

**Case 200501574: University of Glasgow**

**Summary of Investigation**

**Category**

Scottish Higher Education: Teaching and supervision

**Overview**

The complainant (Ms C), who is a solicitor, complained that the University of Glasgow (the University) failed to support or communicate with her client (Ms A) adequately during teacher training placements in secondary schools, did not challenge secondary schools when placements were terminated or find alternative placements quickly enough and, in relation to one specific school placement (Placement 4), her tutor (Academic 1) did not inform Ms A that an informal visit would result in a formal report. In addition, Ms C claimed that the University should have suggested practical remedies to placement problems that had been identified between the part of the University in which Ms A was studying (the Faculty) and secondary schools.

**Specific complaints and conclusions**

The complaints which have been investigated are:

- (a) the alleged failure of the Faculty to support Ms A during her placements (*not upheld*);
- (b) the alleged failure of the Faculty to challenge schools' behaviour and decisions to terminate Ms A's placements (*not upheld*);
- (c) the Faculty's actions and communication with Ms A during and after placements were terminated (*not upheld*);
- (d) the alleged failure of the Faculty to find alternative placements in a timely manner (*not upheld*);
- (e) Academic 1's alleged inappropriate recording of a visit to Placement 4 (*not upheld*); and
- (f) the alleged failure of the University to suggest practical remedies to the problems they appeared to accept there were between the Faculty and the schools upon which the Faculty relied for student experience (*not upheld*).

**Redress and recommendations**

The Ombudsman recommends that the University:

- (i) reflect on this complaint and consider how best to deal with termination of placements. Although it may be a rare occurrence, it is clear that termination of placements is a distressing time for schools, students and Faculty staff; and
- (ii) reflect on this complaint and consider how best to deal with the need to arrange an alternative placement at short notice.

The University have accepted the recommendations and will act on them accordingly.

## **Main Investigation Report**

### **Introduction**

1. On 9 September 2005 the Ombudsman received a complaint from the Principal Solicitor at a legal practice in Glasgow (Ms C) on behalf of her client (Ms A) who was a teacher training student at the University of Glasgow (the University). Ms C claimed that the University failed to support or communicate with Ms A adequately during teacher training placements in secondary schools, did not challenge secondary schools when placements were terminated or find alternative placements quickly enough, and in relation to one specific school placement (Placement 4) her tutor (Academic 1) did not inform Ms A that an informal visit would result in a formal report. In addition, Ms C claimed that the University should have suggested practical remedies to placement problems that had been identified between the part of the University in which Ms A was studying (the Faculty) and secondary schools.

2. The complaints from Ms C which I have investigated are:
- (a) the alleged failure of the Faculty to support Ms A during her placements;
  - (b) the alleged failure of the Faculty to challenge schools' behaviour and decisions to terminate Ms A's placements;
  - (c) the Faculty's actions and communication with Ms A during and after placements were terminated;
  - (d) the alleged failure of the Faculty to find alternative placements in a timeous manner;
  - (e) Academic 1's alleged inappropriate recording of a visit to Placement 4; and
  - (f) the alleged failure of the University to suggest practical remedies to the problems they appeared to accept there were between the Faculty and the schools upon which the Faculty relied for student experience.

### **Investigation**

3. It is important to make clear at the outset that it has not been my role to assess or challenge the academic and professional judgement of University staff in relation to Ms A's work, as this is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction under Schedule 4, paragraph 10A of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (the Act). It is also important to make clear that the Act also states at Schedule 4, paragraph 10 that the Ombudsman must not investigate:

'Action concerning-

- (a) the giving of instruction, whether secular or religious, or

(b) conduct, curriculum or discipline,  
in any educational establishment under the management of an education  
authority.'

Schedule 4, paragraph 8 also excludes personnel matters from the  
Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

4. In considering the complaints under investigation I examined evidence  
provided by Ms C, on behalf of Ms A, as well as evidence provided by the  
University in response to my enquiries.

5. I have not included in this report every detail investigated but I am satisfied  
that no matter of significance has been overlooked. Ms C and the University  
were given an opportunity to comment on a draft of this report.

**(a) The alleged failure of the Faculty to support Ms A during her  
placements; (b) The alleged failure of the Faculty to challenge schools'  
behaviour and decisions to terminate Ms A's placements; (c) The Faculty's  
actions and communication with Ms A during and after placements were  
terminated; (d) The alleged failure of the Faculty to find alternative  
placements in a timeous manner; (e) Academic 1's alleged inappropriate  
recording of a visit to Placement 4; and (f) The alleged failure of the  
University to suggest practical remedies to the problems they appeared to  
accept there were between the Faculty and the schools upon which the  
Faculty relied for student experience**

6. Ms A was a student at the University undertaking a one-year (three  
academic terms) teacher training qualification, which involved study within the  
Faculty and practical experience in secondary schools by way of placement.  
There were due to be three blocks of placements, one in each term, which  
would progressively assess Ms A's ability and suitability to be a teacher. The  
breakdown of Faculty teaching and placements, as outlined in the Guide for  
Students, is attached at Annex 4 to this report. Ms A commenced her studies in  
September 2003, and after a two week placement at a school (Placement 1) in  
that month she then had a six week placement at the Placement 1 school from  
10 November 2003. She said that she experienced problems with school staff  
and pupils and she contacted Academic 1 for assistance. A meeting was held  
on 21 November 2003 between Ms A, Academic 1 and school staff, at which  
Ms A was told that Placement 1 was being terminated. Ms A said that she  
asked the Faculty to find her an alternative placement but that none was found

for her immediately. She said that there was no evidence that the University tried to find an alternative placement in the first term, and that:

'As a result of the lack of action by the [Faculty] at this stage [Ms A] was singled out from her colleagues and put at a disadvantage for the remainder of the course.'

7. In the second term Ms A was due to start Placement 2, which was to be a replacement for the terminated Placement 1, on 9 February 2004. She visited the Placement 2 school on 2 February 2004 as preparation for the seven week placement. The school wrote to the teacher training programme leader (Academic 2) on 6 February 2004 to advise that they had concerns about Ms A because during the preparation visit she would not discuss Placement 1 with school staff, that she had asked for a week off in the middle of the placement which would cause the school difficulty, and that she was discourteous to the Head Teacher. The school said that they would need further discussions before agreeing to the placement going ahead, and so Ms A was advised that the Faculty had scheduled a Student Monitoring Committee (SMC) meeting to review Placement 1 on 9 February 2004, the same day as the start of Placement 2.

8. When Ms A attended the SMC meeting, with Academic 1, Academic 2 and the Associate Dean (Academic 3) she was told that the Placement 2 school did not want her to return to the school at present, but that a final decision on whether she was to attend Placement 2 at all had not been made. The SMC report noted that Ms A:

'... expressed concern that she would not be given a fair experience in school and indicated that she felt it would be more appropriate that a new placement could be found. It was made very clear to her by [Academic 3] and [Academic 1] that the school were not refusing to allow her to return but that they wished to clarify certain issues prior to her return. The difficulty of finding additional placements was also explained.'

On 12 February 2004 Ms A was told that Placement 2 would definitely not go ahead. Ms A said that she asked the Faculty to find her an alternative placement to take place in the second term, but that none was found for her, despite her apparently contacting them continually. Ms A also said that there was no evidence that the Faculty challenged the decision by the Placement 2 school to terminate, given what she described as the 'tenuous reasons' provided by the school. Ms A also said that the school later indicated that the

placement was terminated because of staffing difficulties, but that this reason was not given at the time the placement was terminated. In terms of trying to find an alternative placement for her, Ms A said that there was evidence that the Faculty had tried to find a placement, but that it '... represents an inadequate attempt to find [Ms A] an alternative placement' due to the time taken, about a month, which meant that Placement 3 could not start until the third term.

9. Ms A contacted the Students' Representative Council (SRC) at the University for support, and to complain about the lack of support provided to her by the Faculty. She said that a meeting between her, an SRC representative, and Faculty staff was arranged for 29 March 2004, at which time she was told that the Faculty had found a placement for her (Placement 3), but she was not told the school's location or the placement start date. Ms A said she was also told that Placement 3 would count as her second placement. She said she made her own enquiries to find out where the school was and when she found out that it was an hour and a half's journey away from her home, she concluded that she:

'... was deliberately placed in this school to make life as difficult as possible for me.'

The Faculty wrote to Ms A on 21 April 2004 and confirmed that Placement 3 would begin on the standard third term placement start date. There was an SMC meeting on 30 April 2004, which Ms A was unable to attend. Academic 3 wrote to Ms A on 13 May 2004 to advise her of the SMC meeting content and that:

'It is standard procedure for a student in your position to be required to repeat the full year. If, however, you complete [Placement 3] successfully and you submit a satisfactory written assignment ... it may be possible for you to complete the school experience by undertaking two further placements during the period September–December. Successful completion of the programme in December will enable you to undertake supply teaching for the remainder of the session 2004-05 and to take up a place on the Probationer Induction Scheme in August 2005.'

Placement 3 began on 4 May 2004, in the third term, and Ms A completed it successfully. An SMC meeting was arranged for 22 June 2004 to review Placement 3 and agree the dates of Ms A's remaining placements and the submission date for her final written assignment. In relation to Ms A's complaint about the lack of support from the Faculty (paragraph 9), the matter was

considered by the Senior Senate Assessor for Student Complaints (the Senate Assessor), who did not uphold her complaint.

10. Ms A said that the Faculty told her that she would have to do another placement after the summer holidays. Placement 4 began on 23 August 2004. Ms A said that, as with Placement 1, she experienced problems with school staff and pupils. The Placement 4 school contacted the Faculty and Academic 1 came to the school, according to Ms A, to conduct an informal assessment of her teaching on 16 September 2004. Ms A said that:

'The feedback I received from [Academic 1] was that it wasn't the best he had seen me teach but equally it wasn't the worst.'

As the placement progressed and Ms A encountered further difficulties she said she tried to contact Academic 1 three times but that he was always unavailable to speak to her. Ms A formed the view that the Faculty offered her 'no support at all even though they knew I was facing difficulties' and that Academic 1 was supporting the Placement 4 school rather than her. Ms A said that the first formal assessment by another member of Faculty staff [Academic 4] was arranged for 13:30 on 6 October 2004. However, Ms A said that she was taken out of her first class of the morning on that day and taken to a meeting with Placement 4 school staff and Academic 4, at which she was told that the school was terminating her placement because of increasing disruption in her classroom due to her inability to maintain discipline, which meant that pupils were not learning, and that Ms A appeared to think that advice offered to her by school staff was not worth following. The next day Ms A went to the Faculty to see Academic 1 who said that they would have to wait until the Placement 4 school sent them their report before deciding how to proceed.

11. Ms A said that she went to see Academic 2 on 17 November 2004, six weeks after the termination of Placement 4, to enquire about the report from the Placement 4 school. Academic 3 was not available and so Ms A returned on 19 November 2004 and saw Academic 1 and Academic 2 who told her that they had just received the Placement 4 school's report. They gave Ms A a copy of the report. She was unhappy that it had taken six weeks for the school's report to come in and felt that the Faculty seemed to make no attempt to request it from them. Academic 1 and Academic 2 told Ms A that there would be an SMC on 25 November 2004. Ms A said that she:

'... was told the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the report and for me to make comments. If they agree with my comments they could give

me a pass. Otherwise, I could be asked to do another placement or fail the entire course.'

Prior to the SMC Ms A was given a formal Faculty report on Placement 4 that had been completed by Academic 1. Ms A said that she was surprised to receive it as she believed that Academic 1's visit to Placement 4 was 'entirely informal'. Ms A attended the SMC with a personal representative. Academic 1 and Academic 2 were present, along with a member of Faculty administrative staff who was there to take the minutes. Ms A had been advised previously by Academic 2 '... to bring along any documents I had to support my defence'. She was given an opportunity to discuss what she had brought with her, but she was unhappy that she could not do so uninterrupted and in the order in which she wanted to discuss the issues that her documents raised. During the meeting Ms A's representative indicated that he had been secretly taping the meeting. The Faculty staff brought an end to the meeting at this point. After the meeting Ms A went to the University's Senate Office to hand in a copy of her defence documents to the Senate Assessor, and she:

'... had also written to [the Senate Assessor] accusing [Academic 2], [Academic 1], and [Academic 3] of causing me the problems I was facing.'

In addition to the formal school report, the school appended several pages of notes in relation to Placement 4. The notes stated that in making the request to the school for a placement for Ms A, Academic 1:

'explained that the student required to undertake another placement in order to complete the [teacher training] course. On asking if she would need any additional support he stated that there had been no problems.'

12. Ms A wrote to the Senate Assessor on 29 and 30 November 2004 to express her concerns about the Faculty's behaviour towards her, in particular regarding placement arrangements and the conduct and termination of placements. A Senior Administrative Officer at the University's Senate Office (Officer 1) acknowledged Ms A's letter on 2 December 2004 and said that the Senate Assessor would meet with Ms A and her personal representative once he had considered relevant evidence. On the same day, Academic 2 wrote to Ms A to confirm that the SMC on 25 November 2004 had been terminated due to the revelation of the covert recording of the meeting. Academic 2 drew Ms A's attention to the relevant section of the Guide for Students to the teacher training programme about the situation in which a retrieval placement could be offered, and made it clear that:



'The assessment documentation from [Placement 4] contains fail grades and you therefore have an overall fail recorded for the School Experience part of the Programme. According to Programme regulations you are now entitled to one further school experience placement to allow an attempt at retrieval of this fail grade.'

Academic 2 asked Ms A to confirm whether she wanted to take the retrieval placement, or not to take it and withdraw from the teacher training programme. She also said that if Ms A wanted to take the retrieval placement:

'... we would be pleased to provide additional support sessions in Faculty, in advance of the placement, to address those aspects of the benchmarks which have proved challenging and which have been commented upon in both school and Faculty reports.'

Academic 2 went on to say that Ms A's defence documents were copied to appropriate staff in the Faculty and elsewhere in the University so that her comments would be studied and responded to. A meeting was arranged between Ms A, her personal representative and the Senate Assessor on 22 February 2005. The Senate Assessor considered Ms A's complaint and wrote to her on 7 April 2005 to tell her that he had investigated the matter and that he was not upholding her complaint. The Senate Assessor did note that in relation to Placement 2, the Faculty did not provide Ms A with the full explanation of why the placement was terminated at the SMC on 9 February 2004. He also noted that in relation to Placement 4, the school maintained that they were not aware of Ms A's circumstances (see paragraph 11 and paragraph 13), and that Ms A's description of what occurred during Placement 4 was at variance with the school's description. In concluding, the Senate Assessor said that:

'In a relationship where the Faculty is dependent on schools for student experience and where there is no obligation on the part of the school to provide this, the Faculty is very limited in the authority it can exercise over the schools. I am bound to say that I find the relationship between the Faculties and schools unsatisfactory. This is a matter which should be addressed by a higher authority. The University may not award a qualification where there is no evidence that the required standard has been reached. The remedy you seek of the award of the [teacher training qualification] is therefore not possible. If you wish to continue your studies, following payment of any outstanding fees, the Faculty will provide you with one final retrieval placement.'

13. On 1 April 2005 Officer 1 received a letter from the Head of Education Services at the local authority responsible for the Placement 4 school. The letter said that:

'In relation to the termination of the placement, no guidelines exist as such, beyond those contained in the Faculty handbook. These require schools to contact the Faculty ... if there is a concern about a placement.'

The Head of Education Services also said that:

'In investigating this matter, a number of things have come to light that I think are worth mentioning. I am now given to understand that the reason for the extended placement was that one or more previous placement(s) had broken down. Subsequent to this, the student was on placement in another of our schools in May/June 2004 [Placement 3]. When that school was approached to take an extended placement after the summer break, they declined because their previous experience with the student suggested that she required an abnormally high degree of support. These facts were not known to [the Placement 4 school] when they were approached about the placement. When [the Placement 4 school] agreed to the placement, the [Student] Regent specifically asked if any additional support would be required and was advised that there were no difficulties in relation to this student.'

14. Ms A wrote to Academic 2 on 9 December 2004 to advise that she wanted to appeal against the outcome of Placement 4. The Faculty Secretary (Officer 2) wrote to Ms A on 23 December 2004 outlining the academic appeal procedure and grounds for appeal, and made it clear that she could not appeal against academic judgement. Ms A sent her appeal to the Faculty on 25 February 2005 asking that Placement 4 be considered as successfully completed and that her grounds for appeal in relation to Faculty matters were:

- (i) The support received from the Faculty was inadequate.
- (ii) Throughout the programme, I was singled out and treated differently (in a negative way) from my colleagues.
- (iii) Procedures used by the Faculty both in negotiating a placement and for assessing my performance were unfair.'

Officer 2 wrote to Ms A on 4 March 2005 to confirm that the Appeals Committee, chaired by the Dean of the Faculty (the Dean), would meet in 16 March 2005 to hear her appeal, and that they would take evidence from

Academic 1 and Academic 2 in addition to Ms A. The comments from Academic 2 in relation to Ms A's appeal included a note that Ms A's appeal appeared to cover more than just Placement 4 as had been originally understood. Academic 2 said that Ms A was given more support than other students and that she had been given more time to complete assignments than other students. She went on to say that Ms A was not singled out:

'... but by totally disregarding the time scales and deadlines set out in handbooks and handing things in late [Ms A] put herself in situations where individual treatment became necessary because the rest of the student group had moved on.'

Academic 2 said that because of this, Ms A needed to have placement arrangements which were more complex to organise, but that Faculty staff had done all they could to assist her within normal procedures and that '... [Ms A]'s disagreeing with the grades does not make them unfair'. Academic 1 provided similar comments, and added that as Ms A's tutor he had met with her on six occasions, that Ms A had failed to attend arranged appointments with him on a further six occasions, that he had 'lengthy meetings' with her at Placement 1 and Placement 4 schools, and that there had also been unrecorded ad-hoc meetings and telephone calls. Ms A was unable to attend on 16 March 2005 and so the meeting was rescheduled for 11 April 2005, though Ms A was also unable to attend on this date and so the Appeals Committee exercised their right under the appeal procedures to reach a decision in Ms A's absence. On 25 April 2005 Ms A was sent a letter by the Faculty advising that her academic appeal had been dismissed on the grounds that:

'There was evidence that the Faculty provided significant support during your placement.

There was evidence that the Faculty had made extensive efforts to obtain a placement for you.

Although it was acknowledged that [Placement 4] was terminated before [Academic 1] assessed your performance, it was the view of the Committee that the school and the tutor had sufficient opportunity to assess the standard of teaching you achieved to reach a conclusion without the necessity of the second tutor visit.'

Ms A said that she had:

'... been informed by the Senate that the remedy I sought, which was to have [Placement 4] converted from a fail to a pass is not something that can be done.'

Her solicitors submitted a further appeal but then withdrew it as Ms A was offered the opportunity of another placement in the third term of 2006. Ms A noted that the Senate Assessor had commented on the 'unsatisfactory' relationship between the Faculty and placement schools but did not make any recommendations about how to deal with it, which she felt he should have.

15. The evidence to the appeal also included the record of action to place Ms A in schools. There is no record of action taken after the termination of Placement 1. Following the termination of Placement 2, the record noted that on 13 February 2004 the Placement Administrator (Officer 3):

'Met with [Academic 1] and [Ms A] so that [Ms A] could let me know in order of preference which schools she could travel to ... [Ms A] listed [four schools of six that might be available and rejected two others]. [Academic 1] and I alerted [Ms A] to the fact that it was mid-term break and in-service for schools so it was unlikely that we would have an answer today or tomorrow.'

Officer 3 contacted the four schools in sequence (see paragraph 17) between 13 February 2004 and 24 February 2004 but none could take Ms A, and so Officer 3 tried to contact Ms A on 24 February 2004 to advise her of this. The next day Ms A telephoned Officer 3 who '... asked [Ms A] for her next suggestions on where would be best for her to travel' and Ms A identified her preferred area. Officer 3 contacted four more schools between 25 February 2004 and 8 March 2004 (which included a week's annual leave for Officer 3) but none of them could take Ms A. The record noted that on 8 March 2004:

'[Academic 1] [tele]phoned to say [Ms A] due to come and see him today. [Ms A] did not feel she needed to come to [Faculty]. [Academic 1] met [another Faculty Administrator and Officer 3] to discuss feasibility of [Ms A] commencing placement now as little time left now until Easter – therefore will not satisfy requirements of either term 1 or term 2 remit.'

They asked the Dean for his feedback on their discussion, and his advice was that they should continue seeking a placement. Officer 2 contacted two more schools on 11 March 2004 and 12 March 2004, but neither was able to take Ms A. On 16 March 2004 the Placement 3 school agreed to take Ms A for the third term, but on the same day Officer 3 received a message from the Dean:

'... to say he will write to [Ms A] to attend meeting with [Academic 1, Academic 3 and Academic 2] to discuss options. No more schools to be approached until outcome of this meeting is known.'

Between 31 March 2004 and 20 April 2004 (including school Easter holiday) Academic 3 tried to contact the Placement 3 school to see if they could take Ms A for an earlier placement, the idea being that the Faculty would try to fit in two placements for Ms A before the summer holidays. However, the Placement 3 school were unable to take Ms A earlier and, therefore, Placement 3 went ahead as scheduled.

16. Ms A had an academic assignment that she had been given an extension for, and she handed it in on 21 January 2005. It took a number of weeks for her to get feedback on it from Academic 1, but when she did get feedback she said that Academic 1:

'... was extremely pleasant and was praising my work. Then he asked if he could arrange an appointment with me so that we could go to the library for him to help me with a couple of small points in my assignment.'

17. In response to my enquiries the University provided answers to specific questions, as well as documentary evidence. The University advised me that there were no written agreements between the Faculty and schools, but that a document (the School Experience Handbook) was issued to schools to provide them with details of the remits that placement students were expected to fulfil, as well as the role of the schools and Faculty staff in placement. The University explained that it was the role of the Faculty to arrange placements for students, including alternative placements where necessary. They said that alternative placements could only be accommodated at the very early stages of a placement period. In Ms A's case regarding Placement 1:

'... it would not have been possible for her to complete the required remit by re-starting her placement in another school. It was considered to be in [Ms A's] best interest academically to have a fresh start with her term 2 placement ... [Placement 1] was terminated by the school on 21 November 2003 ... It was not possible to arrange an alternative placement in the time available.'

In relation to Ms A's claim that Academic 1's formal assessment of Placement 4 was based on an informal visit, the University said that Academic 1 followed normal procedures and that:

'The report is not simply a report based on one single observation of the student teaching but on the whole school experience. This was explained to [Ms A] on a number of occasions, particularly at the meeting of 25 November 2004.'

With regard to the relationship between the Faculty and placement schools, the University said that in general the relationship was very positive and that:

'The Scottish Deans of Education meet regularly as a group to discuss common issues and also meet with officers of the Scottish Executive<sup>1</sup> Education Department, Directors of Education and other Local Authority representatives. Because of pressure from the Deans about the difficulties in securing enough school placements for their students, local authorities have appointed Placement Co-ordinators who have oversight of placements in each authority's schools. All placements are now arranged through the Co-ordinators and not directly with individual schools. The new system reflects the willingness of local authorities to work with universities in placing students in schools. There is, however, no formal relationship between the University and any local authority.'

The University also said that the Faculty could not force schools to take placement students as it was a partnership between the schools and the Faculty. In relation to Ms A's assertion that the Faculty should have challenged the school when placements were terminated, in particular Placement 2, the University's view was that:

'The idea of 'challenging' the school to take a student when they feel inadequately resourced to assist does not resonate with this idea of partnership.'

Finally, the University explained the system of how placements were arranged between the Faculty and schools at the time, before the introduction of the local authority Placement Co-ordinators, when:

'... school placements were arranged by telephone call to a School Regent. These had to be done sequentially, one at a time. The Regent had to speak to the head of subject who might not be able to respond until the request had been discussed with colleagues who would share the

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<sup>1</sup> On 3 September 2007 Scottish Ministers formally adopted the title Scottish Government to replace the term Scottish Executive. The latter term is used in this report as it applied at the time of the events to which the report relates.

responsibility of supporting a student. Only when a negative response was received from School 1 could the School Experience administrative assistant contact School 2, and so on. It was not unusual to wait a few days for a response from a school. Under new arrangements introduced this session, we now arrange placements through local authority co-ordinators so a request can be made that applies to a number of schools.'

18. The School Experience document included a note to School Regents that emphasised the importance of partnership, co-operation and mutual support in the provision of teacher training placements, and how grateful the Faculty was to school staff. The document also included guidelines for managing students in schools, which outlined the process for contacting the Faculty if there was a problem with a student, which was noted as being a rare occurrence. The document also noted that '... a student is in a sense a temporary professional colleague ...' and that students had to assume responsibility and '... display an appropriate professional commitment to the school, its staff and particularly the pupils'. The document noted that schools were free to decide what they could or could not offer in terms of placement, and that communication between schools and the Faculty was important, especially where a school was having trouble maintaining an offered placement or where a student was no longer coming to a school. The document also noted that, where possible, at least one of a student's three placements would be near to their home. In relation to the assessment of students, the document said that:

'There will be aggregation of school and tutor reports to form a holistic and balanced judgement of a student's ability and capability in teaching. This aggregation is not mechanistic in nature but is based upon and informed by the professional judgement of tutors and school staff in the light of the evidence available to them. Where students fail in any competence, either in the view of school staff or in the opinion of tutors, the student is deemed to have failed in teaching. Students must satisfy ALL teaching competences.'

The document also included a section on student progress, noting that failure and drop-out rates were low, giving a list of example reasons why a limited number of students had failed in the past, and what schools could do to help students avoid these pitfalls. The document referred to the SMC, the purpose of which was:

'... to assist the student to attain the standards required to satisfactorily complete the course. This may be achieved by putting supportive measures in place, or by taking disciplinary action.'

19. The Guide for Students provided students with information about the teacher training programme, including placement, the Faculty-based elements of the programme, and assessment, from the point of view of what was expected of students. The importance of satisfactory attendance was highlighted, in particular that 'Full attendance is a requirement of all ... courses' and that failure to attend could lead to a student failing the programme. In terms of placement, the document said that:

'Course regulations allow only one opportunity for retrievals or resubmission for each assessed element. It is the responsibility of students to ascertain whether or not they have succeeded in assessment, and to ascertain the details of retrieval.'

It went on to say that:

'School Experience is only possible through agreement with the headteachers and staff of the schools, and you should therefore do everything you can to maintain good relationships ... The Faculty asks that Student Regents who object to anything in a student's appearance or conduct should speak frankly to the student, and if there is no attempt to comply with the advice given, the school is asked to contact the Faculty at once, or in extreme cases, ask the student to return to the Faculty and report to the ... Course Leader.'

The documents included a section about progress on the course, which said that any concerns or problems over progress would be identified quickly, and that it was:

'...the Faculty's policy to ensure that students are not allowed to progress too far in these circumstances without appropriate action being taken.'

The document also said that:

'Students should realise that adverse circumstances cannot result in an assessment being awarded a grade higher than that which it merits. Similarly, a favourable outcome of an appeal will not lead to assessment being upgraded. It will lead possibly to the assessment being regarded as invalid, and the student being allowed another opportunity to take this assessment.'



Support to students was also highlighted as a key area. The Faculty and schools had expectations of students as people who would bring '... substantial qualification and experience to the course', but also acknowledged that the course was intense and demanding and that:

'The policy, ethos and practice of the Faculty encourages you to seek to disclose your difficulties to us. The Faculty offers a variety of support to you as a student ... It also recognises and encourages your right, in the first instance, to seek support from whichever member of staff you would feel most confident in approaching.'

20. Students were also issued with an Assessment Information and Schedule document which gave an outline of assessment purpose and process, as well as specific information on the Faculty based assessment and how placement would be assessed. In terms of placement it said that:

'Both Faculty Tutors and School Tutors assess School Experience. In each block experience the students gather evidence of their classroom and school activity in a file which is a record of work. Tutors and school partners gather evidence for assessment from observation of teaching, from the content of conversations with the student, from conversations with school colleagues and from the file, which is completed by the end of the placement. On the evidence from these sources the school and Faculty tutors write separate reports on each individual student which consist of comments on performance, areas of strength and causes for concern.'

The document made clear that the assessment criteria for placement were matched against the national standard for teacher training in Scotland. The document also emphasised the high standard required to pass the course:

'It is, however, a regulation of the programme that students must pass in every aspect in order to be awarded the [teacher training qualification]. In School Experience, students are not deemed to be fit to practice unless they have passes in every element of the third placement. The developmental nature of the programme allows students opportunities to retrieve fails during the programme, except in the case of fail grades allocated during the Term 3 placement, because lack of time makes it impossible to undertake a retrieval placement before the end of the session. Thus, if a student is given [a fail grade] for any element in placement 1 or 2 they will be called to attend [an SMC]. Advice and

support will be offered for retrieval through progression to the next placements and the student must then overtake all fails in the third placement. If there is a fail in the third placement, ie, a student obtains and [fail grades] in the third placement, then that student is recorded as a fail overall for School Experience and this is passed to the Board of External Examiners. One further opportunity to retrieve is afforded to such students.'

21. I understand from the University that Ms A successfully completed her teacher training and was awarded the qualification on 26 June 2006.

*(a) and (c) Conclusion*

22. It is clear from the evidence Ms C supplied that Ms A felt that she had not been supported or kept informed by the Faculty. In considering her complaints on two occasions, the Senate Assessor was of the view that she had in fact been supported by the Faculty, although he was critical of the Faculty for not providing Ms A timeously with all of the reasons for the termination of Placement 2. In addition, the Appeals Committee dismissed Ms A's appeal and concluded that she had received 'significant support'. There is evidence that the Faculty held at least four SMCs for Ms A, the purpose of which was to support her by identifying problems and providing advice on how to proceed. Academics 1 and 3 provided evidence that they did support Ms A, which is contrary to her account that they did not. It does seem, from evidence supplied by the school and local education authority, in relation to Placement 4, that Academic 1 did not provide information to the school regarding Ms A's situation. After the aborted SMC in November 2004, Academic 1 made it clear to Ms A that the Faculty would provide additional support to her. There is evidence on file of reasonable attempts being made by the Faculty to communicate with Ms A, and of her contacting the Faculty. Given this evidence, and the onus placed on students in the School Experience document that they have responsibilities as aspiring professionals, and in the Guide for Students of the importance of maintaining good relationships with placements schools and their staff, and the professional qualities students should bring to placement, I do not uphold these aspects of Ms A's complaint.

*(b) Conclusion*

23. Ms A claimed that the Faculty did not challenge the behaviour of schools and their decisions to terminate her placements. As the Senate Assessor noted when dealing with Ms A's complaint, her account of what happened on

placement was at variance with the school's account. In terms of challenging any 'behaviours', it would have been difficult for the Faculty to find any independently corroborated evidence to support or disprove either side of the story and, therefore, a clear finding would not have been reached, as was the case with the Senate Assessor's investigations. The Senate Assessor also noted that, given the nature of the arrangements between the Faculty and placement schools, the Faculty had limited authority over what happened in schools and the decisions made by schools. The Placement 4 local authority Head of Education notes that there were no guidelines as such for dealing with termination of placement, but there was information regarding such situations in both the School Experience and Guide for Students documents. The University's view was that, given the nature of partnership, the idea of challenging a school's decision was inappropriate, and that in any case it was rare for schools to have such serious problems with students that a placement would need to be terminated. There is evidence that the termination decisions were discussed between the schools, Ms A and the Faculty, however, given the nature of the relationship between the Faculty and schools in terms of partnership rather than any formal, for example contractual, relationship I am inclined to agree that a challenge would have been inappropriate. On balance, therefore, I do not uphold this aspect of Ms A's complaint.

*(b) Recommendation*

24. Although this aspect of Ms A's complaint has not been upheld, I would encourage the Faculty to reflect on this complaint and consider how best to deal with termination of placements. Although it may be a rare occurrence, it is clear that termination of placements is a distressing time for schools, students and Faculty staff.

*(d) Conclusion*

25. Ms A claimed that an alternative placement was not found in the first term to replace Placement 1, and that an alternative for Placement 2 was not found quickly enough. In terms of Placement 1, the University have said that a placement could not be found quickly enough to be completed before the end of the first term and that, therefore, the decision was taken, in Ms A's best interests, to wait until the second term. Given the dates involved I would agree with this assessment. The first term placement was to be six weeks long, but Placement 1 was terminated with only four weeks of the first term remaining. In relation to finding an alternative placement for Placement 2 in the second term, I disagree with Ms A's assessment that the record of action represented an

inadequate attempt to find a placement. The University have explained why, at that time, placements had to be sought sequentially and that, therefore, much of the time taken to find a placement was as a result of awaiting responses from schools, delays which were not within the Faculty's control. Given the change to local authority Placement Co-ordinators, it should be a quicker process to find alternative placements from now on, where circumstances allow. Given the evidence I do not uphold this aspect of Ms A's complaint.

*(d) Recommendation*

26. Although this aspect of Ms A's complaint has not been upheld, I would encourage the Faculty to reflect on this complaint and consider how best to deal with the need to arrange an alternative placement at short notice.

*(e) Conclusion*

27. Ms A was unhappy that what she understood to be an informal visit to Placement 4 by Academic 1 resulted in a formal report. Having read the report it is clear that it does not focus solely on the visit by Academic 1 and that, as advised by the University, a number of factors were taken into account in its compilation. This is made clear to students in the School Experience and the Assessment Information and Schedule documents. On this basis, I do not uphold this aspect of Ms A's complaint.

*(f) Conclusion*

28. Given the Senate Assessor's comments that he found the relationship between Faculties of Education and placements schools to be unsatisfactory, and given her reported experience, Ms A felt that the University should have taken steps to remedy the problems that the Senate Assessor had identified. The University confirmed that there is no formal written agreement between faculties and schools, that faculties and schools work on a partnership basis and that the Faculty took steps to manage that partnership by way of the School Experience document and contact with individual schools. The University also advised that faculties of education have taken steps to address inadequacies in the relationship with schools in the meetings between Deans, the Scottish Executive/Government and local authorities, and that these meetings had resulted in the creation of the local authority Placement Co-ordinators. My own consideration of the evidence in this case leads me to agree with the Senate Assessor, that the relationship did appear to be unsatisfactory given that at its heart was the training of Scotland's school teachers. However, as this is a national matter, it would be unfair to focus its solution on one institution, and

there is evidence that the Faculty has participated in national discussions on the matter. Therefore, I do not uphold this aspect of Ms A's complaint.

29. The University have accepted the recommendations and will act on them accordingly. The Ombudsman asks that the University notify her when the recommendations have been implemented.

**Explanation of abbreviations used**

Ms C	The complainant, a solicitor
Ms A	The aggrieved, a student
The University	The University of Glasgow
Placement 4	The fourth teacher training placement undertaken by Ms A
Academic 1	A member of academic staff in the Faculty
The Faculty	The part of the University in which Ms A was studying
The Act	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002
Placement 1	The first teacher training placement undertaken by Ms A
Placement 2	The second teacher training placement that was due to be undertaken by Ms A
Academic 2	Another member of academic staff in the Faculty
SMC	Student Monitoring Committee
Academic 3	Another member of academic staff in the Faculty
SRC	Students' Representative Council

Placement 3	The third teacher training placement undertaken by Ms A
Senate Assessor	The Senior Senate Assessor for Student Complaints
Academic 4	Another member of academic staff in the Faculty
Officer 1	A University administrator
Officer 2	A Faculty Secretary
The Dean	The Dean of the Faculty
Officer 3	Another Faculty administrator
The School Experience Handbook	A document issued to schools to provide them with details of remits that placement students were expected to fulfil

**Glossary of terms**

Placement	Periods of time spent by teacher training students in schools to gain practical experience
Student Monitoring Committee	A Faculty Committee, the purpose of which was to assist teacher training students to attain the standards required to satisfactorily complete the course
Probationer Induction Scheme	A guaranteed one-year training placement available to every eligible student graduating with a teaching qualification from one of Scotland's universities
Senate	The senior academic body of the University. Legally and constitutionally Senate is responsible for the academic activity of the University
Student Regent	The Student Regent is the member of staff appointed by a placement school to look after the interests of a student while they are on placement



**List of legislation and policies considered**

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002

University of Glasgow School Experience document 2003/04 (specific to Ms A's teacher training programme)

University of Glasgow Guide for Students 2003/04 (specific to Ms A's teacher training programme)

University of Glasgow Assessment Information and Schedule 2003/04 (specific to Ms A's teacher training programme)

**Pattern of the Course**

**Term 1**

2 days Matriculation and induction

2 weeks in Faculty

**2 weeks serial school placement in school 1**

4 weeks in Faculty

**6 weeks in school 1**

2 days in Faculty

**Term 2**

5 weeks in Faculty

**7 weeks in school 2**

2 weeks in Faculty

**Term 3**

3 weeks in Faculty

**5 weeks in school 3**

2 weeks in Faculty