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Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin
Galway and Roscommon
Education and Training Board

Professional Practice Placements in the Early Learning and Care Programme Policy

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) policy with respect to professional practice placements undertaken by learners engaged in programmes leading to the Certificate in Early Learning and Care (ELC) (Level 5), and the Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care (Level 6).

2. Scope

This policy for professional practice placement applies in the context of the delivery of the Certificate in Early Learning and Care (Level 5), and the Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care (Level 6) programmes.

3. Definitions

Professional Practice Placement describes when Early Learning and Care learners must complete 150 hours of professional practice placement (per annum, when studying full-time) in a minimum of two ELC age cohorts:

- (1) working directly with children aged between 0 and 2 years 8 months and
- (2) working with children aged between 2 years 8 months - 6 years, with an appropriate balance between settings (see 5.1)

3.1 Acronyms Utilised in this Policy

ELC: Early Learning and Care

FET: Further Education and Training

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

GRETB: Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board

NFQ: National Framework of Qualifications

PATD: Professional Award Type Descriptor

PLSS: Programme Learner Support System

PPP: Professional Practice Placement

QA: Quality Assurance

QQI: Quality and Qualifications Ireland

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

4. Policy Statement

This document outlines GRETB's policy with respect to professional practice placements in ELC programmes. The Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care consists of two stages, where stage 1 is the equivalent of level 5, and stage 2 is the equivalent of level 6. The Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care consists of a single stage, leading to a level 5 award.

This policy outlines the standards that learners completing the programme are expected to achieve at levels 5 and 6, as well as specific validation conditions regarding the professional practice placements that all learners are expected to undertake in the course of their studies.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Each FET (Further Education and Training) Centre/Programme manager ensures that applicants and enrolled learners are informed about Professional Practice Placement requirements for ELC programmes.

5.1 Key Implementation Mechanisms

Each FET Centre/Programme will ensure each learner satisfies the Garda vetting process prior to commencing professional practice placement.

Any changes in legislative requirements or changes in course content or the development of new courses or changes to existing course design will be reflected on GRETB's website and literature. The language used, and methods used in communicating information, will be in keeping with stakeholder requirements.

6. Role and Responsibility of the Programme Provider

In the context of this policy, the Programme Provider refers to the centre/college/training centre that is offering the ELC programme to learners.

- Professional Practice Placements will be integral to the programme. Programme providers will maintain an appropriate code of practice for providers of professional ELC practice placements and associated procedures and criteria
- The programme provider must communicate the intended learning outcomes for the practice placement and the strategy for the assessment of the achievement of those outcomes to both the placement providers and the learner
- The programme provider will appoint a suitably qualified professional placement monitor (monitor) to act as the liaison person between the programme team, the learner and the professional placement provider/supervisor
- The programme provider will have final responsibility for approving the practice placement once the criteria listed in section 5.1 above have been met
- There will be a formal written agreement between the provider and the practice placement setting out respective roles and responsibilities and a code of practice for the supervision of learners
- The programme provider will ensure that while the learner is on professional practice placement, appropriate support, guidance and supervision arrangements will be maintained by the programme team and supports will be in place for learners who are experiencing difficulties during professional practice placement
- The programme provider will ensure there is regular, scheduled contact between the learner and the monitor during the professional practice placements
- The programme provider will provide scheduled classroom de-briefings sessions for learners during professional practice placements.

7. Principles of professional practice placement in GRETB

- The professional practice placement is central to the Early Learning and Care programme in GRETB.
- GRETB welcomes a partnership approach between professional practice placement supervisors and the centre/college which is sending the learner out on placement, and recognises and values the role of the supervisor in facilitating and supporting learners in their development while on practice placement.
- In recognition of the central importance of the professional practice placement in the Early Learning and Care programmes, a Professional Practice Placement Handbook has been developed to support

centres, placement supervisors and learners, and to ensure that the professional practice placement experience is as meaningful and valuable for learners as possible.

8. Professional Practice Placement

8.1 Practice Placement criteria

- The special validation conditions published in the Professional Award Type Descriptor (PATD) specify that learners must complete 150 hours of professional practice placement (per annum, when studying full-time) with a minimum of two age cohorts in a **Tusla registered** ELC setting:
 - working directly with children aged between 0 and 2 years 8 months and
 - working with children aged between 2 years 8 months - 6 years, with an appropriate balance between settings
- In practice this means the following:
 - *Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care*. Learners completing the Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care will be expected to complete a **total of 300 hours** of professional practice placement where:
 - 150 hours must be completed at **both stage 1 and stage 2**
 - The placement at each stage must take place with two age cohorts as outlined above
 - The requirement to have 150 hours' placement at each stage, across two age cohorts, applies to **all** learners, regardless of whether they are undertaking full-time or part-time courses
 - *Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care*. Learners completing the Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care will be expected to complete a **total of 150 hours** of professional practice placement where:
 - The placement must take place with two age cohorts as outlined above
 - The requirement to have 150 hours' placement across two age cohorts, applies to **all** learners, regardless of whether they are undertaking full-time or part-time courses.
- An appropriate balance between settings means a minimum of 50 hours with each age cohort, the final 50 hours can be spent with either age cohort.
- All professional practice placement settings must be entities currently registered as service providers with Tusla.
- The practice placement provider must be able to assign a practice placement supervisor/s, suitably qualified, to take responsibility for the learner and their assessment

Note: While the learner may identify a potential practice placement setting, the programme provider will have final responsibility for approving the practice placement once the criteria listed above have been met.

9. Monitoring the ongoing quality of the practice placements

Programme providers are required to have an effective system to ensure the ongoing quality of practice placements.

9.1 Prior to learners going on professional practice placement

- The programme provider will build a database of suitable practice placements over time, which will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it remains up-to-date
- The programme provider/monitor will review all prospective practice placements against the criteria listed in section 5.1 above, to ensure that they meet all the criteria and are appropriate placement settings for the learners

- The programme provider will have final responsibility for approving the practice placement once the criteria listed in section 5.1 above have been

9.2 **During the placement**

- The monitor will communicate with the placement provider at least once during the placement, to ensure the learner and professional practice placement requirements are being met. This can happen either through a phone call, email, virtual meeting (video) or face to face meeting.
- met.

9.3 **After the professional practice placement**

- The monitor will complete the *Checklist for monitoring professional practice placements* (Appendix 6 of the Professional Practice Placement Handbook). Part A of the checklist will be completed by the monitor alone. Part B will be completed by the monitor in conjunction with the learner, either during the final part of the tripartite meeting (monitor and learner alone) or following the completion of the professional practice placement
- Following completion of the checklist, the monitor will make a recommendation as to whether the practice setting should be used for future placements.

10. Assessment of learners while on practice placement

Work-based assessments are carried out during the two professional practice placements at each stage of the programme.

10.1 **Assessing mandatory activities**

The learner is required to engage with a number of mandatory activities while on practice placement.

- The professional practice placement supervisor will verify engagement of the learner with each of the mandatory activities by initialling and dating the Professional Practice Placement Supervisor's Report (Part 1)
- The supervisor will facilitate the learner to carry out these activities at an appropriate time
- The mandatory activities will be assessed and marked in-centre by the programme module teacher/trainer
- The mandatory activities for each stage are outlined in the *Professional Practice Placement Handbook* and in the relevant programme module descriptors.

10.2 **Assessing professional competencies**

The work-based assessment element of the professional practice placement requires the learner to demonstrate a range of professional competencies. For further details of the professional competencies which the learner is expected to demonstrate, see the *Professional Practice Placement Handbook*.

- The learner is required to demonstrate competence in each competency at least once across the two age cohorts to pass the module
- During the tripartite meeting, which takes place during each placement, an evaluation will be made by the monitor and the supervisor, in consultation with the learner, as to whether the learner has or has not demonstrated the competencies set out in the **Professional Practice Placement Supervisor's Report (Part 2 & 3)**.

10.3 **Conducting a tripartite meeting**

- A tripartite meeting for each learner will take place once per age cohort, preferably towards the latter end of the placement, so that a considered evaluation may be made
- Tripartite meetings may not take place by phone or email

- The purpose of the three-way meeting is to provide the supervisor, the monitor and the learner with an opportunity to review the learner's progress over the course of the placement and to allow an evaluation to be made by the monitor and the supervisor, in consultation with the learner, as to whether the learner has or has not-yet demonstrated the competencies set out in the **Professional Practice Placement Supervisor's Report (Part 2 & 3)**.
- If the learner has been deemed to be '*Not-yet competent*' in one or more of the professional competencies in the first tripartite meeting, they will have a further opportunity to be evaluated during the second tripartite meeting.
- The monitor will keep a record of the outcomes of the meeting. Follow up to the tripartite meeting, if required, can be by phone, email, virtual meeting or face-to-face meeting.

10.4 Grading the professional competencies

- The monitor and the placement supervisor in each practice placement setting will review the learner's experience and progress on practice placement and evaluate, in consultation with the learner, if the learner has demonstrated each of the professional competencies
- For each competency a '*Competent*' or '*Not-yet competent*' evaluation will be recorded on the Professional Practice Placement Supervisor's Report
- At the conclusion of the second tripartite meeting the monitor will review the Professional Practice Placement Supervisor's Report, as follows:
 - *Has the learner been evaluated as 'competent' in all of the competencies at least once across the two placement settings?*
If Yes, the learner will be awarded 40%.
 - *If No, the learner will be awarded 0%*
- The monitor will verify if the learner has completed 150 hours' practice placement across the specified age ranges
- The monitor will sign the form and return it to the professional practice placement teacher/tutor at the centre/college.

Note: Where the learner is assessed as '*Not-yet Competent*' in the work-based assessment, and achieves a cumulative mark of 50% or more for the Professional Practice Placement in Early Learning and Care module or the Advanced Professional Practice Placement in Early Learning and Care module, then the assessor must complete the Amended Grade Form in order to bring the cumulative mark for the module to 49%. The Amended Grade Form is at the back of the modules and must be used in order to trigger an Unsuccessful grade.

11. Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed every two years by the FET Support and Development Unit in conjunction with FET Centre/Programme Managers.