

M level PGCE

The following ideas are presented by delegates who attended the ESCalate ITE M level PGCE seminar at the University of Gloucestershire on January 9th 2007. Many thanks to all delegates who for their contributions. If you would like to comment or add suggestions, please contact a.g.jackson@ucsm.ac.uk.

Staff Development

Challenges and opportunities

- The move from Level 3 to Level 4.
- The understanding of 'M levelness' by trainees and staff.
- Giving parity of support to trainees.
- Opportunities for sharing ideas and problem-solving by subject tutors.
- Reclaiming opportunities for action research in ITE.
- 'Exposure' is a threat for some colleagues.

Similarities and differences with former practice

- Much practice stays the same.
- There is a need to find the right assessment task.
- The depth of personal engagement will be greater.
- The rigour of moderation/comparison processes is enhanced.

Similarities and differences between institutions

- The number of members of staff with/without Masters qualifications.
- The confidence to become involved in M level modules is variable.
- Mentor involvement is variable.

Ideas for effective practice

- Embedding study skills.
- Modelling processes.
- Providing time/space for M level reflection.
- Ownership by all the staff.
- Provision of exemplars.
- On-going, evolving process of staff development.

Other considerations

What is the role of e-learning?

School-based research

Challenges ...

- Fitting it all in.
- Involvement of school-based mentors.
- Who moderates/assesses (are they qualified at M level?)
- How to train existing staff.
- Reading – time and resource allocations.
- Will they follow our agenda or their own?

... and opportunities

- To pursue individual interests.
- M level acknowledges existing expertise and ability.
- Valuable for school – SEF etc.
- Prompts students/mentors to do MA/CPD.
- Encourages informed reflective practice.
- Assessment brief improved.

Similarities and differences with former practice

- Students are already:
 - engaged with reading research for assignments;
 - discussing research and relating it to school experience;
 - presenting in groups;
 - collecting data for assignments;
 - being taught using a range of methods.
- Differences will be:
 - Collection of data using the rigour of research design;
 - Introduction to research methodology;
 - Increase in tutor workload due to formative assessment;
 - Staff development needs for giving M level support;
 - Tension for students of managing research and school practice;
 - Impact on partnership schools.

Similarities and differences between institutions

These are seen very much as the interpretation of 'What is M level'?

- Some view rigour as a model of reading and research question clearly defined early.
- Others incline towards more reflective models relating theory to practice (possibly starting from trainee experience)

This is possible a Primary/Secondary split. All insist that Primary trainees come with higher academic credentials than Secondary.

Ideas for effective practice

- Alternatives to written work for assessment: e.g. digital video and voice overs.
- Schools need to be in full partnership: having the research shared with them and helping drive it.
- Students must have a clear rationale and personal involvement to avoid 'just another thing to do'.
- The process of the research should drive the module, not the assessment.

Curriculum design – Primary

Challenges ...

- Expertise in foundation subjects is more varied/limited.
- ECM – logistical challenges of getting students together with, for example, health students.
- Tutor expertise re M level – particularly M level in ITE.
- No agreed view about what M level is.

- Danger of focussing on writing – M level not single tracked.

... and opportunities

- Space/window to consider what we believe in and want to achieve.
- The process of planning has been creative and useful.
- It will help to support more transformative teaching.

Similarities and differences with former practice

- The need to audit skills in advanced study – also to provide support.
- The different role for the M level tutor.
- Changing relationship with schools.
- A move away from content-led delivery modes of teaching and curriculum design.

Similarities and differences between institutions

- Different approaches to subject knowledge – particularly core:
Assessed through assignments
Assessed through audit
Assessed through placements/standards.
- M level is closely associated with school based work in all institutions.
- All are talking about building on strengths of existing practice.
- All see an opportunity to review and use M level to consider ECM and E & E.
- Important to note that institutions are different and that the same model cannot work in each HEI.
- Different practices are allowed by registry/academic standards units.

Ideas for effective practice

- Varied forms of assessment – not exclusively focussed on writing.
- Pre induction preparation is crucial.
- Induction is also crucial.
- Seize the opportunity to change the way we work with mentors.
- Use school as commissioners/audience for research.
- Give choice within combined core assignments.
- Everything should be delivered at M level, even if it is not assessed at M level.
- Cross curricular assignments.
- Action research model.

Curriculum design – Secondary

Challenges ...

- Where does 'formative' support end?
- Workload – RAE.
- The definition of M level.
- 'Qualifications' for assessors – QTS included or not.

... and opportunities.

- Giving credit to students for work already being done.
- Using the reflective practitioner model.
- It brings PGCE into the M level 'fold'.

Similarities and differences with former practice

- 60 credits is equal to student work already delivered.
- More coherent and common across different subject areas.
- Changes to support given and assessment procedures followed.

Similarities and differences between institutions

- Many students are already working at M level.
- All institutions are changing assessment criteria and tasks.
- Credits allocated are variable.
- Individual requirements are different.

Ideas for effective practice

- Designing tasks/assessment activities to allow depth at M level.
- Collaborative work across institutions to examine support.
- Work upon arriving at effective practice over the next few years.

Other considerations

- What do we mean by M level work and does this necessarily involve research?

Student induction and support

Challenges ...

- Offering more support for students working at a higher level while also trying to free up more time to allow pupils to work at the higher level.
- Creating time for reflection by students in a short course.
- Supporting students in shortage subjects whose academic achievements to this point might be weak.
- Time pressures for support.
- Getting students to engage with VLEs.

... and opportunities

- Depth of equality of thinking enhanced.
- Having to rethink courses from first principles.
- Greater integration of centrally provided support into course design.
- Need to develop more personalised professional development support (although this needs time taken from elsewhere).
- Develop VLEs.

Ideas for effective practice

- Effective use of VLEs.
- Making use of what central support services (including librarians) have to offer rather than trying to do it all with the course team and course hours.
- Use peer support (i.e. students supporting one another with areas of expertise).
- Sessions explicitly addressing what does M level mean?
- Looking at assessment criteria and exemplars early in the course.

- Demystify what Masters level and research mean.
- Formalising proposal stage of research based assignments so that difficulties and misunderstandings can be addressed early.

Admissions and support

Challenges and opportunities

- Change of focus towards critical and reflective thinking.
- Representatives from partner schools may have different criteria in interview.
- There may be differentiated expectations for those on M route.
- Criteria for academic reference (GTTR).
- How to extract 'M levelness' at interview.
- There may be different criteria for different routes.
- Distinguishing between M level and QTS.

Similarities and difference with former practice

- Current admissions processes are effective.
- Piece of critical writing to feed into formative assessment.
- Assignment pre-course.
- Support sessions pre-course.

Similarities and differences between institutions

- Range from 2.1 minimum to honours degree.
- Some require 3 GCSEs before application, others require equivalence test (transitional arrangement for science).
- Some use presentation based on school experience.
- Some use prepared piece of academic writing.
- All use written English and Maths tests.
- Some have a standard list of questions.
- Some have collective shortlisting.
- Some insist on an academic reference for Secondary honours degree for shortage subjects.

Ideas for effective practice

- More explicit guidance on websites (e.g. shadowing teacher as 1 week of 2 weeks school experience).
- Very clear interview structure and questions designed to elicit critical thinking.
- Using interview data formatively for support.
- Share interview questions between institutions.
- Examine support/procedures for male applicants.