

A new Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018

Submission from the Teaching Council

8 June 2016

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta



The Teaching Council

Teaching Council submission on a new Strategy for Education and Skills 2016 - 2018

The Council welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the development of a new Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018. This consultation process builds on the ongoing engagement with statutory bodies which the Department has been leading for the past few years, which has been designed to enhance co-ordination, planning and communication between the Department and the bodies.

For the purposes of this submission, the Council notes the emphasis placed by the new Government on making people's lives better, and on the capacity of schools, through teachers, to improve society.

These priorities speak to the overarching imperative for education as a public good to facilitate learning and wellbeing in collaboration with other disciplines, and to support and drive innovation which enhances social and economic progress.

The focus on the learning needs of children, young people and adult learners is a welcome reminder of how teaching does not occur until others have learned. If the full vision for teaching and learning as drivers of innovation is to be realised, teachers should be acknowledged as learners too. This is the hallmark of any profession – the pursuit of ongoing improvement supported by ongoing learning – and it is especially empowering and important in the case of teachers.

Goals and values

The emphasis on learners and learning in the current Statement of Strategy is welcome and should be maintained. **Given that learning cannot happen without good teaching, an equally strong emphasis on the importance of quality teaching would deliver a clear message to all stakeholders in education of how teaching and learning are the core dynamics that drive everything else in our education system.** Without quality teaching and learning, we would not have a functioning education system.

We note the question posed in the consultation as to how success can best be measured. The recent report by the Centre for Effective Services, *Implementing Public Sector Reform: Messages from the literature (2016)*, highlights the importance of another question – how can learning be most effectively shared across the public sector so that reform implementation continues to improve? This in turn raises the question of description of impact and outcomes, and of the reasons for same, being at least equally important as measuring outputs. We suggest that the Strategy would include such questions in whatever framework is adopted for assessing progress.

Promoting excellence and innovation in schools

The Council notes excellence and innovation in schools as one of the education priorities of the new Government. FÉILTE (the Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence) has now become an established feature of the Irish education calendar. We host this event on the first Saturday of every October to mark UNESCO World Teachers' Day (5 October). FÉILTE is a celebration and showcasing of the innovation in learning which teachers are already leading. It has grown from a

single lecture with an attendance of 150 in 2012 to a national showcase event for both the profession and the public with an attendance of 1,000 last year.

The event now includes a Researchmeet where teachers who are engaged in research have presented their findings to the public and their peers. In the interests of supporting a research-informed profession, FÉILTE also includes Rang Bianca. This space, named in honour of teacher and researcher Bianca Ní Ghrógáin who passed away in 2015, is a space where teachers who have an idea they would like to pursue can get support, guidance and advice from teachers, teacher educators and other experts.

There has been much feedback from teachers to broaden FÉILTE beyond Dublin. Inspired by the example of Kinsale Community School, the Council has launched FÉILTE Scoile on a pilot basis this year. If schools fulfil a small number of criteria for an event they are running to support and celebrate professional learning, they can avail of the *FÉILTE Scoile* logo.

The previous Minister announced at last year's event that she would like to see how greater recognition could be given through FÉILTE for teachers' leadership of innovation. The Council would be happy to explore this further with the Department.

Professional standards supporting quality teaching and learning

- 1. Given that teaching and learning are the core dynamics that drive everything else in the education system, we believe that the new Strategy should set out clearly how professional standards will be maintained and enhanced in teaching and learning over the next three years.**
2. Such a section could reference the following strategic goals as outlined by Council in its current Strategic Plan 2015-2017:
 - a. A culture of shared learning in the teaching profession
 - b. Maintaining and enhancing standards at all phases of teacher education
 - c. Establishing and implementing a national framework for teachers' learning (CPD)
 - d. Establishing Fitness to Teach.
3. In referencing these goals, the Strategy could have regard to the work of the Council in the following areas, which all have the aim of underpinning and enhancing standards of teaching at all levels in our school system:
 - a. *Entry criteria to programmes of Initial Teacher Education*
 - i. Advice has been submitted to the Department on this matter. A key issue that this report has highlighted is how best to enhance diversity in the teaching profession.
 - b. *Review and accreditation of programmes of Initial Teacher Education.*
 - i. 70 programmes of teacher education have been reviewed and accredited in the past few years. Many programmes will fall due for review during the

lifetime of the Strategy. This will be the first review where graduates have emerged from the programmes to teach in our schools.

ii. School placement

1. An enhanced school placement component is a particular feature of the new ITE programmes and, in particular, the development of a partnership approach between Higher Education Institutions and schools. Much progress has been made towards the development of that partnership approach. Based on engagement with the Higher Education Authority, the Council has identified the need for a forum that includes all HEIs providing programmes of ITE in Ireland, and a clear, time bound commitment to agreeing practical measures, including a national IT-based system, that will enhance the school placement experience for all parties to the process.
2. All support for school placement has the potential to have three-way impact – the co-operating teacher(s) in the school, the student teacher and the placement tutor in or on behalf of the HEI.

c. Registration Standards

- i. The Council is incrementally developing the standards to be met by applicants wishing to register and to renew registration. This includes meeting enhanced qualification requirements and assessment for suitability of applicants and teachers as ‘fit and proper’ persons to teach. It also includes careful monitoring by the Council of the completion of registration conditions within specified time-frames.

d. Induction

- i. The Council’s integrated induction framework, Droichead, is set to be the only pathway for the induction of newly qualified teachers by 2018. This is subject to the necessary resources and supporting actions. Research by the ESRI indicates that it is a major step forward in terms of successful integration of new teachers into teaching in the school environment.

e. Teachers’ learning (CPD)

- i. Cosán is the new national framework for teachers’ learning. The period of the next Strategy of the Department will see significant progress in the development process for the implementation of Cosán as a statutory framework for acknowledging teachers’ learning.

f. Teacher supply

- i. Advice has been submitted by the Council to the Minister on this matter. It is clear that further research is needed to establish a soundly based teacher supply and demand planning system which will help ensure that appropriately qualified teachers are available to the school system. A strategic goal of developing such a planning system is warranted.

g. Fitness to Teach

- i. The commencement of Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act by 29 June 2016 will be an important signal that there will be a forum for investigating complaints against teachers which are of a more serious and professional nature. It is suggested that the proposed replacement of the existing and unused school grievance procedures as set out in Section 28 of the Education Act, 1998, with a 'Charter for Schools' would be identified as a key goal.

- h. *Research*

- i. The Council has been working closely with the NCCA and the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on the Research Alive! initiative since autumn 2012. The Council intends to launch its research bursary scheme in the first half of 2017. Usage of the free EBSCO Education Source research collection continues to increase. An acknowledgement of the importance of supporting a research-informed teaching profession in the new Strategy would be very welcome.

- i. *Innovation*

- i. FÉILTE (the Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence) is now established in the Irish education calendar as the annual showcasing of teachers' innovation in leading learning. It is held each year to mark World Teachers' Day (5 October).

- 4. In addition, **teaching and learning should be explicitly mentioned throughout the new Strategy.** These are the core dynamics that drive everything else in our education system. Ongoing improvements in these areas will lead to better ways of working and better outcomes.

- 5. **Teachers should be acknowledged as learners, as well as leaders of learning.** In fact, the Council's work is based on the idea that all teachers are leaders of learning. A more distributed model of professional leadership will ultimately be more sustainable, from a wellbeing point of view.

- a. *In March 2016, the Council approved Droichead, the new integrated induction framework.*

- i. We are working on the basis of a three year growth phrase. In the current climate, this will be an ambitious goal. The importance of enhanced collaboration and communication between the Department and the Council to progress this policy over the next three years cannot be overstated. Council's position is that Droichead will be the new enhanced route of induction for all NQTs by the 2018/2019 school year.

- b. *We note the reference to "local education clusters" in the Programme for Government.*

- i. As part of the growth phase of Droichead, the Council has decided to make a Shared Learning Bursary available to all schools during the first year of the growth phase. Schools will receive up to €500 each to support their professional learning as part of the Droichead process, where they cluster

with other schools. Each cluster will receive a maximum of €2,000, regardless of the number of schools.

- c. *We welcome the commitment to invest in additional continuous professional development for teachers.*
 - i. Cosán, the recently approved national framework for teachers' learning, offers a clear and helpful context in which the recognition of this learning can occur. The next three years will see a substantial evolution in putting a teachers' learning framework in place.
6. In the spirit of collaboration and communication led by the Department over the past few years, **the Council believes that we can all do more to enhance the consistency of language across policy documents.** Based on consultation with over 5,000 teachers between late 2014 and late 2015, we are using the term *teachers' learning* instead of continuous professional development. *Teachers' learning* more accurately captures the full breadth and depth of professional learning that teachers engage with. We would welcome reflection of this language in the new Strategy.
7. In the last quarter of 2015, **the Council submitted advice and reports to the Department on two separate but equally important areas – teacher supply and entry criteria.** We look forward to the publication of both reports as soon as possible, especially in relation to teacher supply, so that further progress can be made in these areas. The report on entry criteria highlights the need to look at the issue of diversity in the teaching profession, while the report on teacher supply indicates that further ongoing work will be essential if the State is to develop a fit for purpose teacher supply and demand planning model.
8. **The Council notes the statement by the previous Minister for Education and Skills that Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act will be commenced by 29 June 2016.** We have been ready for this process for some time and are now completing the final stage preparations in anticipation of this date. We would reiterate the view that we have previously expressed to the Department in relation to Section 28 of the Education Act 1998. Procedures should be established under this section as a priority matter to allow for grievance procedures to be dealt with at a local level under a statutory regime.
9. **Further Education**
 - a. The Council engages with a range of education stakeholders on an ongoing basis, to support a coherent and sustainable approach to policy development and implementation. In that context, we are continuing to engage with Solas, ETBI, and others in relation to the Further Education sector, its position in the continuum of education, and the Council's role in relation to same. We would welcome an opportunity to engage with the Department and the aforementioned agencies on this matter as part of the three year Strategy, so as to clarify our respective roles in the sector and how we can most effectively work together.