

DRIVING FORWARD PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS



Policy Statement:

Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland

May 2016

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1 Introduction and Statutory Background

1.1 Introduction

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (the Council) is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing standards of teaching and teacher education. The Council seeks to ensure that programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) are professionally appropriate, demanding and prepare students for registration as a primary or secondary teacher. In the ever-evolving landscape of Scottish education it is also the Council's belief that ITE programmes should help to prepare creative and dedicated teachers who are able to work and develop professionally in a world of change, diversity and accountability and who are committed to equal opportunities for all.

1.2 Statutory Background

1.2.1 The Council's powers in relation to teacher education institutions ("relevant institutions") originally derived from the Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965. The Act placed a duty upon the Council to monitor the quality of programmes of ITE and authorised the establishment of groups of persons to visit the institutions for that purpose. The Act also empowered the Council to make recommendations to the institutions and outlined the procedure for use in the event of conflict arising between the Council and the institution.

1.2.2 The Teachers (Education, Training and Recommendation for Registration) (Scotland) Regulations 1993 required that with certain prescribed exceptions instruction in the Theory, Methods and Practice of teaching must be given by teachers registered with the Council. While these Regulations are now revoked, this specific requirement is maintained under Schedule 5 of the Public Services Reform (General Teaching Council for Scotland) Order 2011. The Public Services Reform (General Teaching Council for Scotland) Order 2011 Part 4 states that:

29 (1) It is for the GTCS to determine what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification for individuals seeking registration as a school teacher.

29 (2) A determination may make such provision about the education and training required to attain such a qualification as the GTCS thinks fit.

1.2.3 The Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland, June 2013, (the Guidelines) set out the GTC Scotland policy on the content, nature and duration of programmes leading to teaching qualifications (TQs) for the primary and secondary sectors. They supersede those which were issued in 2006 by the Scottish Government and came into effect from the start of academic session 2013/2014. GTC Scotland ensures that these requirements are met through accrediting all programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Scotland.

1.2.4 Equal Opportunities/Disability Discrimination

The Council requires that courses and programmes will embrace diversity, challenge discrimination and promote the equal opportunity requirements laid down by statute.

2 Programme Accreditation Process

2.1 The Council defines accreditation as the process of ascertaining the professional acceptability of a programme of ITE leading to a teaching qualification. Accreditation applies to programmes and not to higher education institutions (HEIs); accreditation will therefore take place programme by programme. It is the programme operated by the HEI which is accredited, not the HEI itself. The Council thinks it right and consonant with its role that each programme should be carefully evaluated on an individual basis and from a professional point of view. When a programme has been accredited by the Council on an unconditional basis, it is entitled to run for a period of up to six years with an interim evaluation highlighting any developments and/or enhancements in the content, nature, duration or structure of the programme. The HEI would require to have the programme re-accredited at the end of each six-year period or earlier if the programme is subject to substantial revision.

The Council in any event reserves the right to revisit a programme at any time during the six-year period, a possibility which is sometimes signalled in accreditation reports.

Where new programmes are proposed outwith the six-year cycle they will be accredited separately.

In the case of concurrent programmes only those aspects/courses concerned with the Theory and Practice of Teaching will be the subject of scrutiny by the Council.

2.2 The Council's accreditation function is currently exercised by means of the Education Committee.

2.3 In the case of a programme being accredited for the first time this will normally contain three stages:

Stage 1 Expression of Interest

The expectation is that HEIs will wish to discuss informally with the Scottish Government and the Council proposals for the introduction of a new programme. Having taken account of a range of considerations, including supply issues, a decision will be made whether or not the HEI should be encouraged to proceed with more detailed programme planning.

The HEI should then confirm in writing that the programme is being developed and will be submitted for accreditation.

Stage 2 University Approval/Validation

The second stage concerns the internal approval/validation requirement. The HEI or other degree-awarding institution will assess the programme proposal for academic rigour and degree-worthiness. The Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Courses in Scotland require that all programmes are subjected to external scrutiny as a means of ensuring the maintenance of acceptable academic standards. The process must be completed before the accreditation event and needs to comply with Section 2 of the Guidelines.

This stage must be concluded before proceeding to Stage 3.

Stage 3 Accreditation

This is the stage at which the Council establishes whether or not the programme is professionally acceptable as leading to registration as a primary or secondary teacher. The Council aims to determine whether a programme offers a relevant professional preparation for teaching; it will focus on key professional aspects of the programme and on the understanding and perceptions of the staff likely to be involved in its delivery. The documentation used for accreditation will include appropriate internal approval/validation documentation used in Stage 2.

Exception to Stages 2 and 3

Ideally, and if at all possible, the Council would strongly wish to encourage an approach which amalgamates Stages 2 and 3. This would be through holding a joint event, where the HEI and the Council consider the programme together, enabling stages 2 and 3 to be met concurrently leading to joint validation and accreditation.

2.4 The process of re-accreditation will occur automatically after 6 years and have two stages, namely internal approval/validation and accreditation or be combined into one process with a joint validation/accreditation event.

3 Accreditation Cycle and Timescale

3.1 The cycle for accreditation of ITE programmes is a 6 year cycle which commenced in 2003-2004. Where possible, the accreditation will involve **all** the ITE programmes within a HEI, although the accreditation will be on a programme by programme basis.

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- 3.2 If a separate event is required, the accreditation will normally take place through the attendance of HEI and partner staff at a meeting in the Council offices of a Panel comprising of members of the Education Committee and external experts appointed by Council. Where a joint validation/ accreditation event is to be held, Council Panel members will attend the HEI event and the accreditation will form part of that event.
- 3.3 New programmes proposed outwith the 6 year cycle will be accredited separately.

4 Evaluation Framework for the Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland

- 4.1 The evaluation criteria are designed to assist the process of internal review of ITE and external accreditation and approval.
- 4.2 The format for the evaluation criteria document is centred on 'core issues' to which HEIs are expected to respond in an evaluative way. To help the evaluative process, these issues are refined into 'key questions'.
- 4.3 The evaluation criteria are for use by all stakeholders with a key interest in evaluating the quality of ITE.

5 Programme Documentation

5.1 Documentation for Accreditation of Programmes

The Council must receive electronic submission of the complete documentation not less than five weeks before the event is scheduled to commence. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date will result in the postponement of the event, to a mutually agreed future date. Duplication of documents, e.g. where there is shared course content, should be kept to the minimum. Documentation should be in English.

The documentation for the proposed programmes should include:

- (i) the Self-Evaluation Document (SED);
- (ii) programme specifications and module descriptors;
- (iii) information should include:
 - ❖ rationale;
 - ❖ aims and learning outcomes;
 - ❖ relevant information regarding how the Standard for Provisional Registration will be met;
 - ❖ relevant information to demonstrate compliance with the Guidelines for Teacher Education Programmes;
 - ❖ design and content of the curriculum;
 - ❖ programme structure and requirements, levels, modules, credits, awards;
 - ❖ mode of provision;
 - ❖ learning strategies;
 - ❖ assessment arrangements;
 - ❖ partnership arrangements;
 - ❖ a rationale for placements including ensuring that school experience arrangements are practicable and sustainable; learning resources;
 - ❖ student teacher recruitment, progression and support;
 - ❖ methods for evaluating and enhancing learning.
- (iv) a summary of key changes to programmes;
- (v) internal approval reports and membership of the group together with a note of any substantial amendments made to the documentation in the light of the report;

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- (vi) brief information on relevant university regulations;
 - (vii) annual reports and external examiner reports for the previous three years should be available for scrutiny, if required;
 - (viii) up-to-date information in relation to resource issues;
 - (xii) professional profiles of the staff responsible for the delivery of the various programmes, indicating their Registration status with GTCS.

5.2 Additional Documentation for a New Programme

The Council must receive electronic submission of the programme documentation not less than 5 weeks before the accreditation event is scheduled to take place. The documentation submitted to the Council should be the same as that submitted to the validating body. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date will result in the postponement of the event. Duplication of documents, e.g. where there is shared course content, should be kept to the minimum.

It should include:

- (i) programme specification/rationale document;
- (ii) the programme document in its final format including module descriptors;
- (iii) internal validation report and membership of the Panel together with a note of any substantial amendments made to the documentation in the light of the report;
- (iv) brief information on relevant university regulations;
- (v) professional profiles of staff responsible for the delivery of the programme indicating their Registrations status with GTCS.

6 Accreditation Mechanisms

6.1 The Council's Education Committee delegates programme scrutiny to Accreditation Panels. All have delegated powers; in other words each Panel has authority to take a decision/decisions on a programme and to advise the HEI accordingly without further reference to the parent Committee or to the Council. Reports are made available to Committee and Council post event.

6.2 Each Panel normally consists of a minimum of five members; at least two members are persons external to the Council. The size of the Panel will vary in relation to the number of programmes to be accredited, the number of students on the programmes and the complexity of provision. Panel meetings are chaired by Panel Conveners appointed from the Committee.

The external members are drawn from the educational community at large and will include representation from the higher education sector and, as appropriate to the programme, local authorities and/or schools or the college sector. Care is taken to ensure that the external members are not concerned in any way with the HEI or programme(s) under scrutiny.

Panel meetings are normally serviced by Council staff who also maintain an overview of the accreditation activities. The Chief Executive and/or the Director of Education, Registration and Professional Learning may service some events. A secretary may also be in attendance.

6.3 In relation to communications between the Council and the HEI the key HEI contact should be the person with designated responsibility for ITE and/or quality assurance in the School or Faculty. The designated liaison person should liaise with the Council to ensure good two-way communications and to assist with the arrangements for the event.

6.4 Prior to events specialist advice may be sought on specific aspects of the programme(s).

7 Accreditation Arrangements

- 7.1 Council staff will negotiate the accreditation arrangements.
- 7.2 The Council must receive the required documentation normally not less than five weeks before the event is scheduled to commence. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date will result in the postponement of the event. Duplication of documents, e.g. where there is shared course content, should be kept to the minimum.
- 7.3 The Council staff will visit the HEI for discussion of the programmes prior to the Panel meeting.
- 7.4 The task of the Council is to ensure that all programmes of ITE are demanding, credible and professionally appropriate, that their contents are relevant to the needs of today's learners and that the programmes incorporate significant opportunities for professional growth which will also enable new teachers to meet the demands and challenges of tomorrow's learners.

- (i) A private Panel meeting will identify issues for discussion and areas for consideration.
- (ii) The HEI team will make a presentation (in English or with translation into English provided) which highlights key changes to programme provision, details the HEI's current partnership arrangements and reports on the outcomes from the university's internal review process. The presentation should last no longer than 20 minutes.
- (iii) The Panel and the HEI team will then have an opportunity for discussion, addressing relevant areas and clarifying issues.
- (iv) A private meeting of the Panel will consider conclusions and make decisions on accreditation on a programme by programme basis.
- (v) The outcomes will then be communicated to the HEI team.

7.5 Accreditation of a New Programme outwith the 6 Year Cycle

The Council must receive the programme documentation not less than five weeks before the accreditation event is scheduled to take place. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date will result in the postponement of the event. Duplication of documents, e.g. where there is shared course content, should be kept to the minimum.

In terms of the present arrangements for programme accreditation the Council will expect to meet either the whole Programme Planning Committee or at least a substantial part of it. The expectation is that there will be sufficient HEI representation to speak with authority on any aspect of the programme and/or to answer questions arising. The Council will expect to meet representatives of partnership groups.

- 7.6 All Panel meetings will normally take place in the Council's offices. In the course of an internal meeting the members confirm the issues to discuss later with the representatives of the HEI. The Panel is then joined by the HEI representatives for discussion of the programme arrangements with particular reference to any issues or areas of concern already identified.

The representatives of the HEI should include students, recent graduates and professional partners who have participated in the planning of the programme.

In line with 3.2 above if a joint validation/accreditation is to be held this would normally be in the relevant HEI.

8 Outcomes and Reporting

8.1 Outcomes

At the conclusion of the Accreditation Panel members have a private meeting to determine the outcome of each programme. There are four possible outcomes:

- (i) to accredit unconditionally;
- (ii) to accredit conditionally.

If the accreditation is conditional, the requirements will be clearly defined along with the timescale within which they have to be met. Some conditions will require to be met before the programme commences. Others will require to be met through the HEI's normal monitoring, evaluation and review procedures within a specified timescale. Such conditions will also form the basis of discussion at the interim evaluation and enhancement event.

The Panel may also make recommendations which are for the HEI then to consider.

- (iii) to defer a decision on accreditation subject to major amendments being implemented;
- (iv) to refuse accreditation.

If accreditation is not granted, providers will be given the opportunity to submit revised proposals within a negotiated timescale.

If accreditation is not granted providers also have the choice of appealing against the decision. Details of the Appeals Process are given in Section 8.3.

8.2 Reporting

The HEI is informed of the outcome in three stages:

- (i) The Chair of the Panel and a Council Officer will convey the main outcomes to the HEI team. This verbal report is done as the conclusion to the meeting of the Panel with the HEI team.
- (ii) A formal letter is sent confirming the Panel's decision(s). The letter indicates the timescale involved for any conditions set.
- (iii) A brief overall report of provision is produced which will also identify aspects of good practice.

The report is sent to the HEI and Panel members.

8.3 Appeals Process

If a programme is not accredited the HEI will have a right of appeal.

As detailed in 8.1, if a programme is not accredited, providers have an opportunity to submit a revised proposal in response to the feedback given by the Accreditation Panel.

However, if relevant grounds are met, it is also appropriate, for there to be the possibility of appealing against a GTC Scotland Accreditation Panel decision. Any such appeal will follow GTC Scotland processes and be heard by an Appeals Board, composed of three members of the Education Committee who have not been involved in the original Accreditation process.

Any such appeal must be made, in writing, within 28 days of the date of receipt of notification of the panel decision. The appeal should be sent to the Accreditation Panel Servicing Officer.

The grounds for the appeal should be specified in writing. Grounds for appeal may include:

- ❖ that the panel failed to act in accordance with this Policy Statement and/or the Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland;

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- ❖ failed to give due consideration to the information provided by the HEI;
 - ❖ made an error in law or in fact.

An Appeals Board will be established, consisting of 3 members of the Education Committee, not previously involved in the accreditation process.

The Appeals Board will determine the outcome of the Appeal, giving due consideration to the Guidelines for ITE Education Programmes in Scotland and to the GTCS Standards.

Where an appeal against a decision is upheld, the Appeals Board will give direction on the next steps in the accreditation process of the programme concerned.

9 Interim Evaluation and Enhancement

When a programme has been accredited on an unconditional basis, it is entitled to run for a period of up to six years with an interim report.

Where a programme has been accredited conditionally an Action Plan with timescale will be required indicating how the programme planned to overtake the conditions and the submission of a final report on completion.

The Interim report would include:

- (i) responses to any Action Plan for individual programmes and showing how conditions have been overtaken;
- (ii) any major changes in the nature, content or structure of the individual programme(s) and/or overall provision;
- (iii) progress of the programme(s) as described in the internal quality assurance report;
- (iv) enhancement of the ITE provision;
- (v) professional profiles of new staff involved in the delivery of the programme(s).

A visit by Council staff might be involved to discuss progress in relation to overtaking the requirements.

The period of accreditation and approval of a new programme outside the cycle may be adjusted in relation to the cycle for the HEI.

10 Confidentiality

The Council regards discussion with HEIs and participating individuals during the course of accreditation as confidential.

GTC Scotland aims to promote equality and diversity in all its activities

GTC Scotland *Comhairle Choitcheann Teagaisg na h-Alba*

The General Teaching Council for Scotland is the independent professional body which maintains and enhances teaching standards and promotes and regulates the teaching profession in Scotland. We strive to be a world leader in professional education issues.

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