

STUDENT TEACHER PLACEMENTS NATIONAL STRATEGY GROUP REPORT ON PROGRESS IN 2006, AND FORWARD PLAN FOR 2007

BACKGROUND

1. The national strategy group was established in February 2006 following an undertaking given by Peter Peacock MSP in his letter of 27 October 2005 to Councillor Ewan Aitken. The Minister's letter confirmed that the national strategy group would follow on from the report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), *Student teacher placements within initial teacher education*, published in October 2005. HMIE published a further report in September 2006. While highlighting that much of the necessary work had been overtaken by the first of the HMIE reports, the Minister acknowledged that national guidelines and advice were items that could be looked at by the national strategy group.

2. The national strategy group is chaired by SEED [now the Schools Directorate of the Scottish Executive] and comprises representatives of the 3 regional student placement consortia (Western; Eastern and Northern). It covers local authority and teacher education institution (TEI) interests, the independent schools sector, the teacher associations, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and HMIE. At the first meeting in February 2006, the group agreed its remit:-

1. To maintain a strategic overview of student placements in Scotland;
2. To work closely with all the relevant stakeholders and ensure consistency of national practice;
3. To reflect on the HMIE report and the 2nd Stage review of initial teacher education (ITE); and to identify best practice across Scotland;
4. To discuss and agree forward strategy regarding Section 4 ("The Way Forward") of the 2005 HMIE report, monitor progress and make recommendations for further progress; and to agree and recommend necessary changes in the role of teaching staff and their duties towards fellow professionals (including student teachers);
5. To maintain an overview of the development of the Virtual Administration and Learning Environment in Education (VALED) project.

3. The initial HMIE report of October 2005 identified a number of issues for action by TEIs, local authorities, schools, SEED and the GTCS. The follow-up HMIE report in September 2006 recorded progress in tackling many of the problems.

PROGRESS DURING 2006

4. The group met in February, May, September and November, and:
 - **Agreed** that SEED should commission Glasgow University to develop the VALED IT system for student placements (renamed "Practicum"), based on the university's successful model for placement of medical students.
 - Discussed issues of mutual concern, giving opportunities for consortia, individual authorities and individual TEIs to share problems and learn from each other's experiences. Discussions covered, for example, identifying ways in which the shortage of nursery places could be shared, suggesting approaches to dealing with hard-to-fill places in rural schools and considering how to introduce greater consistency in the timing of critical stages in the planning of placements.

- Discussed the funding that SEED had made available for the student placement scheme since 2004-05, exchanged experiences of how the funding had been, or could be, deployed, and expressed concern about the uncertainty of whether the funding would continue beyond 2007-08.
- Addressed areas of potential tension identified by HMIE, most notably:
 - Tolerance levels for deliberately overestimating requirements when numbers of students and the demand for places were unknown. The Group **agreed** that a level of 10% was reasonable, given the uncertainties surrounding student acceptances of places on courses, student progress and staffing/mentoring issues within individual schools.
 - Inconsistency in TEI practice and documentation, leading to difficulties for authorities and schools working with students from different TEIs.
 - Uncertainties about how, when and by whom student experience is to be evaluated, and how, when and to whom feedback is to be given.
 - Arrangements for future funding for authorities for management and support of student placements.

Practicum

5. The group **agreed** that the development and implementation of Practicum was to be part-funded by SEED with contributions from each local authority and TEI. As part of the development of the system, Philip Donnelly from Glasgow University gave presentations to each of the 3 consortia to ensure that the model met their requirements. The 3 consortia discussed and agreed the features the system was to include. The Strategy Group agreed that the system was to be piloted by 6 authorities which represented the 3 consortia, before being rolled out across Scotland. Philip Donnelly attended all the group's meetings to report on progress, keep the group informed of the problems that had emerged during the pilot and seek their views as to the solutions to put in place to address the problems. The group **agreed** the parameters of Practicum, in accordance with the model endorsed by the 3 consortia and adjusted as necessary in light of the pilot, for roll-out across Scotland for the 2007-08 session.

Harmonisation of documentation of assessment and reporting procedures

6. The group recognised that one of the main areas where progress had been slow was in achieving harmonisation of documentation of assessment and reporting procedures. The group acknowledged that each TEI had developed its own practices over a long period and that each had good reason for retaining systems that had worked successfully. While acknowledging and welcoming the strengths of institutional diversity, the group agreed that greater harmonisation was not inconsistent with academic freedom or distinctiveness. The group **agreed** that greater convergence across organisational systems was both desirable and inevitable, and could be secured without threat to institutional autonomy. To that end, the group **recommended that a small sub-group be established** to consider how documentation could best be rationalised and brought into closer alignment.

Assuring the quality of placements

7. A further area where progress has been slow was assuring the quality of placements, particularly where schools and teachers were becoming involved for the first time. There was

a lack of consistency in how student experience was evaluated and fed back into the system. The group debated whether student evaluation could also be incorporated into Practicum and **agreed** that the systematic evaluation of student placements was key to quality assurance. The group therefore **agreed that a further sub-group be established** to consider how student evaluation might best be formalised and reflected as an integral and key element of the student placement scheme.

Mentoring

8. The group discussed the provision of mentoring courses offered by the TEIs for teachers engaged in working with students, and agreed that it was too soon to judge what impact any extension of such provision would have. They acknowledged that placements to more remote rural schools posed particular challenges, both for arranging visits by TEI tutors and for releasing teachers to attend mentoring courses. They debated whether greater use of secondments would assist the process but concluded that though secondment of teachers to TEIs was relatively straightforward, secondments of TEI personnel to schools was much more difficult to arrange. The Group **concluded** that it was unrealistic to look for greater use of TEI to school secondments.

Funding of the student placement scheme

9. The group **agreed** that the level of funding that SEED had made available to authorities had been critical in securing successful implementation of the student placement scheme. That funding had covered the appointment of student placement co-ordinators and had also covered authorities' contributions to the development and implementation of Practicum; and the relative freedom given to authorities on how best to deploy the funding had enabled them to tailor it to local needs and priorities. However, experience of administering the scheme had brought to light particular problems- for example, student travel and subsistence costs in rural areas were very high, and the group saw little likelihood of any material change once recruitment levels tapered off after 2007. Of further concern were funding of mentoring and funding for student support. As funding was not guaranteed beyond 2007-08, the group **agreed** that post 2007-08 funding arrangements must be pursued as a matter of urgency.

Longer term future of the 3 regional consortia

10. The group debated the longer term future of the 3 regional consortia. Several authorities and most of the TEIs were represented on more than 1 consortium and the traditional geographic barriers, previously seen as restrictive and problematic, were beginning to break down. They **concluded** that, although in the longer term a single national consortium might serve the student placement scheme better, the current 3 consortia should remain at least for the medium term.

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National evaluation working group

11. At their first meeting in 2007 the group agreed that, while the national strategy group had played a valuable role in discussing issues and recommending a way forward, progress had been frustrated by a lack of means to take forward the recommendations. Accordingly, they **agreed** to establish a new working group (NEWG) to undertake this function. The NEWG, comprising representatives of the 7 TEIs, 2 local authority representatives from each of the 3 consortia, the GTCS, HMIE and the teacher associations, will undertake any task

delegated to it by the national strategy group. The NEWG will report direct to the national strategy group seeking guidance on any issues that arise in the course of its work. Where appropriate, the NEWG will set up smaller sub groups to advance particular tasks. The NEWG will be chaired by a SE representative.

12. The establishment of the new NEWG will supersede the that of the planned sub-groups charged with looking at various aspects of the evaluation process. The NEWG's initial programme will comprise work on:-

- **harmonisation of documentation;**
- **the current assessment and reporting procedures**
- **evaluation of school placements and mentoring arrangements.**

The NEWG will aim to achieve a broadly consistent approach across all 7 TEIs and to look to making the evaluation part of the Practicum system. Philip Donnelly of the Practicum team will also attend the NEWG meetings.

National strategy group

13. The national strategy group will continue to **monitor the effectiveness of Practicum**. Expected benefits are greater transparency in the placement scheme, a reduction in placement problems, especially in the first term, and higher levels of school participation. Once the system has been thoroughly tested across Scotland, the national strategy group will consider whether any additions or amendments are required or are desirable and will then discuss these with the Practicum team.

14. The national strategy group will consider more effective ways of **identifying and sharing good practice**, to ensure that placements are a more enriching experience for students, mentors/regents, schools and TEIs. They will also consider how most effectively to achieve wider dissemination of their activities, and in particular, of good practice.

15. It is unlikely to become clear for some time whether **funding** from the Scottish Executive will continue beyond 2007-08. In the meantime, the national strategy group will consider how the **ongoing success** of the student placement scheme might be assured beyond 2007-08, taking into consideration the need for the universities and local authorities to increase their share of funding to support Practicum.

**SE Schools Directorate
Teachers Division
May 2007**