



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

Submission to the Teaching Council

Draft Framework for Teachers' Learning - Cosán

On behalf of the INTO

4 Nollaig 2015

Introduction

The INTO has long called for a framework for teacher professional development (INTO, 1993; 1994; 2006). Therefore the opportunity to respond to Cosán – a draft framework for teacher professional development, which the Teaching Council has issued for consultation - is welcome. The INTO's submission is informed by the Organisations' previous work on teacher professional development¹, by feedback from discussions at National Committee meetings, and from a consultation process facilitated by the INTO Education Committee.

It is significant the framework has been published at a time when the teaching profession has undergone a series of changes and cuts that have impacted on their morale, including the abolition of qualification allowances. Teachers who undertake Masters' degrees or the Diploma in Special Education no longer receive allowances. It is also regrettable that teachers who currently hold the special education allowance risk losing their allowance on transferring to a new role. The introduction of Croke Park hours has had both a positive and a negative impact on teachers depending on how individual schools organise their hours. The recent cutbacks in education and in teachers' salaries have also had an impact on teacher morale that influences current education policy developments. In introducing a framework for teacher professional development the Teaching Council needs to be sensitive to this context.

The INTO supports the continuum of teacher education, and has argued over the years for an induction programme for all NQTs and comprehensive provision of professional development/in-service education (CPD) for all teachers. The social, cultural and economic contexts in which teachers operate continue to change at a rapid pace highlighting the need for continuing professional development for all teachers throughout their careers. Teaching is considered a complex activity in a constantly changing world. Lifelong learning is increasingly seen as essential.

Teaching has moved towards being a more collaborative profession where teachers are expected to work in collaboration with their colleagues and as part of a team. Relationships with the wider community, such as parents and other professionals have also become a defining aspect of teacher professionalism². The school has become more important as a locus for teacher professional development in recent years. School-based CPD and the development of schools as learning communities has become part of the discourse on CPD³. Other features of current discourse include action research, enquiry-based learning, evidence-based practice, networking, professional conversations, mentoring, coaching, communities of practice, shared practice, reflective practice and accreditation⁴. Developing a framework for teacher CPD should reflect the political, pragmatic and professional dimensions of teachers' work. It is disappointing to note that the literature referred to in Cosán does not include Irish literature

¹ INTO, 1994, 2006, 2014

² Bottery, 2006

³ Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) (2008). Vision for the PPDS. Retrieved on 27 October 2012 from: http://ppds.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=296&Itemid=487

⁴ Day, C. and Sachs, J. (2004). International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers. Berkshire: Open University Press

of relevance to professional development. For example, the work of Ciaran Sugrue, Jim Gleeson, Dympna Devine, Teresa Doherty, Paul Conway and Mark Morgan are worthy of mention. It is also surprising to note the absence of some key authors in the field of teacher professional development such as Christopher Day, Marilyn Cochran Smith, John MacBeath and Judyth Sachs.

Engaging in professional development throughout one's career is an integral part of being a teacher. There is strong support among teachers for the principle that professional development is both a right and responsibility of teachers and that teachers are on a learning journey throughout their career. The development of a framework for teacher professional development needs to incorporate all dimensions of teacher professional development, such as definitions and understanding of professional development, how system, school and individual needs are met, and how engagement in professional development is supported at school and system level. A framework without a supporting infrastructure will do little to enhance teachers' engagement with ongoing professional development.

A framework has to offer more than an affirmation of the value of teachers' learning and more than an acknowledgement of the full range of learning activities teachers undertake. The purpose of a framework for CPD, should be to act as an enabler of teacher professional development, outlining a vision, encompassing system, school and individual needs, inclusive of a variety of models of CPD and addressing the issues of accreditation, incentives and time. A framework should enable priorities to be decided at system level, and at school and individual levels. The appropriate structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level should be evident in the framework.

Elements of Cosán

Values

The INTO acknowledges that Cosán takes a broad view of teacher professional development. It is right that Cosán acknowledges teachers' commitment and contribution to their own professional development. The INTO supports the values underpinning Cosán. Teacher professional development should be of high quality, accessible to all teachers, and relevant to their work as teachers. Teachers' professional autonomy to identify and determine their own professional development journeys is a core principle of teacher professional development and is acknowledged in Cosán. The INTO welcomes the recognition within Cosán of the need for time for teachers, both individually and collectively, to engage in professional development and the support for sabbaticals and other forms of leave for teachers. Teachers support the need for their engagement in professional development to be acknowledged through accreditation. The impact of teachers' engagement in professional development must be interpreted broadly. The focus of professional development varies. Sometimes the objective may be to influence practice in classrooms or to deepen teachers' understandings of education policy or curriculum, while at other times the focus may be on teacher well-being.

Standards

While the broad thrust of the professional standards underpinning the framework is positive, there are difficulties around how such standards can be demonstrated. There is a risk that indicators of good practice could narrow the focus of teaching to demonstrating measurable outcomes, which may undermine the complexity of teaching. Good practice is contextual, therefore schools should have the autonomy to determine what good practice is in their own contexts.

Learning Dimensions

Cosán captures to some extent the different dimensions of teachers' learning – formal and informal; personal and professional; collaborative and individual; and school-based and external dimensions. However, there are other dimensions of teacher learning and professional development such as lecturing in colleges, travel, exchanges, research, post-graduate study, professional reading, publication of articles, professional networking, e-twinning, and union activity.

Learning Priorities

There is some support among teachers for the priority learning areas identified in Cosán, however, priorities for individual teachers and individual schools are numerous and varied. It is the view of the INTO that a framework should not include priorities for teacher professional development. Priorities will vary, depending on what national initiatives may be in place, where teachers are in terms of their career stage, and what individual teachers' strengths and weakness are. A framework for teacher professional development should enable the prioritisation of particular areas for professional development, but should not include specific priorities. National and system priorities change to meet policy demands, such as the introduction of the revised language curriculum, while school and individual priorities are particular to the schools and individuals concerned. For example, teacher well-being is very important but teachers will differ regarding what sustains and promotes their well-being. Teacher's needs will differ depending on their context, with some teachers requiring professional development in manual handling or restraint techniques, while others require support with developing emotional intelligence, the arts or PE, for example. A framework should be about enabling all dimensions of professional development to be facilitated rather than identifying particular priorities. Identifying priorities in a framework undermines the principle of professional autonomy.

Recording Professional Development

The broad positive understandings of teacher professional development outlined in Cosán must not be undermined by unnecessary demands for paperwork or bureaucratic recording processes. While keeping a record of teachers' engagement in professional development may be desirable, there is a fear that a necessity to keep records may add to the bureaucracy of the system which creates an unnecessary additional workload for teachers.

The keeping of portfolios, including e-portfolios, may be useful for keeping a record of professional development. Given that all NQTs in future will have commenced a portfolio

during their student teacher years, this same portfolio should remain with them through induction and throughout their career, and include their planning and their professional development. Teachers could keep a portfolio recording their participation in formal professional development where certificates of attendance / engagement are provided. For example, many courses in education centres, INTO education conferences and seminars and post-graduate courses provide certificates which teachers could keep in a portfolio. It should be a matter for teachers whether they keep hard copy or electronic portfolios. However, the Teaching Council needs to proceed sensitively regarding the issues of portfolios as this is a new concept for practising teachers who are wary of any potential increase in workload. Teachers' records of their professional development should be for their own use and not for inspection externally. Teachers should keep a record of their own professional development, particularly their formal engagement in courses, seminars and conferences. Availability of a simple and straightforward template for this purpose would be of assistance to teachers for their personal use.

However, recording engagement in more informal professional development such as professional conversations or staff development events is more problematic. The INTO is of the view that teachers should be trusted to engage in informal professional development at school level without having to formally record their engagement. At present, teachers share feedback and ideas arising from engagement in professional development informally. Professional conversations do not lend themselves to formal processes of recording or feedback. Professional conversations, by their nature, can be picked up and left off, as teachers continue conversations over time. There is no need, in this area, for formal recording processes, whether online or paper-based.

There should no obligation on teachers to record their engagement in professional development or to give feedback to colleagues whether online or otherwise. Teachers should be encouraged to share their experiences of their professional development, but it may not always be useful to share or record such experiences.

Teachers fear that suggestions that they should gather evidence of the impact of CPD on their practice will create an additional workload and is not necessary. Teachers are already engaged in a process of school self-evaluation. There is no need, therefore, to demand that teachers engage in additional processes of evidence-gathering. As part of the process of SSE teachers identify professional development needs and seek to meet needs identified.

While it may appear to be a positive proposal to provide an online tool to support teachers' evidence-gathering, reflection and sharing of professional learning, this proposal has the potential to become a negative imposition on teachers' valuable time. It could also be seen by teachers as a mechanism to take away their professional autonomy, a clear principle of the draft framework. It is unclear what resources are required to support professional conversations among teachers. Professional conversations are currently an integral part of teachers' professional development. Teachers also appreciate professional development designed and facilitated by other teachers.

Given the poor reliability of broadband across primary schools, there is not much scope at present to use ICT to record teacher professional development. However, whatever system emerges it must not be a bureaucratic time-consuming exercise that creates additional workload for teachers or leads to a compliance culture of ticking boxes with no benefit.

Functions of CPD

Teachers' engagement in professional development is about enhancing their work as teachers and about their well-being. While it may be important that the Teaching Council can assure the public that teachers engage in professional development of high quality, this is not the main priority for teachers.

The impact of teachers' engagement in professional development is not always evident in the short-term. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect a measurable outcome each time teachers engage in professional development. To expect measurable outcomes from teachers' engagement in CPD is to misunderstand CPD and reflects an instrumental approach to teacher professional development. Engagement in CPD informs teachers' work in many different ways, including practice in the classroom, advocacy on behalf of their pupils, teacher well-being and policy development.

Teachers are supportive of the principle that they should reflect on their practice but are also clear that reflection should not be confined to the technical aspects of their practice and should include an ability to reflect critically on educational policy. Teachers' work is broader than the implementation of curriculum.

Accreditation of Courses

It is not clear what function the Teaching Council will have in relation to the accreditation of courses and programmes for teacher professional development. At present, quality assurance of summer courses for primary teachers is carried out through the auspices of Drumcondra Education Centre. Academic accreditation is provided for post-graduate study in colleges and universities. Academic study should continue to be recognised as valid professional development. Should the Teaching Council decide that all courses and programmes to be undertaken by teachers should be accredited by the Teaching Council, this will be a time-consuming process, as there are a variety of professional development events. The criteria suggested in Cosán for accrediting professional development courses and programmes are wide ranging. However, not all criteria may apply to every course or programme. Accrediting informal professional development is problematic. Requiring documentation of such professional development is contrary to the informal nature of the learning context, creating unnecessary bureaucracy, and is likely to impact on teachers' willingness to engage in such activities. Further discussion is required in the area of accreditation but the INTO is clear that the establishment of a complex system which requires substantial resourcing would be wasteful and counter-productive. The INTO is willing to enter formal discussions with the Teaching Council regarding the accreditation of INTO professional development courses, seminars and conferences.

Action Research Phase

The INTO supports the proposal that teachers should inform the evolution of the framework of professional development once agreed. However, the proposed action research phase appears to be limited to aspects of a professional development framework, such as indicators of good practice and tools to assist reflection. A framework should be explored in its entirety and adjusted based on feedback and experience. If it is decided that indicators of good practice are worthy of development teacher input is vital, though indicators would need to be flexible enough to reflect all contexts. Indicators of good practice can be useful, but should not be narrow or lead to one view of good teaching. An action research phase could also determine whether such a tool is useful. The INTO recommends that the framework should remain a work in progress, while all dimensions of the framework are explored and developed. At present, there are dimensions of professional development that are missing from Cosán.

The role of the Department of Education and Science in a framework for teacher professional development needs to be more prominent. The State has a responsibility to ensure high quality teacher education, through ensuring adequate funding and appropriate support structures. An agreed proportion of the annual education budget should be earmarked for CPD, in line with best practice. Even though issues such as incentives were mentioned in the initial consultation process, the role of incentives to support teacher professional development is missing from Cosán. The role and function of national support programmes such as the PDST are not explored in Cosán though such services play a key role in professional development for teachers. The relationships and interactions between various stakeholders, such as colleges and university schools of education, teacher unions, and education centres, regarding teacher professional development is insufficiently developed in Cosán. How a professional development framework should build on initial teacher education and induction is not clearly articulated in Cosán.

A framework for teacher professional development also needs to make specific references to school leadership, and in particular, the professional development needs of principal and deputy principal teachers. Professional development for school leaders should address the needs of teachers who wish to take on leadership roles, the needs of newly appointed principal and deputy principal teachers and the ongoing professional development needs of principal and deputy principal teachers. How the framework relates to the Centre for School Leadership, and future of existing professional development programmes such as Tóraíocht and Misneach needs to be addressed in the framework.

Primary teachers have a strong sense of professionalism. They often engage in professional development in their own time, whether during the summer, during term time or at weekends. Incentives to support teachers' engagement in professional development play an important role. The INTO supports the retention of EPV days for participation in summer courses and recommends that EPV days be available to teachers who participate in term time courses. The INTO recommends that sabbatical leave be available to all teachers after ten years of teaching to facilitate teachers to engage with education-related projects either in Ireland or abroad. The INTO supports the retention and expansion of the refund of fees scheme to reimburse teachers' costs associated with engaging in further study and suggests that the Teaching

Council consider awarding grants and bursaries for further research and post-graduate study. Teachers should be released from teaching duties to facilitate their engagement in collaborative planning and professional conversations. Release time should also be available to teachers engaged in action research projects. Budgets should be available to boards of management to facilitate staff development. Substitute cover should be available also to enable teachers to attend courses and professional development events that occur during the school day. A proportion of the education budget should be earmarked for teacher professional development.

Conclusion

Teachers should be trusted to engage in professional development as their needs dictate, whether informally at school level with colleagues or through more formal engagement at whole school level, through courses, seminars and programmes or through accredited qualifications. Teachers, in general, identify with the concept of professional development rather than professional learning.

The INTO endorses the view that teachers should maintain their professional knowledge and understanding to ensure that it remains current and that they should avail of opportunities for career-long professional development. The system should ensure the support structure is there to facilitate teachers' engagement in professional development. Teachers need space, time and resources, not measurement, to support their engagement in ongoing professional development.

The INTO is of the view that it is counter-productive to require a set minimum amount of professional development. Teachers should be trusted to engage in professional development as required. A mandatory requirement could lead to a box-ticking exercise to ensure compliance with regulations at the expense of teacher goodwill which underpins much of teachers' current engagement in ongoing professional development.

Professional development should be supported by the system. Where there is a requirement to engage in professional development related to system change, such professional development should be within school time and at no cost to the teacher. As stated in Cosán it is the State's responsibility to provide sufficient funding to ensure high quality teacher education across the continuum. In summary,

- Engaging in professional development throughout one's career is an integral part of being a teacher.
- The appropriate structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level to support professional development should be evident in the framework. A framework should also identify the role of incentives and supports for teachers to engage in CPD.
- Teachers' professional autonomy to identify and determine their own professional development journeys is a core principle of teacher professional development.

- A framework should be about enabling all dimensions of professional development to be facilitated rather than identifying particular priorities.
- The keeping of portfolios, including e-portfolios, may be useful for keeping a record of professional development. Portfolios commenced by NQTs during their student teacher years, should remain with them through induction and throughout their career, and include their planning and their professional development.
- The impact of teachers' engagement in professional development is not always evident in the short-term.
- Teacher reflection should not be confined to the technical aspects of practice and should include an ability to reflect critically on educational policy.
- A framework needs to articulate the role of various agencies in teacher professional development, such as the DES, teacher unions, colleges and university schools of education, education centres and national support services.
- INTO professional development courses, seminars and conferences should be recognised as valuable and valid professional development for teachers.

It is sufficient to state that teachers should engage with professional development as an integral part of being a teacher. The what, the how and the when should primarily be a matter for individual teachers and their schools. Being passionate and enthusiastic about their work in the classroom is more important than meeting bureaucratic requirements associated with recording.