Continuing Professional Development for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education

Early Childhood Education

In the main, continuing professional development for staff in childcare settings is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) through the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs). The funding facilitates a broad range of activities in support of the development of the established workforce in ECCE. These include short professional practice courses (e.g., First Aid training, Child Protection), training seminars and accredited training programmes. In addition, a number of membership organisations and special interest groups offer courses in a range of areas including Irish language education, working with gifted children and special educational needs training.

School Education

The Department of Education and Skills has a wide range of support structures in place across the primary and post primary sectors to enable teachers to meet the ever-evolving needs of the education sector and to support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning generally. A national network of Education Centres is supported and appropriate groups, bodies and institutions are empowered to design, develop and deliver Continuing Professional development (CPD) programmes from which teachers can select courses appropriate to their needs. While it is not yet mandatory for teachers to attend CPD events run by these bodies, they are encouraged to attend and there is no charge for events provided by DES funded support services e.g. Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Project Maths, Special Education Support Service (SESS), Junior Cycle for Teachers [1], Centre for School Leadership [2] etc. Places on limited numbers of specialised post graduate programmes are available in some targeted areas i.e., SEN and maths.

As well as focusing on curriculum changes, continuing professional development programmes for teachers provide support for teachers and schools across a range of other areas including teaching methodologies, special educational needs, literacy and numeracy, leadership development, induction, substance misuse prevention, child protection, school self-evaluation and curricular support. Teachers can access these supports by responding to invitations from service providers, by identifying areas for support and requesting same through their school principal, or by using telephone or online support where available.

On 20th March, 2017 three support services:

- Special Education Support Service (SESS);
- National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS);
• Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Children who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VTHVI);

transferred from the DES to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and joined with the services already being provided by NCSE’s SENO’s and administrative staff to form a new NCSE Support Service. This new service aims to develop schools’ capacity to include students with special educational needs and to promote a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive and responsive.

From March 2017, the NCSE has responsibility for

• Providing CPD and support for teachers in the area of special educational needs (SEN) to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to SEN provision (formerly provided through the SESS - see below);
• Providing support and expertise to partner schools on issues related to behaviour (formerly provided through the NBSS);
• Supporting the introduction of the new model of resource teaching allocation to schools and to develop capacity to meet the needs of students with SEN.

Previously, the role of the SESS was to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinated, developed and delivered a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

The **Summer Course Programme** is a very substantial element in the professional development of primary teachers. The summer courses provided are wide-ranging and include professional development opportunities for teachers in topics related to each curriculum area, special education, teaching approaches and methodologies, and many aspects of school organisation, management and leadership. A key component in assuring quality in the Summer Course Programme relates to the approval of applications process. In an effort to ensure optimal quality in the summer course programme, the summer course criteria and application forms for face-to-face and online courses are subject to ongoing review based on feedback received.

Recent legislative changes provide an enabling mechanism for the Teaching Council to require teachers to participate in CPD in order to renew their registration in the future.

**Organisational Aspects**

**Early Childhood Education**

Participation in continuing professional development courses is voluntary. It is a stated policy aim that flexible education and training options will be progressed, allied with a focus on addressing barriers to participation of those in the workplace in ongoing education and training. Work-based learning has been identified within the ECCE sector as a valuable mechanism for overcoming barriers to access. The work of FAS/Solas in this area has enhanced the availability of work-based training options for the workforce.

**School Education**

Prior to 1998, there was no legislative framework relating to duties of provision, or rights of entitlement to CPD. What was available emerged in response to obvious needs in a changing education system, and a strong voluntary dimension has existed with regard to availing of CPD.
However, in the case of new national curricula and syllabi, where CPD is organized during school time teachers are expected to attend. The great majority of teachers participate in some form of CPD. To their credit, significant numbers also undertake long-duration certificated courses, on a part-time basis, largely at their own expense.

The Education Act, 1998, provides for professional development in sections dealing with the functions of the Minister for Education (Part I, 7.), Schools (Part II, 9) Inspectorate (Part VII, 41). A function of the Minister is to provide funding for support services to schools and Education Centres. The school is required to make resources available for staff development needs. A function of the Inspectorate is to advise teachers and boards of management in respect of the performance of their duties and, in particular, assist teachers in employing improved methods of teaching and conducting classes. The principal is required, with the support of the staff and board of management, to provide a school environment that promotes professional development of the teachers. The NCCA is obliged to review the in-service training needs of teachers ..., and to advise the Minister in relation to those needs.

There are many other functions of the NCCA in relation to curriculum planning, design, evaluation and research that also directly involve teachers and, as such, will contribute towards their professional development.

Part of the remit of the Teaching Council is to promote the professional development of teachers. When the relevant section of the Act is commenced, the Council will be required to conduct research into the continuing education and professional development of teachers ... and promote awareness among the public and the teaching profession of the benefits of continuing education and training. The Council will be required to review and accredit in-service courses, and to perform other functions in relation to CPD, as advised by the Minister.

An In-career Development Unit (ICDU), established within the Department of Education and Skills in 1994, was the main co-ordinating and decision-making body regarding state supported in-service provision. The Unit has since been superseded by the Teacher Education Section (TES). It determines priorities in the allocation of available State funds for in-service development and the methods of delivery. TES coordinates the resourcing of state provision for teacher education for primary and post-primary teachers at local and national level and, in doing so, seeks the maximum involvement of teacher and managerial bodies, the NCCA, Education Centres and others. The latest CPD service is the PDST, which combines the roles of former sectoral services such as PCSP, SDPS, SDPI, SLSS, NCTE, SPHE and STDL Gaelilge. The PDST is key to the delivery of CPD and support to teachers in schools. With effect from 1st June 2012, the role and functions of the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) come under the remit of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). This service is managed by Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC).

PDST comprises the following teams to support teachers in line with DES strategies and ongoing curricular reform: Literacy, Numeracy, Leadership, Health and Well-Being, Languages, Technology in Education, Post Primary STEM, Business and Enterprise, Transition Year and LCVP, Post Primary Literacy, LCA, JCSP, Cultural and Environmental. Currently, the main priority areas for support for these teams are: Child Protection - Children First for primary and post primary schools, revised Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes; School Self Evaluation (SSE), Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Health and Well-Being in the context of the curriculum and also the overarching framework of Healthy Ireland, Primary Language Curriculum, Gaeilge, Introduction of Politics and Society at senior cycle and Digital Strategy. This programme is administered by Dublin West Education Centre.

The National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) [3] provides support and expertise to post-primary schools experiencing difficulty coping with persistent and serious student disruption. The Special Education Support Service (SESS) [4] provides a range of supports for school personnel working with students (primary and post-primary) with special educational needs.
Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) is a dedicated continuing professional development (CPD) support service of the DES established to support schools in their implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) through the provision of appropriate high quality CPD for school leaders and teachers, and the provision of effective teaching and learning resources.

Supervision for Guidance Counsellors [5] offers guidance counsellors peer professional support facilitated by supervisors and an opportunity to access continuing professional development.

The Centre for School Leadership (CSL), located in Clare Education Centre, involving the Department, IPPN and NAPD, has been established on a partnership basis for an initial 3-year pilot period. DES has committed to an investment of €3m for this pilot. The Centre is staffed by three experienced school principals who are on secondment from their schools. The partnership will have many benefits for the profession in terms of the quality of training programmes, coordination of provision, and increased accessibility. This represents a new departure and presents a unique opportunity for the development of a coherent continuum of professional development for school leaders. It is the shared objective that the Centre will become a centre of excellence for school leadership and the lead provider of supports. The CSL’s responsibility extends across the continuum of leadership development commencing with pre-appointment training through to induction of newly appointed principals to continuous professional development throughout the leader’s career. The Centre will also advise the DES on policy in this area. During the initial phase, the Centre will have a particular focus on the needs of newly appointed principals and experienced principals experiencing professional difficulty and/or challenging situations.

Over 400 teachers are currently enrolled in the new postgraduate diploma in school leadership (Level 9). The course is part-funded by the DES. The coaching service for school leaders was launched at the end of January, 2017 with capacity annually for up to 400 principals. Every newly appointed principal in a primary or post-primary school has access to a trained CSL mentor since September 2017. A total of 400 experienced principals have now trained as mentors.

The Teacher Professional Network Scheme (TPN) [6] is a teacher organisation which affords professional peer support to members.

As well as offering certified continuing professional development courses, the universities and colleges of education also provide various shorter, non-certificate courses, and some engage in research and development courses with clusters of schools in their vicinity, with a strong professional development dimension. Staff, from these institutions, also contribute to the CPD activities of schools and other educational organisations.

A range of other agencies offer CPD programmes of various types. These include teacher unions and school management/trustee bodies such as the JMB, the ETBI, the ACCS, the NAPD and the IPPN. At post-primary level subject associations have been active in CPD activities for their members, e.g. geography teachers' association, science teachers' association, etc.

There is a great range of curriculum variation in the types of CPD, in line with the needs of a fast-changing education system. School curriculum reform has been, and continues to be a core concern of the professional development activities which are provided.

The incorporation of ICT in teaching, learning and administration of schools has been an important government concern over recent years. Significant investment has been made in equipping schools for ICT purposes, and a range of short, medium and long-term CPD courses have been made available to teachers by a variety of providers.
School leadership is another area that has been very much targeted for CPD support. It is realised that school leaders face increasingly complex challenges and require assistance and guidance. Whole-school planning is also a national policy concern and guidance on good practice planning procedures has been much in evidence.

The duration of courses varies a great deal linked to the theme, purpose and outcomes of the provision. Many courses are of relatively short duration, 2/3 hour, one-day, three-day, one week. Others are conducted over a longer period, and can sometimes be punctuated over time. Many courses have no formal credits or certification attached to them. Their purpose is to update, re-skill, and re-energise teachers. Increasingly, there is an emphasis on school-based CPD, and the cultivation of a cluster approach between staff in local schools. While teacher substitution may occasionally be possible, it is inevitable that a heavy reliance is placed on teacher participation in out-of-school time. Traditionally, a very popular period for primary teacher CPD has been during the summer holiday period, most notably the first week of July, the beginning of the vacation period, for which teachers may be allowed three days compensatory leave during the following school year. Certificated courses in colleges and universities, by their nature, are of long duration, the majority being of one or two years. These courses allow teachers to develop a specialisation. Graduate teachers frequently become providers/facilitators of CPD for their own colleagues.

Evaluation instruments form part of all DES-supported courses and are monitored accordingly. On occasion, inspectors visit courses to contribute their support and provide feedback on the quality of provision.

**Incentives for Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Activities**

**Early Childhood Education**

Early Start childcare workers who attend an approved summer course in the area of early childhood education which is directly relevant to their work in Early Start may, subject to the consent of their schools’ Boards of Management, avail of three extra personal vacation (EPV) days during the subsequent school year.

Individual early childhood care and education settings may also decide to offer their staff incentives to undertake CPD activities.

**School Education**

Teacher CPD is mainly voluntary, providing for teachers who wish to up-skill and keep their skill set up to date. Where there is a curriculum change which necessitates CPD it may be viewed as mandatory although teachers cannot be directed to attend. Travel and subsistence are reimbursed according to Department rates and substitution may be provided depending on the course.

Certificates of attendance are provided in most cases, for example, to newly qualified teachers for attendance at workshops and also to primary teachers who attend 20 hour summer courses.

When the relevant functions of the Teaching Council Act are commenced, the Teaching Council intends to develop on a framework linking regular teacher CPD to registration. This may mean that teachers would need to complete a set amount of CPD per year to remain registered with the Teaching Council.

The [Teaching Council’s Code of Professional Conduct](#) sets out the standards of professional...
knowledge, skill, competence and conduct which are expected of registered teachers and states that
the teacher should take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by:

- Actively maintaining their professional knowledge and understanding to ensure it is current;
- Reflecting on and critically evaluating their professional practice, in light of their professional knowledge base;
- Availing of opportunities for career-long professional development.

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