



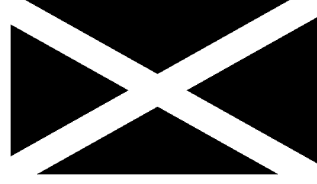
# Successful Teaching Placement in Scotland

Primary and Early Years

JANE MEDWELL AND  
FRANCES SIMPSON



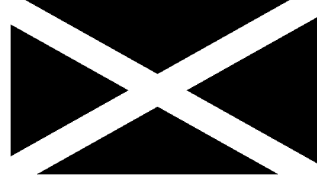
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**Jane Medwell and Frances Simpson**

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# Contents

	Introduction	1
1	Preparing for professional placement	7
2	Starting in school	19
3	Learning to observe, plan and evaluate on teaching placement	31
4	Learning to teach on placement	56
5	Learning to assess, monitor and report on children's progress	71
6	Individualised training: target-setting, observation and assessment on placement	83
7	The challenges of placement	96
8	Moving on	111
9	Your probation year	116
	Glossary	147
	Index	154

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# Introduction

This book is intended for those who want to teach in Primary and Early Years (3–11).

To become a qualified teacher you need to reach the benchmark Standard for Full Registration. This is achieved in stages, the first of which is to study at one of six Scottish Universities to complete and pass a course of Initial Teacher Education. This allows you to register with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) at a provisional level. Full registration can only be achieved upon successful completion of a probationary period (normally one year).

Fully registered teachers are expected 'to be committed to life-long learning and to identify their own professional development needs through a process of self-evaluation and review which allows them to maintain and enhance the Standard for Full Registration.' (Scottish Executive: 2006) As a teacher you are therefore expected to keep reflecting on your work and to keep developing your knowledge and skills throughout your career.

## Routes to achieving the Standard for Initial Teacher Education

There are a number of options for study towards the Standard for Initial Teacher Education. All are run by one of six Universities in Scotland – Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley or Strathclyde. Stirling University currently only offers training for secondary teachers. All these Universities work together with schools and local authorities to form partnerships that allow for training both within the University and within the school setting.

The route undertaken by the majority of students every year is the Post Graduate Diploma in Education or PGDE. This award is open to those who have successfully completed a degree course of any sort and who have reached required standards of language and maths (see entry requirements for each University). This is usually a one year course and at least half of it (minimum of 18 weeks) will be spent on school or nursery placements where you will develop your teaching skills.

Some universities are now running part-time courses leading to a PGDE. This route takes 21 months and is currently intended for those employed by partner local authorities. Some universities also run courses based well away from the university campus, in particular in the Highlands and Islands and in Dumfries and Galloway. Such arrangements involve students meeting in local colleges for university lectures and workshops (either by visiting lecturers from the main campus or by video-link) and having local mentors who oversee their training. Training is now also available in the Gaelic medium at some universities and centres.

If you have not already obtained a degree, you may undertake an undergraduate degree course to complete your initial teacher education. This will be a four year course leading to a BEd degree with teaching.



The demands of an undergraduate degree are different to those of a PGDE because you also have study challenges to address – you are learning to become a successful learner to degree standard as well as a teacher. You will undertake at least 30 weeks of school or nursery placement during the four years.

These are the routes leading to provisional registration for teaching in Scotland. Following successful completion of ITE, you will then move on to training as a probationary teacher which takes place entirely in school.

This usually consists of a one year placement in a designated school under the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) during which you will teach part-time in class and spend the rest of the time on professional development assisted by a mentor and professional development sessions organised by your local authority.

The alternative route is for those not eligible for the TIS, or who decide to opt out of the scheme perhaps from a need to work part-time. This route involves either:

- working as a supply teacher and accumulating the required number of days from short term contracts or part-time contracts;
- working in the independent sector; or
- completing the probationary period outside Scotland.

This route can take up to four terms (270 days) to complete.

This book will be of use to you whichever route you take towards full registration. Chapters 1 to 8 deal with school placements and Chapter 9 covers the probationary period either on the TIS scheme or on supply.

### CASE STUDIES

Jane completed her first degree in French and German, travelled abroad for a year, worked for a charity running a play scheme and then began her Primary (5–11) PGDE. She did a placement in P1 of a large city school and a longer placement in P5 of a suburban school. She has just completed her probation year and hopes to develop foreign language teaching in her primary school. Jane found her PGDE 'a really, really, tough year. But a fantastic experience with an incredible learning curve. I wouldn't have wanted any longer because after my long placement I was desperate to have a class of my own. To move the furniture and so on...'

Judy did a degree in biological science and was an environmental health officer for fifteen years. When her children went to secondary school she did a PGDE to re-train as a primary teacher. 'It was very demanding but I was ready for the challenge and the intensity (one year full-time) suited me. I have never regretted it. I found my first placement (in P2) awful but then went into P7 and P5 and loved both. I learnt that each class is very different...'. Judy is an IT co-ordinator in a large city school.

Petra did a four-year BEd course. She did short placements in her first and second years in P3 and P7 in two different schools. In her third and fourth years, Petra had a P2 and a P7 placement in the same school. 'I started really slowly. I just had no idea what school was like from the teacher's side. But by my third year I was a totally different person. My knowledge of my subjects has changed out of all recognition and I've

matured. I have learned so much and grown as a person on my placements and I feel I have grown into the role of the teacher. My mentors and class teachers were tireless in pushing me but also gave me the confidence I needed.' Petra is now Special Needs co-ordinator in a suburban primary school.

## The Standard for Provisional Teacher Registration and professional placements

Whatever route you take through ITE, you will be aiming to demonstrate that you have met the professional standards for initial teacher education known as the Benchmark Standards for ITE. Achieving these standards allows you to apply for provisional registration with the GTCS. The standards will be clearly set out in your course documentation and are also available on the GTCS website. They have three interrelated sections.

1. Professional knowledge and understanding.
2. Professional skills and abilities.
3. Professional values and personal commitment.

You need to know these Standards really well as you will be using them to monitor your progress, set targets and shape your placements. You will have a chance to demonstrate most of the Standards during your professional placements.

Your course will be designed to enable you to demonstrate you have met these standards but the responsibility for collecting the evidence that you have met them is yours. You will be deeply involved in setting your targets, reviewing evidence and monitoring your progress. Your course handbook or guide will suggest formats and processes for doing this and each course is different. This book refers you to your course guidance whenever necessary.

## The role of professional placements in ITE

The way each ITE university plans courses will be similar but they involve many similar experiences. As part of your ITE you will experience taught sessions in a university and may have visiting speakers coming to the university to teach you. You will be asked to audit and improve certain aspects of your subject knowledge through self-study. However, all courses have professional placements in schools (including Nurseries) as a central part of their training as a government requirement.

In schools you will be able to observe the way the subject knowledge you are acquiring is used and you will be able to see how teaching techniques are used. You will also learn about the culture and values of schools. These experiences are vital to all trainees. In school you will also be able to practise your planning, teaching and assessing, and the use of the subject knowledge you are developing. In school you will set targets for yourself and the children and assess and monitor your progress with feedback from at least one member of staff. Your mentor will be able to teach, direct and support you in improving your subject knowledge, planning, teaching and assessing – in short, to train you.

This raises a difficulty with terminology. Each university may use its own terminology and your course may use terms such as 'supervised teaching practice', 'school experience', 'serial days', 'school visits', 'professional placement'. We use the term professional placement to identify a period when you are assigned chiefly to a particular class.

During a professional placement you will undertake a number of forms of training:

- observation of particular children, class or group activities, aspects of management or teachers;
- planning;
- teaching and assessing pupils;
- reviewing your progress with feedback from staff;
- undertaking directed tasks;
- learning particular policies and curricula;
- taking part in meetings and in-service sessions.

Many, but not all, of these experiences will be based in one class that you will get to know and teach for a substantial period of time. However, you will have some training needs that may require you to observe or teach in other classes or age phases and you will certainly want to develop your knowledge of progression and continuity through the age ranges. Professional placement is an important part of your training and offers training in all aspects of the Standards. It is important that you do not fall into the trap of thinking that professional placement is only a time to practise what you have learned elsewhere. There are key school staff who will participate in your training in school.

You may also have a *mentor*, a person assigned to oversee your training in school and participate in the assessment of your placement. The mentor will have been trained for his/her role. Your mentor may, or may not, be the same person as your *class teacher* who will work with you in your class and may participate in observing, advising and assessing you, as well as offering ongoing support. You will also have a *course tutor* (known as 'link tutor', 'adviser', or 'visiting tutor' in different courses) from your ITE university. This is the person who may visit you in school.

Each person's ITE is unique and each trainee is different because you all have different experiences and different expertise. All training routes try to take this into account. You may have some experience of teaching in, perhaps, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or a private school but find the demands of planning unfamiliar curricula challenging. Or you may be very familiar with the curriculum having been, say, a classroom assistant but find the management demands and performance aspect of teaching on placement a challenge. Each trainee will find some standards easier to address than others. This is why you will have some sort of *Individual Training Plan* to guide you through your course. This may be called a 'Professional Development Record', a 'training record' or something else. But it will be the document you use to set and monitor your targets. It will contain references to useful aspects of your prior experience as well as what you achieve during your training. Learning to use this sort of plan is important to succeeding in your ITE. It is also an important professional skill because you will have to do this sort of target setting and evidence collection throughout your probationary year and the rest of your career.

## Short placements

One special type of professional placement you may encounter will be the short visit to another educational setting. You may visit a secondary school to look at the secondary curriculum in action, or to focus on transition to secondary school. You might visit a Nursery to look at the transition issues involved. You might visit a school with a particularly good teacher of one subject, or good practice in teaching children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or Special Educational Needs (SEN). If you visit these sessions for a very short period you will not be expected to teach in them but you will usually be given tasks to focus your attention on particular aspects of practice.

## The responsibilities of professional placement

All those involved in professional placement (mentors, trainees, link tutors) take on responsibilities that are discussed in detail later in this book. One type of responsibility raises particular ethical issues – that is, your responsibility to the children in your class. When you are working in a class you are participating in the education of all the children in that class and they will not get that time, or even that lesson, again. You have a responsibility as a teacher from the moment you begin your ITE. This includes the responsibility to ensure the children are learning as they should. Your class have the right to expect that you know how to behave in school, are well prepared and are able to seek the help and support you need. This book will help you to be well prepared and knowledgeable.

## Full registration – your driving licence

The achievement of the Standards for Full Registration (SFR) may seem like a distant and demanding goal but remember that it is also only a beginning. Full registration is rather like a teacher's driving licence. When you achieve the standard for full registration you have achieved your driving licence and are safe to be let loose on a class relatively unsupervised. Like a novice driver, you are not an expert and will continue learning.

Achieving the Standard for Initial Teacher Education is a big step in your career but only the first step on a long road. It will be followed by a period of probation, further school based training which will be assessed by staff in the school.

In your ITE, try not to set yourself unreasonable demands. During professional placement you will find that you have to juggle demands, do extra research, fill gaps and generally cope with change. This is a normal part of school life and your training. Do not try to demand perfection of yourself and remember that you learn from the less successful experiences as well as the brilliant successes. Do not let off days (and you will have them) get you down.

### **PRACTICAL TASK** PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK

Before you go further in this book, you should review a number of important documents.

- Your course handbook of guidance for your training. Check you know when the professional placements take place in your course and what is expected of you on each placement. Note anything that is unclear to discuss with your tutor or mentor at your next meeting.

- Look at your ITE plan. (This may be called a training record, record of professional development, monitoring file, etc.) As soon as you have started your ITE, this plan should contain background information about yourself, your targets and reports. Try to focus on the personal strengths you will be taking into your first placement.
- Look at the standards for the award of ITE ([www.gtcs.org.uk](http://www.gtcs.org.uk)) and ensure you are familiar with them. Identify any that you are unclear about and look them up in the guidance (available from the same site) that gives further information about each standard.

### A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- > **This book aims to help you to succeed at professional teaching placement in Early Years and Primary.**
- > **If you are undertaking ITE you will be doing professional placements.**
- > **Your placement will involve an ITE provider, mentor, class teacher, and possibly a course tutor.**
- > **Your placements will be guided by your own training plan (or record of development).**
- > **As soon as you start your training you assume professional responsibilities and the first of these is to understand your training plan and the professional standards for Initial Teacher Education.**

## Resources

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/Home/home.asp>  
The General Teaching Council for Scotland is the professional regulatory body for teachers in Scotland. They:

- maintain and enhance professional standards of Scotland's teachers;
- support new teachers through the Standard for Full Registration;
- work with partner organisations across the world.

Go to 'becoming a teacher' to find links to the university websites.

Teach in Scotland, <http://www.teachinginscotland.com/tis/171.html>, provides an information point and links for those considering this as a career. It provides information and links for non-graduates wishing to embark on teacher training, graduates looking for a career change and teachers from elsewhere who wish to transfer to Scotland.

# 1

## Preparing for professional placement

This chapter aims to make you aware of how your placements are organised, what is expected of you and what you can expect of those involved in your placement. The chapter is focused on helping you prepare for a setting that is new to you.

By the end of this chapter you should:

- **understand the disclosure requirements before you can go into school;**
- **know how and why teaching placements are selected.**

### **Before you can work with children**

Before sending any student out on a school placement or into any other situation where they will be in contact with children, the student must successfully undergo a full disclosure check. These checks are carried out by the Scottish Criminal Record Office Disclosure Service. To undertake the check, you will need to complete a form on which you must disclose any previous criminal convictions, cautions or bind-overs, irrespective of when they occurred. The second part of the form requires your signature to agree to a criminal record check. The purpose of this is to safeguard the children with whom you will be working. You do not have to declare any motoring offences for which you received a fine and up to three penalty points but all other offences must be declared. All criminal convictions are considered and none are considered spent – the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 does not apply in this instance.

The ITE provider will tell you what you need to do and will obtain your agreement before any checks are made. The check is usually completed before students begin their courses but there can be delays and when the student is to be sent on a placement or school day visit soon after beginning the course, there can be problems. If the disclosure is not successfully completed before you are due to go out into school, you will not be able to go.

Make sure you complete any forms you are given promptly.

## Selecting professional placements

All universities running ITE will ensure you have placements in more than one school. This ensures you are prepared to teach in schools generally, rather than in just one particular school. It also offers you a much wider range of staff, children and resources to learn from. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions on this subject.

### Frequently asked questions

#### **1. 'How will my placements be selected?'**

If you are pursuing a PGDE or BEd programme, your ITE provider will assign places that it has been allocated by the local authority placement scheme, in the training partnership school on the basis of the information it has been given by you and by the school. So, if you are asked to fill in a form with personal details and questions about travel and domestic arrangements, make sure you are specific. ITE providers will accommodate you as conveniently as possible, taking into account the following factors:

- your training needs (the age phase or school type you need, any specific targets you have to address during this placement);
- the range of professional placement offers from schools in the partnership;
- the number of trainees who need placement;
- the geography and your travel arrangements;
- the training history of the school (you will not be placed in a school with a poor record of training or a school that has just gone into special measures);
- your commitments (if you are part-time, not all placements will be suitable).

Professional placement carries the same professional demands as other jobs. You may have to make domestic arrangements to ensure you can meet those commitments. It is not reasonable to expect placements to be arranged around pet care.

## **2. 'There is a really convenient school at the end of my road. Why can't I just go there?'**

Your placement school has been chosen first of all, to meet your training needs, not just for geographical reasons. Most places are allocated on the principle that since not everyone has a convenient school with training places at the end of their road, it is fairer if everyone has to travel some distance. An effort is usually made to provide places within reasonable reach of your accommodation. There may be other reasons why it is not appropriate for you to train at that school.

## **3. 'Why doesn't the school at the end of my road have training places?'**

The University is allocated the training places it requires by the local authority. The University cannot select the schools in which it will be given places. Schools sort out problems they may have with taking students with the local authority not with the University

## **4. 'Can I choose my own school?'**

No, you will be allocated a place by your University based on the places they have available. There are several reasons for this. The organisation of placement by request would be impossible with large numbers of students from several Universities all requiring placements at the same time. You are training to teach in all types of schools in your age phase, not just those you like. Your school must be chosen with a range of factors in mind and your training needs are the most important.

Do not approach schools yourself unless you are asked to do so – you may cause real professional offence.

## **5. 'I am doing a PGDE and have been assigned a placement at some distance. My friend is doing a placement much nearer my home. Can we swap?'**

Check with the person who arranges placements. It may be possible to swap. But it may not, for good reasons. Either you or your friend may have training needs that dictate a need to place you in those schools. It may be that those schools can offer different age phases, or examples of particularly good practice. It may be that the travel arrangements of several trainees can be accommodated using this placement pattern. If the schools already know who to expect, changing places will cause inconvenience.

## 6. 'I will be doing a final placement in a school that has much more challenging behaviour than ours. Can I refuse this offer?'

You are training to be a teacher who can teach in all Primary (or Early Years) schools. If this school is satisfactory in HMIE terms and is part of the training partnership then it is probably a good training setting and you must take advantage of the training it offers. Remember, too, that a school in a challenging area may actually be very successful indeed and may offer you some excellent models of good practice. In this case you will have the chance to see successful behaviour policies in action and work with teachers who are used to this challenging setting – learn from the support they can give you.

### **PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK**

When you know which school you will be going to for your professional placement there are some things you should do before you visit the school.

## Use the Internet to find out as much about the school as you can

- Search the HMIE site for the school's most recent HMIE report.
- How old is the HMIE report? Does this mean some things will have changed, or that another HMIE inspection is due?
- What weaknesses did HMIE identify? These may well be areas the school will be working on and may particularly benefit you.
- Find out whether the school has a website and see what it tells you about the school. You might also check [www.ukschoolguide.com](http://www.ukschoolguide.com) – this website is a directory of all schools based in the UK.
- How large is the school? Does it have a nursery? If you are aiming to look at transition between key stages this may offer you particular opportunities.
- What are the school's strengths? Some of these may be of particular interest to you.
- Does the school undertake particular events like residential trips that might affect you?

## Check the location and travel arrangements for the school

If you are travelling to school by public transport, make the journey at the appropriate time of day before your placement. You can then make sure you allow enough time on the day itself. If you will be driving to school the same applies – check how long the journey actually takes; maps can be deceptive. When you know what your journey will be like you can make any domestic arrangements you need.

## Explore the area around the school

When you get to the school take the time to explore the streets around it, ensuring that you choose a safe time to do so. Take a good look round so you can form some impressions about the lives of the children you will be teaching. You will also be able to identify what resources children will have experienced (such as shops, cafés, etc.) and what local features might be a part of your teaching (park, mosque, church, village hall, etc.).



## **Join a union**

Join at least one of the main teaching unions. All offer free membership to trainees and this includes valuable insurance and advice about all sorts of professional matters. Joining a union is discussed fully on pages 16–17.

## **What to expect on your professional placement**

When a school has accepted you for a professional placement, it has a commitment to ITE and is looking forward to training you during your placement. The training partnership will have a contract with the school that sets out what they can expect of you and what you can expect of the school. Look at your training programme or guidance and you will find this is set out for you. Each training partnership is different, so check your details carefully.

## **What to expect of your school mentor**

The standards emphasise that you should act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring for a good reason. This will be your chief vehicle of learning through professional placement. The school may provide a mentor who will be a teacher who has undertaken training and takes a lead role in dealing with trainees in the school. Your mentor is crucial to your training on professional placement. In some schools your mentor may also be your class teacher, but often the mentor is a senior member of staff who can provide the sort of objective support that we all need from time to time. The role of the school mentor will vary depending on the level of partnership the school is engaged in, but in general you can expect the following.

Your mentor will:

- be your main point of contact with the school;
- know the school well, including the strengths of different members of staff, resources and opportunities;
- meet you on a regular basis to help you to set targets, evaluate progress, and identify experiences you want to have;
- know the professional standards for the ITE and how to help you demonstrate them;
- be aware of your workload and help you to plan it effectively so that you can meet your training needs;
- observe some of your teaching and give feedback;
- assess and report on your progress;
- be trained, know what to expect of trainees and pass information about trainees to other members of staff.

Many schools do not have a trained mentor with responsibility for students and the class teacher will be your mentor, often with support from a member of the senior management team.

These roles are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

## **Contacts**

Your mentor will know the dates and expectations of the placement before you arrive, and will also have a handbook of guidance for the placement as well as other training materials. However, it is a good idea to discuss the placement requirements clearly at the beginning.