# **Placement/ Project ESCalate Final Report**

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# **National Teacher Training/ Education Studies Context**

The overall gist of government policy is to get increasing numbers of graduates into teaching more quickly. Employment-based routes to Qualified Teacher Status are consequently likely to multiply rapidly in the near future. Until April 2002 the funding model for these initiatives followed individual applicants and is drawn down by schools, acting as Recommending Bodies for these applicants. However, a disproportionate number of schools introduced one or two teachers and then did not continue as training providers. So the government revised the model of funding to build a sustainable level of training based upon the allocation of places to Recommending Bodies. The Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP) are employment-based routes into teaching. The Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP) enable schools to employ teachers who are not yet qualified and to support them through an individual training programme leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The programme has been heavily oversubscribed and competitive so the central TTA administration used criteria to decide which individual applications received funding. In 2002 the model changed so that Recommending Bodies bid for an allocation of GTP places. It is down to the Recommending Body to use their discretion to select students, place them in schools and mentor them to Qualified Teacher Status. As of April 2002 the £13,000 training grant goes direct to the student and the £4000 to the Recommending Body. The priority categories for applicants remain the same and Recommending Bodies will be scrutinised by the TTA for their allocation of places to suitable candidates.

This is one of two key changes that provide an opportunity for us to help our existing and prospective students in Education Studies at DMU (first offered as a joint honours subject in 1998). The government has changed the requirements for entry to PGCE and the GTP schemes in so far as those applicants for a Primary teaching place on both schemes have now to have a first degree (but it no longer has to be substantively comprised of a National Curriculum subject). This, combined with the increase in GTP places, enabled us to attract a cohort of students to Education Studies and not diminish our current core intake of joint honours students who wish to become secondary school teachers. The range of modules and subject open to our students is therefore helped in terms of broadening the curriculum. This has an impact on this particular project as the module in question is an independent and individually negotiated project involving a placement in a school or other educational environment. Students take responsibility for establishing their own placement and this may be in a neighbourhood setting, such as Arts or Literature in the Community schemes, in addition to schools or colleges. This module is designed for students to gain work experience in an educational setting and to evaluate that experience. Hence the focus of this study is *The Reflective Practitioner: Undergraduate Independent Study Modules in Education Studies*. Students have wide ranging opportunities to develop their own work in Music, Dance, English Language and Literature Drama or Visual Art and to explore current thinking and practice in Education in its widest sense. Issues are considered within a broad educational spectrum, which may include special needs provision and multi-cultural concerns in the UK. There are opportunities for working with individuals with special educational needs and/ or groups with particular needs. The independent study module has been running successfully since 1998 and offers students the opportunity to carry out an applied independent study through a placement in an educational setting. The students identify and prepare resources for a class in a school, playgroup, performing arts group, dance class or for an individual learner. The finished project then includes **a reflective journal** of prepared resources in the context of their purpose and a variety of personal reflections of the learning and teaching process. Students are responsible for finding the placement, for completing a CRB check and providing a proposal for the Faculty Ethics Committee before entering the placement.

# The BA Education Studies induction evaluation exercise at De Montfort is an annual questionnaire that has highlighted in successive years that students who take our course wish to study Education and take another subject because they have to and because we have advised them to in order to comply with past government policy regarding PGCE applications. Widening participation is now a firmly established topic for most, if not all, educational institutions including the Universities. The Dearing Report on higher education has had a profound effect on government, the QAA, HEFC and higher education in general. Dearing recommended widening participation:

‘We recommend to the Government and funding bodies that, when allocating funds for higher education, they give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widened participation’

(*Higher Education in the Learning Society.* Summary Report, Paragraph 29, Recommendation 2).

# **De Montfort University Education Studies Context**

Education courses at De Montfort University have embraced this agenda and diversity forms part of this continuing strategy, as does an institutional focus on professional, vocational and creative courses. A number of students who hitherto would have been denied the opportunity to benefit from higher education have been recruited and have been very successful in their academic and occupational achievements. Our external examiners have been impressed with the achievements of these students, in particular with relation to added value. The programme aims to enable students to become knowledgeable, critical, creative and confident professionals in Education or related occupations. We particulalrly

* recognise and develop the existing professional knowledge and experience that students bring to the course
* investigate and research aspects of teaching and learning and encourage students to use their findings from independent study to enhance their professional practice and development.
* introduce different psychological perspectives of learning and the implications for different teaching contexts and cultures

A number of issues have been adopted to address issues relating to student recruitment:

* We have sought to recruit students from non traditional backgrounds as well as from ‘A’ level routes. In particular Education Studies students have followed Access courses. A number of students who hitherto would have been denied the opportunity to benefit from higher education have been recruited onto the BA Education Studies. Students include those with A levels, BTEC qualifications and access courses. We also take students who, through other means, show evidence of ability to meet the standards required. For example on the undergraduate programme we have accepted a student with one A level, but who had been accepted for a course at the University of Exeter, but which had closed. The student, now in the second year is achieving firsts and upper seconds in modules.
* The information on progression in the U/G programme, shows that mature students who arrive with non standard entrance qualifications achieve a larger than expected proportion of upper seconds compared with those who arrive with A levels.
* Tutors have built links with local access courses, educational establishments, the LEA , TTA and training providers.
* Given the large proportion of non-A level students entering Education Studies course, changes have been made to the curriculum in Part 1 which have been specifically designed to enable such students to enhance relevant study skills, for example, a learning journal designed to monitor their reading, developing essay writing and reflecting on their own development.
* Local advertising campaigns in community newspapers like *Asian Voice* have encouraged enquiries and applications.

All students on the Education Degree route take a compulsory first year; providing an introduction to independent study and reflection in action for all students.

This modules act as a bridge between pre-degree teaching and learning, whether that is A level, GNVQ or an access course, and the level required for a degree course. This transition needs to be carefully managed with respect to students’ prior experiences and what is expected of them on a degree course. To facilitate this transition and help students acquire the learning habits required for independent study, this first module is tightly structured. It guides the students through weekly reading, prepared set questions, to help facilitate reflection upon learning (including their own learning style). This is an important introduction to students’ independent study during their non-contact time. This is laid out for the students in the module handbook, under the section entitled 'Independent Study and Seminar Workbook'. Students complete their weekly independent study tasks in the learning journal, which in turn, forms part of their assessed work.

The second and third terms work is less structured to encourage the move to greater autonomy, and each module thereafter in years two and three attempts to encourage even greater independent study, culminating in the final year with the dissertation module (a 10,000 word essay) in either Education or the other joint honours subject. There are optional modules of the negotiated study (a 5,000 word essay or equivalent), and/ or the project module (a 5000 word report).

**The Placement/Project ESCalate Study**

The module is an independent and individually negotiated project of one hundred and fifty learning hours’ duration involving a placement in a school or other educational environment. Students take responsibility for establishing their own placement. This module is designed for students to gain work experience in an educational setting and to evaluate that experience.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Independently manage a project over time, bringing it to a conclusion by an agreed deadline;

Organise material to structure the final presentation in a coherent and appropriate way;

Demonstrate independence of thought and critical evaluation;

Successfully plan and organise a placement in an educational environment;

Successfully undertake a placement in an educational environment, demonstrating appropriate professional skills.

Identify a variety of research methods used in education

Outline their essential characteristics and indicate their contemporary significance

Evaluate the relationship between methodology and epistemology in conducting research

Critically relate educational theories and contemporary research to a research proposal of your choice

**Project description**

**Project Rationale:** The Reflective Practitioner: Undergraduate Independent Study Module in Education Studies. The module is designed to encourage reflection on one’s individual practice, especially when relating to independent study modules and personal development planning. Students will be asked to consider the purpose of reflection, the value of reflection and how to reflect in a variety of ways.

**Aims:** Reflection on professional practice in a placement setting following two key themes:

‘A process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse and evaluate and so inform learning from practice’ Brigid Reid, 1993.The major question is whether reflective practice actually *improves practice.*

Identify issues for future consideration including doing research and work-based learning.

**Overview of the work plan**

Many students choose to carry out the project in a school during their final year as undergraduates. This can provide a valuable opportunity to gain experience for a PGCE application. Students have also completed projects successfully in other contexts, for example, the preparation of an individual programme of study for a young person in a children’s home or a variety of arts community projects. Other students have evaluated materials produced in their existing employment, for example, in Further Education colleges.

The project lasted one academic year. Following the introduction of Blackboard to the module in 2005, students were asked to take part in a variety of reflective activities (including writing journals, portfolio preparation, presentations, discussion groups online, feedback, self-evaluation) and asked to comment on the methodology and pedagogy used in delivering the module. To prompt discussion of the student experience of reflective practice on independent study modules, especially with regard to graduate outcomes, students were asked to comment on the following themes:

* Journals enable students to reflect
* Journals are about dialogue rather than a statement on work
* Lecturers ought not to annotate journals but use post-it notes or additional sheets of paper
* Journals force students to qualify what they mean by being ‘reflective practitioners’
* Lecturers and students have to know the purpose of journals in relation to achieving goals.
* How do you record reflection on action and for future action?
* What kind of documents/ activities reflect what kind of reflective processes?
* What should the journal look like?
* What should be submitted for assessment?

**Outcomes**

Learners construct their own meaning about situations drawing on both their cognitive skills (reasoning, knowledge) and metacognitive skills (intuition, self-awareness).The process of reflection provides a structure for these intellectual and emotive aspects of learning. Laurillard (1993) draws a distinction between mediated learning (aided by a teacher) and non-mediated learning (experiential). Reflection on an independent study module designed to facilitate learning is designed to make links between the educational theory and constructs that students have learnt formally during their undergraduate course and practice. As responsible for both their own learning and the facilitation of learning of others while on the module, reflection can also enhance un-mediated learning by providing a structure and framework by which the individual can 'unpack' an experience and consider the implications of what has happened.

The design of the module broadly draws upon models of experiential learning developed thorough the work of Dewey, Kolb and Boud and the learning journals ask students to link examples of mediated and unmediated learning to skills including supposition and hypothesis, using personal judgement, critical assessment and analysis. These are similar to the kinds of questions used by a number of personal development schemes in education and beyond. As a core member of the De Montfort University DfEE Key Skills project, I became involved in links with Alverno College in the USA which operates a system of assessment-as-learning. Students are constantly engaged in self- and peer-assessment and accept that making judgments about their own work is part of college education. This is very much part of the philosophy of the independent study module and something that could be extended throughout the curriculum as a result of this project. The majority of the funding enabled relief from commitments to devise the design of the Blackboard site, the Student handbook and related materials (see appendix A) and writing the report (although my job changed in late September 2007 along with the nature of those obligations). Part of the funding was to represent several members of the Education Studies department at the British Education Studies Association Conference. I have transferred this experience to developing an online distance learning MA first offered in 2005 which again deals with many non standard entrants to HE, albeit in a different academic discipline.

Pedagogic research has done much to persuade us of the value of teaching methods that support independent and reflective learning. In the context of a government commitment to lifelong learning and widening participation, there is an increasing impetus to include reflective practice within the higher education curriculum. 'Key', 'transferable' and 'core' skills feature in policy papers and refer to the development of independent self-aware people who can respond to the complexities of contemporary society.In professional contexts like education and performing arts subjects, reflection is a key component of the subject. It forms part of therepertoire of skills that the individual practitioner draws upon in order to improve performance. Self and peer review arefundamental to the development and refinement of a professional identity or artistic performance. Structured reflection enablesstudents to learn from their performance, building on the best elements and creating an awareness of their limitations. Inherent in the idea of an independent study module is the concept of development and re-working to produce a self-managed project.

**Practice**

Students were directed by the 2006/7 module handbook:

‘This year the module leader and tutor are also developing an electronic learning support package to assist students with information and peer support. Please be aware that this is in the developmental stage but available on <https://vle.dmu.ac.uk>. You will need a username and password and need to be formally registered as a student on this module in order to access the site. It contains announcements, a

course calendar, course information and additional documentation, links to other sites and discussion boards. Please be aware that the usual academic conventions and protocols apply to material on this site, including plagiarism, as it is the work of the module staff. If you have any feedback then we would be pleased to know your views.

We encourage you to adopt the approach of a reflective practitioner in facilitating learning. That is to say, to take from each session ideas about how you could have improved the learning experience and what your strengths were. Had you correctly assessed the preferred learning styles of the students and enabled them to extend their skills, knowledge and understanding? What are the issues around teaching mixed ability and enthusiasm? Can you empathise with that particular age range? What skills might you need to develop in future and so forth.’

The use of research of this kind is intended to improve student experience in Higher Education and also to focus on skills which lead to successful graduate outcomes. The majority of Education Studies graduates will go on to PGCE course, teaching careers and other care-related professions. In his seminal work Schön (1983) refers to the uncertainty, uniqueness and conflict inherent in professional practice. Professionals are often faced with a unique situation in which the boundaries are likely to change. He argues that there is a need for alternative strategies including what he termed 'swamps' and 'high ground'. While certain fixed situations can be approached by applying technical knowledge and skill (high ground), the unique and changing situation is 'swampy'. By this he refers to the 'messy', subjective process of thinking and attempting to find solutions to problems which others might call professional judgement. He speaks of 'reflection-in-action', which may be interpreted as a body of personal knowledge that is implicit in your 'feel' for the subject. The independent study module asks students to enter the ‘swampy’ ground of a self-managed practical project working with a small group of learners, to apply their technical knowledge and skill and also to reflect upon it as preparation for making the transition from undergraduate to professional. It is consequently a controlled and formally assessed (see appendix A) introduction to the role of reflective practitioner.

**Sample feedback from Education Studies Students**

**Student A**

I have found the placement module extremely beneficial especially in regards to PGCE application……. This module has given me the opportunity to independently analyse, evaluate and reflect on the observations I have made and use the information gathered, to conduct a project. I am more confident and have improved my communication skills. I have been able to test out my own teaching styles and analyse my own strengths and weaknesses. I would strongly recommend this module to students as it allows you to gain valuable experience throughout the placement and helps you improve aspects of your own learning and performance.

**Student B**

I have found the placement/project module hugely useful towards my personal and educational development as well as career plans. With having such an open module, I was given the opportunity to reflect on my previous knowledge and pursue an area of interest of mine.

This module enabled me to gain experience in my chosen career path; teaching. It provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my experience within schools and to be analytical of my own practice. I would definitely highly recommend future students to be able to choose this module.

**Student C**

For the project/ placement module I volunteered at my local Primary school as I want to become a primary school teacher. This placement was one of the best experiences of my life despite the fact that I had been volunteering at numerous schools over the last six years. Reflecting upon this experience, I think it was exhilarating and left me with an overwhelming sense of achievement as I was able to work alongside a group of learners, monitoring their progression, facilitating their learning and inspiring their young minds……... I believe that this module was significant in me being selected for a teacher training course as I was able to reflect my views and experiences from this placement at interview. Also the module was well organised and structured and my module tutor was very helpful. I would definitely recommend this module to anyone who is contemplating whether or not to take it.

**Further Recommendations**

The broader pedagogical issues which arise for the course, institution and academic community include:

* The journal should inform practice and not merely be assessed in itself
* Journals may serve different purposes in different courses and a degree of flexibility encourages some to use online versions while others prefer more traditional technologies.
* It may also be that a single journal could be used for several courses so that connections are made in the whole degree - but academic teams would need to decide exactly what is to be assessed for each course to avoid self plagiarism.
* Where a journal is 100% of the mark reflective practice has had a ‘transforming effect’ on teaching and learning in the department.
* Online technologies provide flexibility for interaction not always available to those Education Studies students who have work and family commitments. There is currently a series of developments such as the DMU presence on SecondLife and other interactive social networking sites which could see the extension of relatively low-tech projects such as this in facilitating reflection.

Appendix A

**EDUC 3314 PROJECT: ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK PROFORMA 2006/7**

**Name: …………………………. Date: ……………………… Title:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assessment Criteria** | **Excellent**  **(First class)** | **Very Good**  **(Upper Second class)** | **Good**  **(Lower Second class)** | **Adequate**  **(Third class)** | **In need of improvement (Borderline/ Fail)** |
| **Appropriateness of the placement for the project.**  **Demonstration of appropriate professional skills** | Project is confidently introduced - aims and objectives described authoritatively. The overall impact is that the project has been created with careful academic preparation including secondary reading | The project is effectively introduced - aims and objectives described and developed.  Project is thorough but without the completeness and authority of first class work | The project is clearly introduced - aims and objectives described but not developed.  The content has been based on basic independent research and tends towards being derivative of the placement’s existing learning materials | The project is introduced - aims and objectives provide an overview. The overall structure is identifiable and some use has been made of learning materials | The project is introduced in a limited or unfocussed way. The overall structure is in need of revision to identify the value/ structure of learning materials and the overall structure. |
| **Planning and preparation of appropriate learning materials for your chosen student group** | Excellent use of a range of diagnostic tools and differentiated materials to suit a range of learning styles and abilities. | Several points analyzed and evaluated in considering learning styles/abilities of the target group. | Use of evaluation is evident in moving from one task/activity to another. Learning materials are generally appropriate to the age and ability group | There is evidence of judgement in the construction and organization of the learning materials. No serious omissions | Limitations in the ability to select and present relevant material. Needs revision to prepare for the general age/ability range. |
| **Organization and management of the project, structure of the argument, independence of thought and critical evaluation** | You provide an excellent critique of the key issues. Your personal perspective has been developed as a result of extensive research and you have synthesised these sources to authoritative effect | You provide analysis and some insight. Your personal perspective has been developed by wider research and you have shown some evidence of synthesis which could be developed | You show a grasp of relevant material and key concepts and an ability to construct and organise an argument. You show some analysis and insight but could develop your evaluative skills and overall interpretation | Competent and suitably organized work. The content may be derivative and based on activities rather than a broader context. Analysis may be limited and insufficient to warrant a lower second | The content of a third class mark but with limitations that justify a bare pass/fail. The work may be flawed by omission or irrelevance and the study may be limited and narrowly focussed |
| **Structure and coherence of the presentation of the project** | Outstanding work will facilitate an overall coherence and ensure that your individual contribution relates to the work of the rest of the placement. You relate a topic or issue to a broader framework | Very good work will reflect collaborative preparation, continuity and coherence. You may need to work on the originality and depth of the conclusions to give a more searching analysis | Your individual preparation is evident. You could develop the flow of the structure and move from the particular topic to the overall context to draw a more effective conclusion. You may think about the short, medium and long term goals of the placement regarding your topic. | You will communicate effectively through spoken language. The work will demonstrate co-operative support. You could develop this interaction with the group of learners to produce more probing questions | Interaction with the group appears to have been brief and/ or unfocussed. You could develop your personal opinion by looking at other perspectives and a more considered conclusion |
| **Reflection on your learning and performance in the placement** | First class work will use quality multi-media aids in facilitating a dialogue with your learners by dividing your project into clear sections. Variety will maintain the learner focus and interest. | There is clear evidence of critical judgement in selecting, ordering and analyzing content. You draw on a range of well referenced sources and could develop insight and originality further | Second class projects will use multi media aids to helpclarify, develop and illustrate the main points of the topic. Develop the critical analysis of well chosen examples by reading around the subject | The multi media items used provide a partial view of the topic or make points that are not entirely relevant. Develop the analytical points to be extrapolated from the source material | Your overall topic made limited or no use of appropriate multi media aids. Select and present relevant material to assist in the delivery of your project for a selected age and ability range |

**Mark:**

**Comments:**