

**TUI Response to Teaching Council Proposals on a New Model of Induction and Probation for Newly Qualified Teachers (May 2013).**

TUI has long been an advocate of induction support for newly qualified teachers. It made a comprehensive response to the earlier proposals for a career entry programme, raising a number of critical issues and concerns. It, therefore, welcomes the reframed proposals for induction and probation into the profession and the opportunity to make further comment and notes a number of key points below.

* In its earlier feedback TUI was unambiguous in its view that expectations about induction and probation must take cognisance of the intention to extend post-graduate initial teacher education. It held this view on the understanding that such programmes will better prepare teachers for the day-to-day reality of schools, especially through extended placements. This continues to be the view of the TUI although the union recognises that the revised proposals address this in some respects. Nonetheless, it remains a concern that in many cases it will take a minimum of 7 years (often more) for a person to become fully qualified and probated into the teaching profession, with a commencing salary and life-time earnings that do not adequately reflect or recompense this.
* The overall title ‘Droichead’ implies reference to the entire suite of requirements for full registration. Yet, the main text, under 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and the diagram on page 3, to some degree suggest that the induction programme is separate from Droichead. This recurs in other sections. Greater clarity is advised.
* TUI welcomes the clear message that the proposals refer to probation for registration into the profession and do not include probation into employment. It also welcomes clarification that induction is one of the requirements for full registration as opposed to being synonymous with probation.
* Shared responsibility and professionally-led regulation are principles and concepts supported by TUI. These are critical to a system of strong and adequate support of NQTs into the profession. TUI particularly welcomes the clarity that the mentor will focus on support and will not engage in an evaluative role. The mentor role is necessarily based on trust and *‘professional friendship’*. If mentors are formally appointed for a period of indefinite duration and/or have an explicit, formal evaluative function these emphases may be undermined. Other critical concerns and questions arise from the revised proposals. How will mentors be selected? Who will select the mentors? What criteria will apply? Will mentors self-select to participate or be appointed? If self-selection is the approach adapted what happens if more self-present than are required? What will define the relationship between the mentor and NQT? For what period will a mentor be selected? How will mentors be resourced and supported to provide effective mentoring? Is any supervision necessary? Will there be a cap on the number of NQTs a mentor can support in a given school year? How will mentoring work when the NQT has to complete probation in a number of schools?
* Similar concerns and questions arise with respect to the idea of a Professional Support Team (PST) comprising experienced teachers? In this case, the definition of ‘an experienced teacher’ and minimum requirements to fulfil a role on the PST are important. The PST approach would mean more experienced teachers are involved in the process, which could be beneficial. However, it also means that more teachers have to be afforded appropriate opportunity and time to access training and adequate time to carry out related functions. These are critical issues at a time when capacity at school level is stretched as a consequence of the austerity measures and cutbacks and the workload of teachers and principals has already escalated significantly. The ideas of a PST and a cluster approach between schools also raises questions about the overall level of scrutiny to which a new teacher would be subjected to. While these approaches may have something to offer, how they would work and be supported across a number of schools needs careful thought.
* Under 5.2.3 it is advised that the minimum period of professional practice be clearly referred to; as opposed to reference only in the appendix. Reference to that fact the practice as a substitute teacher may fulfil the requirement needs to be clarified further. In addition, a question arises as to how one will define and assess ‘satisfactory commitment to quality teaching and learning’ and the demonstration of independent practice, above and beyond what should already have been established during initial teacher education?
* In section 5.2.4 the suggestion that the principal, while responsible for ensuring the Droichead process has been properly conducted, may not always be involved directly in confirming completion is helpful. It is, however, also somewhat ambiguous and this approach merits clearer articulation. Again, the union notes the implementation of Droichead will clearly place an additional level of work and responsibility on principal teachers, which must be recognised and acknowledged.
* TUI wishes to draw particular attention to the difficulty NQTs face in obtaining employment. Development and implementation of new requirements for induction and probation are, therefore, problematic and bring with them additional adverse consequences in respect of opportunities for overseas travel and employment. The union considers the Teaching Council has some responsibility in ensuring that NQTs be afforded adequate opportunity to complete all the requirements for full registration. To this end it should advocate for a guaranteed placement programme so that all those who wish to be probated and fully registered can obtain sufficient teaching hours on obtaining their academic qualification. Such a placement programme would need very careful planning. In particular, TUI emphasises it should not lead to any displacement of the teacher allocation and the NQT should receive the qualified rate of pay.
* TUI has also obtained some feedback from NQTs on the induction workshops provided under the auspices of the NIPT. In particular, they have noted that the workshops provided are, in too many instances, a repetition of what was covered in college and fail to provide adequate opportunity for reflection on practice. In this regard it appears they are not as beneficial as they could be. The decision to reduce the number of workshops to be completed and to provide some element of choice is welcome but more thought about the structure, content, delivery mode and relationship with day-to-day practice and experience is required. In addition, the union notes that a number of NQTs incur considerable travel costs in participating in the workshops. Furthermore, they are not allowed set even a percentage of the time commitment against the 33 Croke Park Hours requirement. Some consideration of these issues is advised.

**Piloting**

* TUI endorses the idea of a 2-year pilot. It considers that the issues set out above (and others) could be carefully addressed and clarified during a pilot.
* The union accepts that it is useful to draw schools from across the primary and post-primary sectors in the counties with the highest concentration of NQTs. It also agrees that the pilot should include schools that represent different contexts. However, TUI questions the absence of further education contexts and expressly requests that they be included. Many new teachers may secure hours in further education settings. Are they not to be facilitated in completing induction

and probation? Such an approach is untenable professionally and is unacceptable to the TUI.

* TUI has no difficulty with pilot schools being provided with additional resources and access to the NIPT during the pilot. However, this should not result in other schools that have NQTs on staff having reduced access to resources and support. That would be most unfair. An adequate level of additional resources should be provided to support the pilot work.
* A research strand to the pilot is important and the areas for consideration (as set out under section 6, page 7) are all relevant. However, there is one significant omission. There should be clearer commitment to examining carefully and objectively the level of resources that will be necessary to support full implementation of an appropriate system of induction and professional probation for all NQTs in schools and other centres of education. A pilot that fails to do this will not serve its purpose well. In this regard, TUI is disappointed that while bursaries will be committed to the pilot schools, these will cease once the pilot is completed. Such an approach suggests a lack of recognition that additional resources will be necessary to support long-term implementation, especially in context of significant resource reductions at school level and little room to manoeuvre. TUI accepts it is not the function of the Teaching Council to resource schools. However, there should be stronger reference to the fact that the Department of Education and Skills will need to demonstrate commitment to implementation by making provision for an adequate level of additional resources to schools.

TUI will make further observations and contributions through participation on the Steering Group for induction and probation.

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