

8.1 Recommendations to the higher education institutions, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the Ministry of Education and Science

The expert group suggest that the higher education institutions and the Ministry consider the following suggestions.

1. The provision of two types of programmes (non-university and university) at undergraduate level should be discontinued and all teachers should receive Bachelors degrees. This would require adjustments in all non Master's study programmes to ensure the following:-

- a) All study programmes should include the intention to encourage students as autonomous learners particularly in regard to developing in students the skills of: -
- i) independent study including time management
 - ii) finding, choosing and applying information
 - iii) reflective practice
 - iv) critical thinking
 - v) using a variety of research methods reflecting a variety of theories on how to conduct educational research.

Curriculum theory also needs to be discussed and various models examined so as to enable students to see alternative methods of curriculum design and practice. This would enable students to move forward in their thinking and encourage innovation in practice.

b) All undergraduate study programmes at both college and university need to include a good element of teaching practice in every year of the programmes. This should begin with observation and group work in year one and develop in length and in the challenges presented to the student in each practice throughout the programme. The number of credits related to practical teaching experience should be increased in universities and other subjects decreased in credit allowance to provide a better balance between theory and practice. Consideration should be given to providing better uniformity between college and university regulations as the team do not see the need for the division.

c) Programmes need to show a good relation between theory and practice and a critical examination of how theories discussed in the programmes can be applied in the classroom. In universities this was given insufficient consideration and in colleges the theoretical content of programmes did not allow for critical analysis of their relation to and application in practice.

2. At present programmes appear to be designed as separate courses, often linked, particularly at Masters level, to the interests of the staff as opposed to the needs of the students. There is an apparent lack of holistic planning in the programmes with no clear rationale presented, resulting in them appearing to be a collection of courses, lacking in coherence and suffering from an apparent irrationality in the allocation of credits.

Study programmes should be designed with clear aims of what kind of graduate or post graduate they intend to produce. These aims should then be mapped against the learning outcomes of the individual courses to ensure that what is included contributes to the overall aims and outcomes of the programme. It would also be advisable to link the assessment tasks to these aims and learning outcomes to ensure that set assignments contribute to the growth of the teacher. It is essential that the study programmes show progression from year one to year four of the programme (this

comment also applies to Masters programmes), This should be evident in the learning outcomes expected from the courses and the set assessments which should increase in demand and rigour.

3. In all study programmes the rigour and challenge provided for the students needs to be considered. There is at present over teaching and a lack of time for students to develop skills of independent lifelong learners. The emphasis needs to change from teaching to learning so as to remove the transmission model so evident in the programmes reviewed. This causes stagnation and the support of the status quo, rather than providing opportunities for challenge and innovation. In Masters programmes in particular, their needs to be a careful examination of the role of the thesis and what is expected as regards the literature search, the triangulation of research methods applied and the stress on the critical discussion of the field work findings in relation to the literature. These dissertations need to be longer and more demanding of student thinking, as at present they do even compare to many studies undertaken at undergraduate level (as opposed to Masters level) in other European countries.

This lack of rigour in programme assessment practices appears to result in very few students, in many of the institutions visited, failing the programmes. The review group believes that if assessment and standards are of high quality there is a need on the part of tutors to acknowledge the fact that all students, no matter how well motivated or supported will not succeed, particularly in regard to teaching practices. This lack of failure gives the impression that expectations of performance are too low and that students are merely following previous practice rather than being required to be innovative. The use of the transmission model of education as opposed to the process model was evident and needs to be changed. Good use of external examiners from outside institutions, possibly at present outside the country would help in this regard.

4. The ICT element of study programmes needs to change from merely examining technology from the point of view of its use by the teacher, to a consideration of how this technology can be used with children to improve and introduce innovation into learning.

5. Access to learning materials from outside the country needs to be vastly increased to enable students and staff to see what ideas are being considered in the rest of the world as regards pedagogy, developmental theories, classroom practice and research method theory. This will require students and staff to be better enabled to use the English language in order to access such information even via suitable web sites. This is essential if pedagogy and practice are to move forward. Allied to this is a concern that even within the country students stay in the area where they have been trained and staff in schools and the colleges and universities have also been trained in the same establishments. This causes stagnation of ideas and in some cases observed, a belief that what is being done is of high quality, even where this is not the case. The incestuous nature of this relationship leads to a lack of cross-fertilisation of new ideas and can result in complacency. This insularity in outlook is hampering progress and must be addressed.

6. Staff professional development is weak, many trained a considerable number of years ago and this leads to stagnation of ideas and practice. Consideration needs to be given to ongoing programmes of staff development, not merely attendance at conferences but training programmes in new methods of teaching and theories of education from around the world. To this end it would be useful to consider the introduction of a programme of accreditation for staff teaching in universities and colleges to introduce them to their role, that of working with adults and to stimulate ideas such as the need to address the variety of learning styles found in learners, assessment practices and the theory and application of reflective practice.

- 7.** Consideration needs to be given to providing training for school mentors in their roles. Not merely the issuing of instructions by the colleges or universities on tasks required to be completed by students. The introduction of a qualification for mentors could be considered but all should attend training where ideas about the role for the mentor are critically analysed and examined. Without this training it is too easy for mentors to merely expect students in the classroom to copy their ideas and methods of teaching, preventing the introduction of innovation in teaching methods.
- 8.** Resource provision in colleges and universities is universally poor. Urgent consideration needs to be given to ensuring the availability of textbooks and journals from other countries and to the provision of more ICT equipment for students' use.
- 9.** The team suggest that consideration needs to be given to bringing credit allocation in the study programmes into line with the European Credit Transfer System, to allow easier cross accreditation. This would mean a radical change in programme design and the removal of so much division in study programmes into small elements. However, this in the opinion of the team would be a positive step.
- 10.** Entry requirements need to be more rigorous in order to prevent students who lack the requisite levels of ability being accepted onto programmes. In some cases entry appeared to be more related to the ability to pay or the inability to find work, than to aptitude or specific interest. In some cases entry requirements were narrowed by asking for abilities (such as musical ones) that could be acquired on the study programme. There needs to be also a consideration of how adjustments could be made to enable more equality of opportunity for prospective teachers who have disabilities to be accepted onto programmes. This is allied to programme content being developed to include equal opportunity issues in classrooms, such as race, gender, special educational needs and Lithuanian as an additional language and to give students skills in working with pupils with special needs who are in main stream provision.
- 11.** Students accepted onto Masters degrees in the area of pedagogy should be expected to have considerable experience in the field of education. The expert team consider that one year's experience is insufficient.
- 12.** The expert group applauds the decision to introduce foreign language teaching into primary schools and the preparation for teachers with this area of specialisation.
- 13.** The provision in some institutions of many programmes which include similar material at present causes duplication and a possible waste of resources. We suggest that it would be better practice to introduce, in each institution, a programme for primary which allows for flexibility and specialisation within it. Some areas of study at present included in programmes, for example economics, seem to be irrelevant in achieving the intended aims and outcomes. There are also concerns that in some cases overlap and repetition is occurring within programmes and between non-university, Bachelor and Masters programmes. A more careful, systematic and holistic approach to planning the programmes carefully related to the intended learning outcomes and with the intention of ensuring progression would eliminate this problem.
- 14.** It would be helpful to allow review groups longer times at universities and colleges so more consideration could be given to student work and possibly visits to see students on teaching practice.