DRIVING FORWARD PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

THE GENERAL
TEACHING COUNCIL
FOR SCOTLAND

gtc
SCOTLAND

Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland

Policy

August 2022

Contents

1 Introduction and Statutory Background

1.1 Introduction

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland) is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing standards of teaching, teaching qualifications and teacher education. GTC Scotland 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.

1.2 Statutory Background

GTC Scotland's powers in relation to Teacher Education Institutions (Institutions) originally derived from the Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965. The Act placed a duty upon GTC Scotland to monitor the quality of programmes of ITE through the accreditation of programmes and authorised the establishment of groups of persons to visit the Institutions for that purpose. The Act also empowered GTC Scotland to make recommendations to the Institutions and outlined the procedure for use in the event of conflict arising between GTC Scotland and the Institution.

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 GTC Scotland. 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 GTC Scotland 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 GTC Scotland thinks fit.

The Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland 2022, (the Guidelines) sets out GTC Scotland's policy on the content, nature and duration of programmes leading to teaching qualifications (TQs). GTC Scotland ensures that these requirements are met through accrediting all ITE programmes in Scotland.

1.3 Equal Opportunities/Disability Discrimination

In the ever-evolving landscape of Scottish education, it is GTC Scotland's belief that programmes of ITE need to prepare student teachers to become competent, thoughtful, reflective and innovative practitioners, who are committed to providing high quality learning for every learner. GTC Scotland considers that this includes prioritising and ensuring that all programmes of ITE embed the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

GTC Scotland is committed to the general equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 in all of its functions. This includes having a due regard to the need to:

❖ eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
❖ advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and
❖ foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

As part of the accreditation of ITE programmes, GTC Scotland encourages ITE programme providers to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring that all ITE programmes embrace and promote diversity, challenge discrimination and promote the equal opportunity requirements as laid down by statute, and that all opportunities reflect the diversity of Scotland's population. In addition, GTC Scotland will look for clarification as to how programme providers will empower students to adopt these principles.

2   Programme Accreditation Process

GTC Scotland 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 ITE Institution; accreditation will therefore take place programme by programme. It is the programme delivered by the ITE Institutions which is accredited, not the ITE Institution itself. GTC Scotland thinks it right and in line 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 GTC Scotland on an unconditional basis, it is entitled to run for a period of up to six years with an interim report highlighting any developments and/or enhancements in the content, nature, duration or structure of the programme. The ITE Institution would be 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.

GTC Scotland 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.

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 GTC Scotland.

GTC Scotland's accreditation function is currently overseen by means of the Education Committee.

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 the ITE Institution will wish to discuss informally with the Scottish Government and GTC Scotland 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 ITE Institution should be encouraged to proceed with more detailed programme planning.

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

❖ **Stage 2 – Institution Approval/Validation**

The second stage concerns the internal approval/validation requirement. The ITE Institution 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 GTC Scotland establishes whether or not the programme is professionally acceptable as leading to registration as a primary or secondary teacher. GTC Scotland aims to determine whether a programme offers 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 alongside the Evaluation Framework: Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland, 2022 (see 4).

The process of re-accreditation will occur automatically after 6 years and have two stages, namely internal approval/validation and accreditation.

3 Accreditation Cycle and Timescale

The cycle for accreditation of ITE programmes is a 6-year cycle which commenced in 2003-2004.

Accreditation will take place on a programme-by-programme basis. The accreditation will normally take place through the attendance of ITE Institution and partner staff at a meeting, in GTC Scotland offices or online, of a Panel comprising GTC Scotland Education Panel members and external experts appointed by GTC Scotland.

To ensure that all programmes are given sufficient time for discussion, it is recommended that programmes are presented for accreditation individually, i.e. PGDE programme (for primary and secondary) or a MA programme, but not a PGDE and MA programme at the same accreditation event.

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

The evaluation criteria are designed to assist the process of internal review of ITE and external accreditation and approval.

The format for the evaluation framework is centred on 'key aspects' to which ITE Institutions are expected to respond. The headings within the framework give a sense of the 'teacher journey' and support the principles of the developing professional.

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

GTC Scotland must receive electronic submission of the complete documentation not less than six weeks before the event is scheduled to commence. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date may result in the postponement of the event, to a mutually agreed future date. Documentation should be in English.

The documentation for the proposed programmes should include the following:

❖ **Statutory Requirements**

The programme proposal must be assessed for academic rigour and degree-worthiness by the ITE providers or other degree awarding body and be subjected to external scrutiny as a means of ensuring the maintenance of acceptable academic standards. Annual reports and external examiner reports for the previous three years should be available for scrutiny.

❖ **Staffing Levels and Effective Delivery**

Staff delivering the programme and associate tutors involved in professional placement should be identified along with their GTC Scotland status. For ITE staff, their area of research/scholarship should also be noted with explanation of how this expertise is being used to both underpin and enhance the programme.

The communication strategy for associate tutors should be provided, outlining the roles, responsibilities and how associate tutors will be supported to ensure their knowledge and practice remains contemporary.

❖ **Programme Design**

The rationale with associated aims and objectives of the programme should be provided, including how the following are addressed throughout the programme:

- ❖ How the programme develops and promotes equality and diversity and empowers students to adopt these principles. For example, outline how additional support needs are addressed.
- ❖ How students are prepared to work with children experiencing trauma or who have had adverse childhood experiences and understand their duties as a corporate parent.
- ❖ Progression in skills and knowledge acquisition.
- ❖ Opportunities for personalisation and choice.

❖ Recruitment and Selection of Students

Marketing approaches must encourage diversity of applicants. ITE providers must have a system of selection for student teachers which must take into account available reports on individual applicants, their experience, interests and wider achievement and the extent to which they match the skills, attributes and dispositions desirable in a teacher. Student teachers should only be admitted to a programme after an interview process which should normally involve personnel from both the institution and local education authorities/schools.

ITE providers should mitigate institutional barriers and bias throughout the recruitment and selection procedures to ensure all applicants are given equal opportunities of being selected onto an ITE programme. They should consider how the lack of diversity currently within the teaching profession in relation to protected characteristics is being addressed.

Programmes must have clear criteria for recognising prior learning and experience, and offer opportunities for part-time and distance learning wherever this is appropriate.

All student teachers must apply to Disclosure Scotland for membership to the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme once an offer to join a programme has been received.

❖ Support for Student Teachers

Each ITE provider must have in place strategies and protocols to support student teachers both academically and with pastoral issues. The delivery of the programme should support student teachers to build their academic and professional resilience. There also needs to be within the partnership arrangement defined roles and responsibilities to ensure that student teachers are fully supported on professional placement.

The student programme and placement handbook should both explicitly state the supports available to all students, including clear advice for students should they experience discrimination or harassment.

❖ Content of Programme

The programme should include educational theory and practice that supports student teachers to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice in areas such as educational theory, childhood development and developing positive relationships. The legal and statutory frameworks which govern teachers work should also be addressed throughout the programme.

Student teachers should be exposed to national priorities and pedagogies to develop their understanding and practice in key areas such as:

- ❖ inclusion;
- ❖ additional support needs;
- ❖ parental involvement;
- ❖ involvement of young people;
- ❖ the curriculum with emphasis on areas that are Responsibilities of All - literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing;
- ❖ digital and data literacy;
- ❖ skills for learning, life and work;
- ❖ Learning for Sustainability.

❖ **Professional Values**

Personal values and GTC Scotland Professional values must be explored, discussed and assessed at multiple points throughout the programme.

ITE providers should consider how they are enabling students to acknowledge and consider how their positionality and identity shapes their thinking and practice.

❖ **Delivery of Programme**

The rationale for the delivery model should be clearly outlined with associated timelines and key milestones. An outline of methodologies used, moderation of the programme and how the programme supports students to connect theory to practice should also be included.

The development of the programme should include opportunities for student teachers to engage in professional dialogue, to work collegiately and engage in collaborative learning. It should also include opportunities for student teachers to be creative and enhance their digital literacy skills to enrich learning of every learner.

Multiple exit points should be identified and opportunities for further study should be signposted to support the teacher journey.

❖ **Assessment**

The assessment pattern and range of assessment strategies, also the diverse learning and teaching approaches and blended learning opportunities, should support student teachers' progression. Successful completion of the programme should enable students to meet (and evidence) the Standard for Provisional Registration (GTC Scotland, 2021).

Moderation activities must be part of the programme alongside clearly outlined interventions to support student teachers who do not meet the assessment criteria with procedures for re-sits, extensions and appeals identified.

There should be clear roles and responsibilities in the assessment of placements to ensure these are a valid and reliable means of measuring students' progress.

❖ **Partnership**

Partners must be involved in the planning of the programme to ensure that university staff, school staff and student teachers have a shared, relevant and up-to-date knowledge and are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in respect to the professional placement. This would include mechanisms to collect feedback on the quality of the professional placement.

The programme should normally have a professional placement pattern that is compatible with Student Placement System and is practicable and sustainable.

The partnership working should be evident to support and promote collegiality and collaborative working which is underpinned by self-evaluation, reflection and enquiry and supports student teachers to develop these stances.

5.2   Reaccreditation

In addition to the documentation for accreditation of programmes (5.1), documentation for a reaccreditation would also include the following;

❖ A summary of key changes to the programme.
❖ Internal approval reports and membership of the group together with a note of any substantial amendments made to the documentation in light of the report.
❖ Annual reports and external examiner reports for the previous 3 years should be available for scrutiny.

6 Accreditation Mechanisms

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

Each Panel normally consists of a minimum of five members; at least two members are persons external to GTC Scotland. 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 a GTC Scotland Education Panel member.

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

Panel meetings are normally serviced by GTC Scotland 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.

In relation to communications between GTC Scotland and the ITE Institution, the key ITE Institution 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 GTC Scotland to ensure good two-way communications and to assist with the arrangements for the event.

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

7 Accreditation Arrangements

GTC Scotland staff will negotiate the accreditation arrangements.

GTC Scotland must receive the required documentation normally not less than six weeks before the event is scheduled to commence. As panel members require sufficient time to scrutinise the documents, failure to submit by that date may result in the postponement of the event.

GTC Scotland staff will visit the ITE Institution for discussion of the programmes prior to the Panel meeting.

The task of the GTC Scotland 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 ITE Institution team will make a presentation (in English or with translation into English provided) which discusses the key highlights of the programme provision, details the ITE Institution's current partnership arrangements and reports on the outcomes from the university's internal review process. The expectation is that there will be sufficient ITE Institution representation to speak with authority on any aspect of the programme and/or to answer questions arising. GTC Scotland will also expect to hear from representatives of the partnership group, for example, students, recent graduates and/or professional partners. The presentation should last no longer than 20 minutes.

(iii)   The Panel and the ITE Institution 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 Institution team.

All Panel meetings will normally take place at GTC Scotland's offices or online. In the course of the internal meeting, the members confirm the issues to discuss later with the representatives of the ITE Institution. The Panel is then joined by the ITE Institution representatives for discussion of the programme arrangements with particular reference to any issues or areas of concern already identified.

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 ITE Institution'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 ITE Institution then to consider.

(iii)   To defer a decision on accreditation subject to major amendments being implemented:

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

(iv)   To refuse accreditation:

If accreditation is not granted providers also have the choice of requesting a review of the decision. Details of the Review Process are given in Section 8.3.

8.2   Reporting

The ITE Institution is informed of the outcome in three stages:

(i)   The Chair of the Panel and a GTC Scotland Officer will convey the main outcomes to the ITE Institution team. This verbal report is done at the conclusion to the meeting of the Panel with the ITE Institution 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 ITE Institution and Panel members.

8.3   Review Process

If a programme is not accredited, the ITE Institution will have a right to request to have the proposal reviewed.

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 requesting a review of a GTC Scotland Accreditation Panel decision. Any such review will follow GTC Scotland processes and be heard by a new ITE Accreditation Panel, composed of three members of GTC Scotland's Education Panel pool who have not been involved in the original accreditation process.

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

The grounds for review must be specified in writing. Grounds for review are limited to the following reasons:

- ❖ that the Panel failed to act in accordance with this Policy Statement and/or the Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland;
- ❖ that the Panel failed to give due consideration to the information provided by the ITE Institution;
- ❖ that the Panel made an error in law or in fact.

If grounds for a review are agreed, a new ITE Accreditation Panel will be established, consisting of 3 members of the GTC Scotland's Education Panel pool not previously involved in the accreditation process.

The new ITE Accreditation Panel will determine the outcome of the review, giving due consideration to the Guidelines for ITE Education Programmes in Scotland and to GTC Scotland Standards.

Where a review of a decision is upheld, the new ITE Accreditation Panel will give direction on the next steps in the accreditation process of the programme concerned.

The decision of the new ITE Accreditation Panel will be considered final.

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. GTC Scotland reserves the right to undertake an interim visit, with peer ITE members of the accreditation panel where possible.

Where a programme has been accredited conditionally, an Action Plan with timescale will be required indicating how the programme plans to overtake the conditions and the submission of a final report on completion. Once the conditions are met, the programme will be entitled to run for a period of up to six years with an interim written report from the ITE institution to the GTC Scotland and/or an interim visit.

An interim visit will be agreed as part of the Action Plan. This visit will include GTC Scotland staff and, where possible, peer ITE members of the accreditation panel.

9.1 Interim Report and/or Visit

The interim visit will be of no longer than two hours and will facilitate professional dialogue between the ITE provider, GTC Scotland staff and peer ITE members of the accreditation panel where possible.

If requested, the interim written report should cover the points below. Professional dialogue during an interim visit may also include discussion around these areas:

(i)   For accreditation with conditions, the responses to the Action Plan and a discussion of 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).

Within two weeks of the visit, GTC Scotland will provide a report to the ITE provider outlining good practice and recommendations to support the ITE in their preparation for re-accreditation.

If any significant issues are noted in relation to the interim report or during the interim visit, GTC Scotland will convene an additional meeting with the ITE provider to discuss these.

10   Confidentiality

GTC Scotland considers discussions with ITE institutions and participating individuals during the course of accreditation to be 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.

Clerwood House
96 Clermiston Road
Edinburgh EH12 6UT
Tel: 0131 314 6000
Fax: 0131 314 6001
E-mail: GTC Scotland@GTC Scotland.org.uk
Website: www.GTC Scotland.org.uk

Direct web links

Professional Update:
www.GTC Scotland.org.uk/professional-update

Fitness to Teach:
www.GTC Scotland.org.uk/fitness-to-teach

Probation site:
www.in2teaching.org.uk

Latest news:
www.teachingScotland.org.uk

Twitter feed @GTC Scotland