expectations

While colleges may have expectations of schools, teachers also have expectations of student-teachers and colleges. Over half of the respondents agreed that student-teachers are always well prepared for their school placements, however, it is of concern that almost a quarter of principals disagreed.

**Figure 6. Student-teacher preparations**

Comment	Principal		Class teacher	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Student-teachers are always well prepared for their school placement	58%	23%	56%	11%

According to class teachers, students were not always prepared, nor did they always understand what was expected of them. Focusing on school placement as an exam can take away from the experience and more practical advice from supervisors would be welcome. There were a number of comments from class teachers relating to the standard of Gaeilge among student-teachers.

I feel the students are not sufficiently prepared and do not know the academic standards expected of them and the students. Frequently the topic is not covered correctly, and the class teacher has to revisit the topic.

The student appears only to be concerned about the visit of the supervisor and not their teaching generally; there's too much of an atmosphere of 'an exam' about their placement as opposed to an experience.

I feel it is the responsibility of the colleges to support/prepare student-teachers. We had an instance where the college inspector told the class teacher to get the student to an acceptable standard before the next visit!

Helpful practical advice on how to improve performance would be appreciated from supervisors.

The standard of Gaeilge must be addressed. My fourth class pupils have a higher standard of Irish than the average student-teacher.

Other issues raised in comments included discipline, and professional relationships.

Only a third of teachers agreed that colleges of education provided them with clear expectations regarding the student-teachers' school placement experience. It must also be noted that only 41% of class teachers agreed that they are clear regarding what to expect from first year students in comparison to fourth year students, while an equal number disagreed.

While the Teaching Council Guidelines state that the class teacher should assign the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student-teacher while retaining the primary responsibility for the progress of the learners, there are some tensions around this as was evident in teachers' comments:

Student-teachers should adapt to the structure of lessons given by the class teacher in order to ensure a smooth transition. Veering off course and doing their own topics becomes very messy for the class teacher.



Some years students arrive in with a list of expectations from the college. These do not blend in with what is expected in the classroom. The class teacher and student-teacher are then caught – give the college what it wants for a good grade or follow what is already happening in the school/class.

These tensions around what students should teach and how they should teach when they are being hosted by class teachers who have their own plans, methodologies and schemes of work for the year need to be teased out more.

There were also mixed views among teachers regarding whether student-teachers should join the staff for breaks in the staff room, participate in staff meetings or Croke Park hours or shadow the hosting teacher on yard duty and other supervision duties.

### Concerns

While principals and teachers agreed their experience of school placement was generally positive, note should be made of the fact that about one in 10 teachers disagreed.

We know that teachers are very concerned about the amount of paperwork that has crept into teaching over recent years. Teachers are also concerned about the wellbeing of student-teachers and the demands being placed on them. Three out of four class teachers and two thirds of principal teachers agreed that there is too much emphasis on paperwork and planning during a student's placement.

Figure 7. Student-teacher – wellbeing

Comment	Principal		Class teacher	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
There is too much emphasis on paperwork and planning during a student's placement.	67%	10%	75%	11%
I have concerns about the well-being and welfare of student-teachers going through placement	63%	13%	59%	18%
Student-teachers are appreciative of the support they receive from the school	85%	5%		

The issue of the 10-week placement also merits revisiting, to reconsider the purpose of the long placement based on the experience to date.

### Supporting schools and teachers

The majority of principals (85%) agreed that schools should receive a grant from the Department to cover the cost of hosting student-teachers. When offered a list of possible ways to recognize schools' contribution to school placement four out of five principals recommended an allowance for the school. Both principals and class teachers would welcome EPV days, and interestingly two thirds of class teachers would welcome the use of 'Croke Park Hours' for reflective meetings with the student-teacher. The Teaching Council Guidelines refer to the class teacher's responsibility to encourage, support and facilitate the student-teacher in critical reflection on their practice, the use of a variety of teaching methodologies, and in engaging with and responding appropriately to feedback from learners.

**Figure 8. Recognition for hosting student-teacher**

Suggestions	Principal	Class teacher
An allowance payable to the school	79%	44%
EPV days	59%	66%
The use of Croke Park hours for reflective meetings with student-teachers	50%	67%
CPD provided by the colleges	50%	44%
Recognition of school placement participation/cooperation in school inspections	50%	46%
Recognition of School Placement through <i>Cosán</i>	36%	19%
Certificate of acknowledgement	34%	23%

## Conclusion

There continue to be challenges and concerns in relation to school placement, not least of which stem from the increasing numbers of students seeking placements and the longer length of placements required. It is essential that feedback on how the current policy and guidelines are working for teachers, students and colleges is used to inform future policy development.

Notwithstanding the challenges, primary teachers remain positive about the experience as they see participation in school placement as part of their professional responsibility, as a professional learning opportunity and as a valid form of professional development. The intrinsic importance of the real school experience for student-teachers places an onus on the partnership of schools, colleges and students to continue to work together to ensure the most valuable experience possible. As one teacher noted:

In the pursuit of excellence in education I really like the potential of student placement for the opportunity for mutual learning it provides.



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