



Educate  
Together

## **Submission to Teaching Council**

8th April 2011

Educate Together welcomes the publication of the Teaching Council's Draft Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education, and the opportunity to make a submission to these process.

Educate Together welcomes the focus on Innovation, Integration and Improvement in the document. We also welcome the reference to partnership with schools. Broadly speaking Educate Together supports the Teaching Council's Policy on Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as outlined in the document, including the proposal that the duration of ITE courses be extended, as long as this development is properly resourced.

However, we wish to highlight the following in the context of Initial Teacher Education in particular.

### Preparation to teach in Educate Together schools in Initial Teacher Education

In the current academic year, there are approximately 3,900 students in primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in the five major Colleges. As part of their BEd or post-graduate course, these students attend regular modules in Religious Education as well as receiving specific training in either the *Alive-O* or *Follow Me* programmes. They are fully prepared to teach in denominational schools.

Only 56, or just over 1%, of the students in ITE in these Colleges this year have been involved in courses addressing Ethical Education and the *Learn Together* curriculum, as taught in Educate Together schools. Most of these students have attended short electives provided by Educate Together in collaboration with four of the five Colleges and in most cases this will be the only contact they have with this ethos and curriculum during their pre-service education.

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Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) graduating from the Colleges are, in the vast majority of cases, ill-prepared to work in an Educate Together school. Many students have expressed concern and regret at this lack of preparation (see a sample of comments in the Appendix) and it is keenly felt by Educate Together schools and Principals. It places individual schools under significant pressure in relation to time, resources and mentoring – a pressure not experienced by the denominational sector where NQTs are well-versed in the relevant programmes.

Educate Together welcomes the new Ethics and Education course, now available in St Patrick's College of Education as an alternative to Religious Education. However, we continue to question the existing situation, whereby citizens of a state, wishing to pursue a teacher education course in a College of Education, must, with the exception of the small number of students that have access to this new course, either genuinely espouse a specific religious belief or pretend to do the same.

Educate Together is aware that the Teaching Council has stated that Religious Education is outside its remit. However, the issue here is preparedness to teach in all school types, an issue with which the Teaching Council should certainly be concerned. In any case references have been made to Religious Education in Teaching Council reports and documents.

Educate Together therefore feels that as part of its function to oversee teacher education, the Teaching Council should monitor the extent to which courses which lead to qualification as a primary school teacher genuinely prepare students to teach in all school types. In this regard the Programme, Placement and Assessment sections of the Policy should reflect the need to ensure that all student teachers learn about, experience and reflect upon the different school types and ethos that exist, and that students have access to the necessary pedagogical preparation to teach all available curricula.

## APPENDIX

### **This is a selection of comments made by participants about Initial Teacher Education in an Educate Together online summer course in 2010.**

It should be noted that these comments were unsolicited, arising mostly in a forum which asked 'How are Educate Together schools viewed?'. Comments have not been altered, except to remove names and identifying features.

**Sunday, 4 July 2010, 07:43 PM**

I agree with (name) that students in training colleges need to be better prepared to teach in ET schools and to be taught about the principles and programmes involved. I have just recently completed my B.Ed and most of what I know about ET schools is from my own research. We were given the option of attending an ET talk which was run at the same time as a denominational talk and around 15 out of close to 500 pupils chose the ET talk. I feel ET is not presented in a positive or indeed a real light in college. It is viewed as airy fairy and a place for athiests or hippies by many trianing teachers in my experience. It is a pity as with a little more knowledge on the subject perceptions would change i believe

**Monday, 5 July 2010, 11:26 AM**

This is very true. I completed the post grad in St Pat's in 2009 and throughout the whole 18 month course we barely heard anything about ET schools. There were even separate lectures set up at the same time to discuss ET schools and schools with a catholic ethos almost making students choose before they even grad

**Monday, 5 July 2010, 04:44 PM**

I trained in England and I have to say they were completely open in celebrating different religions. I would have been weary starting out in an ET school if it had not been for Uni in England introducing and celebrating diversity. People still have an negative view of ET schools. I find this completely ignorant as I feel they are making judgements without having any knowledge of what ET involves.

**Monday, 5 July 2010, 04:47 PM**

I agree with (name). Having spent the last three years in college i came out having not received a single lecture on what educate together is about. Yet we spent 3 years being prepared to teach religion in demoninational schools. when i brought up this disparity with my religion lecturer he commpletly brushed off my concerns. It is the responsibility of the college's to prepare their students to teach in all schools in the country. This will help to eliminate myths about educate together and there will not be newly qualified teachers coming out afraid to teach in an educate together setting because of their lack of knowledge about.

**Monday, 5 July 2010, 07:17 PM**

There needs to be more of an awareness of E.T schools; the ethos and values of these schools..starting in Teacher Training Colleges. Teacher Training colleges don't provide teachers with enough information or experience of E.T schools. They need to provide student teachers with enough information about these schools; the ethos, principles and programmes involved. Public awareness of E.T schools is also very important, people need to fully understand what E.T schools stand for. This knowledge will help get rid of any myths about E.T schools.

**Monday, 5 July 2010, 07:21 PM**

Yes, I was an undergraduate in Pats and there was no mention of E.T. teaching until teaching practice came round and several people were thrown into the unknown! Anything any of us learned about the Educate Together ethos and running, we discovered ourselves- outside of college.

**Tuesday, 13 July 2010, 12:45 PM**

I completely agree (name), I qualified as a primary teacher over in the UK and in my course I got to teach about all different religions. Religion for primary schools in the UK covers finding out about all different types of cultures and traditions and religions. The children find it very interesting and it makes for an very inclusive classroom environment.

I think that colleges in Ireland should introduce the Learn Together Curriculum as part of becoming a teacher, instead of teachers entering the teaching profession unaware of this. I think that this would inturn create a deeper understanding to what an Educate Together School is all about.

**Wednesday, 14 July 2010, 07:56 PM**

(Name) I think you made a very good point there. When I was in college we were forced to do Catholic Religion, there were no other choices. The only training we got linked to Educate Together Schools was through the History of Education module. In order for teachers to have a good understanding of what an ET school is there needs to be more training at undergraduate level.

**Thursday, 15 July 2010, 03:06 PM**

In my opinion there is a real misconception of ET schools. Over the past five years I have taught in an ET school and to be truthful I had very little knowledge of ET schools prior to this. In college we had one lecturer hosted by ET themselves and although informative I feel that the teacher training college should have take more responsibility to inform its students / future educators regarding ET schools, both formally and informally.

As a mainstream teacher in an Educate Together school the most shocking misconceptions that I have encountered have come from other teachers. ...

These misconceptions can be very frustrating at times but the rewards for teaching in an ET school outnumber them all! I think it is important for fellow teachers to recieve accurate information from teaching colleges and that the wider community also become educated on ET schools as there are alot of old-fashioned ideas out there!

**Friday, 16 July 2010, 11:37 AM**

It just shows the dangers of relying on passers-by for information that could shape an entire career. If such is the quality of information and the only source of comparison a NQT has access to, then he/she is not likely to seek out employment in ET schools as a first choice but will either fall unhappily into them in order to be employed or dismiss them as unworthy.

Isn't it time for the teacher training colleges to become multi-denominational - with online courses for all major religions and belief systems? Just add another year on to the training.....easy.

**Saturday, 17 July 2010, 09:37 PM**

There definitely needs to be more information available to parents, teachers and the wider community. I am both a teacher and a parent at an ET school. I am constantly battling with pre-concieved ideas and misunderstandings about the school. We are a relatively new school and we are surrounded by established schools which have been attended by generations of families. I would like to see more local kids attend the school so the word would spread about how we are just like the other schools in lots of ways ie. we teach the curriculum! The teacher training colleges could help by educating teachers about the choices of schools! Really reassuring (as a teacher and parent) to hear that our school is not the only one which has suffered lots of criticism based on rumours!

**Friday, 16 July 2010, 12:34 PM**

...All of these responses show me that there is a lack of understanding for Educate Together Schools. I hope that as the number of Educate Together Schools grows the general public will become more aware of

what an Educate Together School is.

I think there is a real need for the teacher training colleges to incorporate lectures on the Educate Together movement and the Learn Together programme into their education programmes. When I was in college we had one presentation on Educate Together. This in no way prepared me to work in an Educate Together school or to deliver the Learn Together programme.

The most effective way to combat the misconceptions of what an Educate Together School is, is to educate and inform people about the Educate Together ethos and life in Educate Together Schools.

#### **Monday, 19 July 2010, 04:31 PM**

I think any of the views I've encountered have been referred to by other contributors. I would agree very much with the contributor who states that there is a continuum of e.t. schools. Each school is influenced by its own set of geographical/demographic and socio-economic features as well as subscribing to a common ethos--so there is no one specific template. As many of the contributors have stated I think the key to raising awareness of e.t. sector is information and integration. The information/education element is especially crucial at the level of pre-service teacher training and would be relevant to every teacher whether they plan to work in an educate together school or not--each teacher should still have a broad understanding of the various school models within the primary sector:from denominational to multi-d to community primary schools. Educating the educators should help dispel any myths that still abound. Also integration and increasing awareness among a local community is so important-thought the ideas of leaflet drops,Open Day and taking part in the St. Patrick's day parade were fantastic. I think any school should aim to be a facet of their local community rather than something apart.

#### **Monday, 16 August 2010, 01:13 PM**

To a certain extent, there is still a lack of education on the general public's behalf as to what an Educate Together school actually is. From personal experience, I know teachers who are not even sure what an Educate Together school is. Even in training college, we never received enough information on the Educate Together ethos, charter, policies etc.

#### **Tuesday, 10 August 2010, 01:31 PM**

I currently work in an Educate Together school but am originally from Portlaoise. I have many childhood friends who teach in Portlaoise town and the surrounding areas. I found it very interesting to hear feedback on teachers opinions/perspectives and level of understanding of Educate Together ethos when the schools in Portlaoise heard in February that a new Educate Together was to be opened in September 2010. Many teachers were unaware of the ethos and made statements such as they don't teach Irish, they have a completely different curriculum, they don't follow the curriculum guidelines "we" use, it is not a state funded school, parents are constantly in the classroom, it's for "foreign children" etc. My friends made comments correcting them on these great errors in opinions, and even gave some of the teachers my phone number so they could clarify details with me. I believe that many towns throughout Ireland, where Educate Together is not known or established in the area, have teachers who are not aware of our ethos and/or have a lack understanding of it. Surprisingly (for me at least) was that lack of understanding was not only with more senior teachers but with NQTs also.

#### **Thursday, 5 August 2010, 09:54 PM**

I wasn't aware of Educate Together schools until I moved back to Ireland from England a few years ago. There are quite a few Educate Together schools in this area, one of which has been established for quite a few years now and has an excellent reputation. On doing my own research into local schools with a view to choosing a school for my son to attend, the Educate Together ethos really appealed to me and I was unaware of any myths/prejudices that people had about Educate Together schools until I started reading this forum!

As an NQT, I find it disappointing that there was no option for us to learn about the Learn Together Curriculum as part of our teacher training, and don't recall any discussion about Educate Together schools as part of the course. This definitely needs to change.