



Droichead: Quality Assurance Report

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An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta



The Teaching Council

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Glossary

Associate

An associate is a practising and fully-registered teacher who is also an experienced mentor and/or induction workshop facilitator, nominated by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) to support the *Droichead* process in *Droichead* schools.

Continuum of Teacher Education

This describes the formal and informal educational and developmental activities in which teachers engage, as lifelong learners, during their teaching careers. It encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development and later career support.

Droichead

The *Droichead* process is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers. It recognises the effectiveness of the reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education and particularly the extended school placement, in the professional preparation of student teachers. It builds on that phase, taking as its starting point the areas for further learning that have been identified by the NQT in collaboration with the HEI as part of the school placement experience. At the same time, it recognises that induction is a distinct phase of the continuum of teacher education, a socialisation process into the teaching profession. This integrated framework includes both school-based and additional professional learning activities to address the needs of teachers as they begin their careers. The main objective of the *Droichead* process is to support the professional learning of the NQTs during the induction phase, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and learning for the next phase of their career. Following the *Droichead* process, a declaration is made by the NQT that he or she is ready to move to the next phase on the continuum of teacher education. A joint declaration is made by the teacher and experienced colleagues, following collective reflection, that through their engagement in *Droichead*, they have participated in a quality teaching and learning process. The Teaching Council then removes the *Droichead* condition from the teacher's registration.

National Induction Programme for Teachers

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) is a State-funded service that supports the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), both primary and post-primary, into the teaching profession in Ireland. The main objective of induction is towards promoting the professional development of NQTs by way of systematic support in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and development. The NIPT co-ordinates the provision of a multi-faceted induction programme for teachers. Full-time team members, Regional Development Officers (RDOs), are supported in their work by a team of associates (see above).

Newly qualified teacher (NQT)

This refers to a teacher who meets the Council's requirements in terms of qualifications but has not completed the required period of professional practice. In this document, newly qualified teacher (NQT) refers to all newly registered teachers who are beginning their teaching career or may be returning to teaching after a period of absence, regardless of their date of qualification.

Taisce

A professional learning portfolio is developed over time by each NQT, to support the process of reflection on his or her practice. The term Taisce, (Irish for treasure trove) is used to refer to this process of portfolio-based learning. It may provide a focus for the professional conversations that are central to *Droichead* and thus enable the NQT to identify areas in which he or she may need support or guidance.

Professional Support Team (PST)

The Professional Support Team is a team of experienced and fully-registered teachers, who have received specific training from the NIPT and work collaboratively to support the NQT during the *Droichead* process.

List of acronyms

DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage)
ESR	Economic and Social Research Institute
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NIPT	National Induction Programme for Teachers
PST	Professional Support Team
DQA	<i>Droichead</i> Quality Assurance

Chairperson's Foreword

The DQA process conducted in 2020 aimed to visit 24 schools, 12 primary and 12 post-primary in order to be able to report to the Teaching Council on the findings in relation to the operation of *Droichead* and the quality of the process in those schools. The schools were selected by a random process similar to last year when there was a smaller sample. The questions asked in schools were reviewed and updated from the previous year by the panel in order to obtain more specific and more detailed information on the process which had taken place in the schools in 2018/19. The randomised selection of 24 schools contained a reasonable balance of school types in both sectors given the small sample number overall.

The restrictions introduced following the onset of Covid-19 in the country meant that we had conducted our research in only 16 of the 24 schools which we had intended to visit. Indeed, we had just concluded our visit to one of the schools when the impending school closures were announced in the school. What followed was a time of great uncertainty, but it soon became clear that the remainder of our visits would be impossible to conduct in the schools we had yet to visit in the current school year. This uncertainty now also pertains to the opening of schools in September 2020 and would make our remaining visits in the next school year uncertain if not impossible. We would also be seeking evidence from a process that happened two years previously. A judgement was made that rather than wait for an opportunity to visit the remaining schools, which might not be possible, that we would report on the basis of the schools we had already visited. This has obvious implications for the nature of our work but it was still felt that the evidence we had obtained was valuable and could form the basis for relevant findings and appropriate recommendations as in previous reports.

All schools approached were very willing to co-operate with the DQA process in their schools which is a significant finding in itself. I would again like to thank all the Principals, members of senior management, the Professional Support Teams and Newly Qualified Teachers in participating schools for their co-operation and for their warm welcome to us in all cases. Schools are very busy places and we are grateful that our work in the schools was approached with a high level of professionalism, flexibility and generosity by all participants. The engagement of schools and members of the school community was most certainly in the spirit of *Droichead*. I would also like to thank the members of our Primary and Post-Primary panels for their professionalism and generosity of spirit in conducting the DQA process and members of the Teaching Council staff for their unstinting support and background work within a very tight timeline.

As previously indicated schools and school contexts vary greatly, both between and within sectors. *Droichead* is well established in many of the schools we visited but equally some schools have very little experience of the process. The DQA panel places the emphasis on consistency rather than uniformity in the operation of *Droichead* in schools. The findings from the DQA process as outlined give a good indication of how schools are continuing to develop the *Droichead* process and achieving the balance between uniformity and consistency within the individual school context. NQTs are very appreciative of the professional support they receive from their colleagues at the start of their professional journey.

We were once again privileged as members of the DQA panels to conduct our Quality Assurance process for *Droichead* and to report to the Teaching Council on our findings. As noted above given the challenges that the whole school system has experienced in this school year our findings have to be interpreted in the light of these limitations. They do provide the Teaching Council with a certain level of assurance that the process as envisaged is being conducted with a significant level of professionalism in the schools visited.

Our DQA process for this year again provides valuable qualitative insights into *Droichead* and has several practical recommendations from practitioners engaged in the process arising from our work. Our report is also affirming of the professionals engaged in the process and notes the value of their contribution to the induction process within the continuum. As in previous years the most valuable part of the *Droichead* process for both PST members and NQTs was reported to be the peer-to-peer observations. Professional collaboration in schools is contributing greatly to the process and similarly *Droichead* is contributing to enhancing collaborative practice among professionals in schools. The process itself as experienced by the NQTs, the training and support supplied to PST members were generally very positively received by those involved. In this regard a small number of caveats were expressed which are outlined in the report. Recommendations for improvements across a range of elements to the *Droichead* process are outlined.

One of the strengths of the *Droichead* process noted by NQTs in particular is that it is non-evaluative and provides an opportunity to share good practice between professionals. The collaborative nature of *Droichead* was summed up in one school as: “The collaboration and the relationships in the school are something which are key in getting anything off the ground, and particularly in this, and if we are talking about professional conversations and the ability to have that trust with somebody to identify our own strengths and weaknesses and make reference in some small way... give them a comfortable space in which to grow and that the staff are open and receptive.”

I would like at the end of this turbulent school year to say a heartfelt thank you to teachers who quietly and humbly went beyond the call of duty to provide not only excellent learning opportunities for their students but also provided solace and support in a particularly difficult time for those students and their families. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Ciarán Flynn,
Chairperson

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to *Droichead* Quality Assurance (DQA)

The *Droichead* process is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers, which includes the period of professional practice that an NQT in a *Droichead* school is required to undertake following his or her initial registration.

The *Droichead* Quality Assurance process was initiated with a view to examining the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process in several schools involved in the pilot phase from September 2013. For the remainder of this report, the *Droichead* Quality Assurance process will be referred to as DQA.

The conceptualisation of the DQA process has changed significantly since the early stages of *Droichead* policy development. In the first iteration of the *Droichead Guide for Schools 2013/2014* (for year 1 of the pilot), it was envisaged that the Inspectorate would have an important quality assurance role by evaluating the work of a sample of NQTs who had completed the *Droichead* process in schools, through observation of their classroom practice.

In light of significant concern voiced by pilot schools in relation to the proposed approach, an alternative DQA process was developed and approved by Council in July 2014. This DQA process takes cognisance of the core values of the Teaching Council; shared professional responsibility; professionally led regulation, and collective professional confidence. This is reflected in the composition of the DQA (see Section 3) panels, which looks to the profession to assume responsibility not only for the induction of NQTs into the profession, but also the quality assurance of that process.

In line with the quality assurance processes set out in *Droichead: A Guide for Schools 2015/2016*, the DQA process was initiated during the 2015/2016 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of eight school visits took place in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration. During these visits, the panel discussed the process with the principal, the professional support team and the newly qualified teacher. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panels. This report was approved by the Teaching Council on 6 March 2017 and can be found [here](#).

The second cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2017/2018 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of twenty-four school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

The third cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2018/2019 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of twelve school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

Currently, *Droichead* Quality Assurance is one of a number of mechanisms in place to assure the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process nationally as outlined in '*Droichead: The Professional Induction Framework March 2017*' at 1.1.9.

The DQA Panel does this in two main ways:

1. Completion of annual reviews at national level in order to promote and develop a shared understanding across schools about what works well in *Droichead*, within different school contexts.
2. Consideration of requests from individual NQTs for their *Droichead* process to be reviewed in line with the quality assurance processes set out in *Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework March 2017*.

1.2 Purpose of DQA

The purpose of the DQA process is to examine both the quality and consistency of *Droichead* across schools, and how NQTs' experiences reflect this quality and consistency.

In achieving this, it is intended that the DQA process will seek to:

- promote and develop a shared understanding across schools about what works well in *Droichead*, within various school contexts.
- examine if the *Droichead* process, as implemented, is fair, and consistent with Teaching Council Policy.
- make recommendations to the Teaching Council in relation to the procedures for quality assurance for the *Droichead* process.

As schools exist in a variety of contexts, the focus of the DQA is placed on consistency rather than uniformity across participating schools.

The following key principles guide the DQA process:

- shared professional responsibility and professionally led regulation;
- sharing good practice;
- the NQT is central to the process;
- fairness and consistency.

This is not a research report. The purpose of this document is to outline the findings of the DQA panels as a result of visits to a number of *Droichead* schools. It is intended that this process will inform future policy development in relation to quality assurance.

The findings of the research on the pilot phase of *Droichead*, conducted by the ESRI, can be found [here](#) in the report *Review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme (2016)*.

2. School Selection

All schools that participated in *Droichead* during Year 6 (2018-2019) were collated and a sample of schools selected for this DQA cycle. These schools were randomly selected, this selection of schools took place in September 2019. During this academic year 1168 schools (726 primary schools, 442 post-primary schools) supported 2773 NQTs (1580 primary, 1193 post-primary) through the *Droichead* process.

A total of twenty-four schools were randomly selected, twelve at primary and twelve at post-primary. The criterion for selection was based on having an NQT apply for *Droichead* during the 2018-2019 academic year.

On Thursday, 12 March 2020 the government announced a series of measures aimed at addressing the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ireland. These measures resulted in the compiling of this report based on the 16 school visits that were completed prior to school closures. Of these 16 schools, 9 were primary and 7 were post-primary.

The Teaching Council and the DQA Panel wish to thank all the schools involved, for facilitating the work of the panel. The welcome received and the openness and engagement of the staff made the experience of this DQA process a very positive one for all involved in ensuring that *Droichead* is being conducted fairly and is consistent with *Droichead* Policy.

2.1 Anonymisation

Schools participating in the DQA process are anonymised in this report. The schools' profiles are generalised, and the schools are referred to using the anonymisation codes as outlined in the table below:

Code	Details
A	School A is a multi-denominational, co-educational special school with 97 students. In the school year 2018-2019, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST team was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
B	School B is a catholic co-educational primary school with 211 students. In the school year 2018-2019, two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST team was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
C	School C is a multi-denominational, co-educational, community post-primary school with 970 students. The school participates in DEIS. In the school year 2018-2019, seven NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST team was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
D	School D is a multi-denominational, co-educational, primary school with 543 students. In the school year 2018-2019, five NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
E	School E is a multi-denominational, co-educational community post-primary school with 761 students. In the school year 2018-2019, four NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
F	School F is a catholic girls' primary school with 713 students. In the school year 2018-2019, six NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process at this school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

G	School G is a catholic, co-educational voluntary post-primary school with 570 students. In the school year 2018-2019, four NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
H	School H is a catholic, co-educational primary school with 154 students. In the school year 2018-2019, one NQT completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
I	School I is a catholic, co-educational, all-Irish primary school with 328 students. In the school year 2018-2019, one NQT completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
J	School J is a catholic, co-educational primary school with 92 students. In the school year 2018-2019, one NQT completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
K	School K is a catholic, all-boys voluntary post-primary school with 652 students. In the school year 2018-2019, two NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
L	School L is a catholic, co-educational primary school with 574 students. In the school year 2018-2019, two NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
M	School M is a catholic, girls' post-primary school with 619 students. In the school year 2018-2019, three NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
N	School N is a catholic, co-educational primary school with 536 students. In the school year 2018-2019, four NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
O	School O is a catholic girls' voluntary secondary school with 639 students. It is a fee-charging school. In the school year 2018-2019, four NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
P	School P is a catholic co-educational junior national school with 402 students. It caters for pupils from junior infants to second class. In the school year 2018-2019, three NQTs completed the Droichead process at the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

Across the **16** schools visited the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel met with **50** PST members and a total of **29** NQTs who had experienced and completed the *Droichead* process.

3. *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panels

3.1 Composition of the Panels

The composition and work of the DQA panels may be summarised as follows:

Review panels are established by the Teaching Council to quality assure the *Droichead* process. Each panel includes an independent Chairperson, a registered teacher from the relevant sector and a person with expertise in the support and/or evaluation of teaching and learning at school level. The review panel visits a sample of schools where the *Droichead* process has taken place and discusses the process with the Principal, the PST and the NQT. Such visits are pre-arranged and take place in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration (see Appendix 2). Following its review, the panel submits a report to the Teaching Council setting out its findings and recommendations in relation to the process. The report is considered by the Council and, following ratification, is published on the Council's website and circulated to the NIPT and the Inspectorate.

In December 2019, two DQA panels, one primary and one post-primary, were established by the Teaching Council. In order to ensure consistency, one Chairperson was appointed to oversee the work of both panels. A Teaching Council Associate, acting in the role of rapporteur, supported the work of each panel. DQA panel membership can be found in Appendix 1.

Each panel visited the selected schools relevant to its sector. The Chairperson visited all schools, both primary and post-primary. This report outlines the findings of these visits.

3.2 Preparation for the DQA Process

In January 2020, the panels met in Maynooth to engage in professional development before school visits. On that day the panels were briefed on the *Droichead* process, including the procedures and criteria involved in the process, the rationale for DQA and the roles and responsibilities of the panel members. A visit schedule and provisional dates for drafting and finalising the report were agreed by the panels and rapporteur on that day.

4. Process for *Droichead* Quality Assurance

4.1 School Visits

All school visits for the DQA process were carried out in a spirit of collegiality and co-operation. Visits took place between 14 January 2020 and 12 March 2020.

During each school visit the panels endeavoured to meet with a member(s) of the school's senior management team (Principal/ Deputy Principal), PST members and with NQTs who had completed the *Droichead* process and who remained in employment at the school. The meetings were conducted in an open and collaborative manner and notes were recorded by the Rapporteur.

At the end of each visit, the panel met briefly to define the emerging themes of the visit and to consider same with a view to determining levels of consistency with other schools participating in the DQA process.

5. Droichead Quality Assurance Findings

5.0 Information Table

Schools		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Strand A School Based Induction	<i>NIPT training for all members of the PST</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Minimum period of professional practice in an eligible setting</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Engagement in professional conversations</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Taisce</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Observations by/ of NQT</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strand B Additional Professional Learning Activities	<i>Cluster Meetings attended during the Droichead process</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Professional Learning Activity</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

This table describes key elements of the *Droichead* process and shows how each of these were consistently adhered to across all schools visited.

The findings from each school have been compiled and a composite image has emerged that covers the *Droichead* process as it was experienced by NQTs and schools during the 2018/2019 academic year.

5.1 Role of Senior Management Team

- 5.1.1 The importance of having a member of the senior management team, i.e. Principal or Deputy Principal on the PST was highlighted in the majority of schools visited.
- 5.1.2 In over half of primary schools visited the Principal was a member of the PST team. In cases where the Principal was not on the team, the Deputy Principal was. The Principal/ Deputy Principal introduced and led the process initially and had undertaken training with the NIPT.
- 5.1.3 In almost all post primary schools the Deputy Principal was a member of the PST team and was involved in leading *Droichead* in their school context.
- 5.1.4 One school did not have a member of senior management on their PST team however in this case the Principal had completed a Principal Information session with the NIPT.
- 5.1.5 PST members reported that having a member of senior management on the team gave a message to the NQT about the importance of *Droichead* and induction. It prioritised the process as well as ensuring that management “understood the process”.
- 5.1.6 Overall NQTs welcomed the fact that their Principal or Deputy Principal was on the PST team however, at post primary there were some reservations expressed when senior management were involved in observation.
- 5.1.7 Senior management recognised the time element involved in *Droichead*. However, this wasn’t said to be excessive and it was felt that it was important to give time to the NQTs and the process.

5.2 PST Selection and Roles

- 5.2.1 In most schools visited staff members had an opportunity to express an interest or volunteer for the role of PST member.
- 5.2.2 In other schools staff members who had experience with the NIPT as an associate with the NIPT and those that had been involved in mentoring and induction were put forward for the role. There were five current NIPT associates on the PST across schools visited.
- 5.2.3 All schools visited had fully internal PSTs.
- 5.2.4 The PST members were consistently strong in supporting the NQT in a variety of ways. Principals acknowledged that it was important that PST members had an interest in developing competencies in teaching and learning, that they had personal strengths in communication skills, empathy or a caring nature.
- 5.2.5 PST members recognised the enriching impact that being a member of the team had on their professional practice. It was a collegial and affirming experience that gave members an opportunity to develop leadership capacity, forge new professional relationships as well as personal growth and fulfilment through engagement with the innovation that NQTs bring to schools. A few schools expressed concern over the time commitment involved in the process and some PST members felt that they were missing their own classes in order to conduct the process.
- 5.2.6 In most schools visited, NQTs felt that they were supported by a PST who had shared roles and they could approach any member of the PST for advice or guidance. They welcomed the non-evaluative nature of the PST. One PST member stated that being part of a team was preferable to individual mentoring.
- 5.2.7 There was a broad range of experience of the process across the schools visited. Two post primary schools had inducted more than sixty NQTs through the *Droichead* process. An average number of five NQTs had gone through the process in the other schools visited.
- 5.2.8 Schools visited undertook regular reviews of the *Droichead* process both formally and informally. Notably, they identified the need for continued training, expanding membership of the PST, linking *Droichead* to SSE and the importance of having senior management involved in the process.

5.3 *Droichead* Expectations

- 5.3.1 In almost all schools visited a clear and transparent timeline for the *Droichead* process was outlined by the PST to the NQTs at the beginning of the school year. Timelines did not change except where school events intervened. No NQT had their process extended in the year 2018- 2019 in the schools visited.
- 5.3.2 In all schools visited the role of the PST was clearly explained to the NQTs.
- 5.3.3 In ten schools visited there was consensus from senior management, PST and NQTs that school support for *Droichead* was evident. Over half of these schools were at primary. At post primary nearly all schools felt that there was an awareness of *Droichead* however this did not always extend beyond the PST. In some schools where there was school support for *Droichead* it was on the agenda at staff meetings and presentations were made to staff about the process. Staff supported the NQTs by opening their classroom doors to NQTs for observations.
- 5.3.4 The majority of schools engaged in the *Droichead* process over the full year or duration of the NQT's contract. It was felt that extending this support over the full year was more beneficial for the NQT. In cases where an NQT needed to complete the process in the minimum time limits this was facilitated by the PST.

5.4 *Droichead* Standards

- 5.4.1 All schools visited were using *Droichead* standards as a focal point for the process. In most schools it was considered best practice to explain the standards when meeting NQTs at the initial meeting. These standards were used throughout the *Droichead* process and were referred to during discussions pertaining to observations and in professional conversations between the PST and NQT. In one school visited links from *Droichead* standards to the standards outlined in the publication *Looking at Our Schools* had been made.
- 5.4.2 *Droichead* standards ensured that the process was consistent. In schools with more than one NQT, it was reported that the process was felt to be consistent for all NQTs involved.
- 5.4.3 As part of PST training schools developed an indicator document describing good practice in specific school contexts to support *Droichead* standards. PST members noted a high level of satisfaction arising from the use of these indicators citing them as “ideal guidance and reference” for the process.

5.5 *Droichead* Training and Support

- 5.5.1 In all instances PST members had attended full NIPT training. In the majority of schools visited a member of senior management had also attended training.
- 5.5.2 Training was consistently lauded as aiding the process and PST members felt it clarified the process clearly. Comments made about training ranged from very good to fabulous.
- 5.5.3 All schools were aware of the external supports available to them. Many schools had engaged with external support through contact with NIPT RDOs/ Associates, with the NIPT email support or through clustering with PSTs in their locality.
- 5.5.4 Many schools indicated that regular refresher training is necessary for PST members.
- 5.5.5 Some schools would like training to focus on NQTs in a SET setting and to include more guidance on how an NQT can avail of opportunities for the teaching of Gaeilge at primary. Guidelines on the process of portfolio-based learning, referred to as Taisce in the *Droichead* policy and giving appropriate feedback was also sought.

5.6 Induction Release Time for *Droichead*

- 5.6.1 The flexibility of release time is very important to ensure release time suits both sectors and varying individual school needs. In more than half of schools visited release time was accessed.
- 5.6.2 The accessibility and availability of substitute teachers was cited as an issue in schools visited. Schools used substitution (including S & S), SET and the goodwill of PST and NQTs for professional conversations, observations and PST meetings.
- 5.6.3 ETB schools visited reported difficulty in drawing down release time available for the process through their claims system.
- 5.6.4 Schools reported that the best use of release time was for observations including pre and post observation meetings. In some schools the PST also used release time to meet among themselves for action planning purposes.
- 5.6.5 Four schools at post primary voiced that an allocated slot for PST members on their timetable would be advantageous for the *Droichead* process.

5.7 Observations

- 5.7.1 In all schools visited the observations were viewed as fundamental to the *Droichead* process. NQTs found them hugely beneficial with one NQT citing them as “the gold star” of the *Droichead* process.
- 5.7.2 All schools visited engaged in a minimum of two observations by the NQT and of the NQT. In 10 out of 16 schools NQTs were provided with an opportunity to engage in more than the minimum of observations prescribed in policy.
- 5.7.3 All schools engaged in pre and post observation conversations. These were structured conversations that ensured that pre observation planning was transparent. The post observation conversations allowed structured feedback that gave the PST members an opportunity to identify and affirm good practice.
- 5.7.4 The impact of observations was multi-faceted and mutually beneficial, some of these benefits were:
 - Observations were based on NQTs needs. NQTs felt that their practice was affirmed and as a result they gained confidence.
 - NQTs saw the observation of colleagues as important and gained a great deal from observing how more experienced teachers conducted their classrooms. Some NQTs noted that they would like an opportunity to engage in more observations.
 - PST enjoyed having an opportunity to see innovative teaching methodologies and a process of improvement. With one PST member stating that “A teacher’s best resource is a teacher”.
 - PST acknowledged that being involved in *Droichead* fed into a school culture of opening classroom doors and allowed for collaboration amongst staff members.

5.8 Professional Conversations

- 5.8.1 A combination of both formal and informal professional conversations took place in schools visited. Both types of conversations were recognised as being equally beneficial for the *Droichead* process.
- 5.8.2 Formal meetings took place when the PST team were initiating the *Droichead* process and at times when the NQTs were engaging in observations. Informal conversations took place more regularly and this allowed the PST to provide timely, ongoing support.
- 5.8.3 NQTs felt that they could approach PST members for advice and guidance and both PST members and NQTs initiated professional conversations in the schools visited.
- 5.8.4 Three schools expressed concern around possible difficult conversations in the future. More specific training or a refresher course aimed at language to be used during these conversations could help to address this.

5.9 Taisce

- 5.9.1 The process of portfolio-based learning, referred to as Taisce in the *Droichead* policy was engaged in by almost all NQTs during their *Droichead* process. A variety of formats for collection was used by the NQTs, including folders, diaries and online portfolios.
- 5.9.2 The benefits of using Taisce from the NQTs' perspective was on the collection of resources, of students' work, and nearly half found it beneficial in aiding reflective practice. In two schools, NQTs mapped Taisce onto the standards and indicators being used for their *Droichead* process.
- 5.9.3 The PST felt that Taisce was important for formalising reflective practice and that NQTs should be encouraged "to have something tangible – to make them more aware of reflection; to organise their thoughts and affirm their practice". Half of PST members would like more clarification on their role in the Taisce process.
- 5.9.4 Some NQTs lacked understanding of the Taisce element of *Droichead* and lacked clarity as to the purpose and benefits. They were seeking more clarification from their PST and at cluster meetings.

5.10 Records

- 5.10.1 All schools were using the templates provided by the NIPT for the *Droichead* process. These templates are deemed necessary to guide the process, for consistency and to ensure clarity for all involved.
- 5.10.2 The most useful records for the process were the observation templates. Among other records kept by the PST were minutes of PST meetings, planning documents, the standards and indicator document, Form D, needs analysis and correspondence from the NIPT.
- 5.10.3 The NIPT website was considered a useful reference point for the process.
- 5.10.4 NQTs reported that the templates gave the process structure. NQTs used the NIPT weekly planning templates and some also made use of the weekly reflection document.
- 5.10.5 Schools had limited suggestions for how templates could be improved. Suggestions made included streamlining observation templates and additional templates to support NQTs completing *Droichead* in a SET setting.

5.11 Additional Professional Development

- 5.11.1 In all schools visited NQTs were adhering to policy requirements and attending cluster meetings throughout the process.
- 5.11.2 Cluster meetings received mixed feedback from NQTs across the schools visited. Half of NQTs found them beneficial, especially the information about the process delivered at the first cluster meeting. However, some NQTs voiced criticism as they found them to be repetitive of their Initial Teacher Education content and felt that they did not address their needs.
- 5.11.3 It was noted that the success of cluster meetings was dependent on the facilitator. Some facilitators were praised by NQTs, especially those who allowed time for Q & A. Two schools reported it was difficult to get a place at cluster meetings especially at the beginning of the year.
- 5.11.4 Recommendations for improvement of cluster meetings included more input around planning and SET. NQTs suggested that an agenda could be circulated in advance of the meeting to allow NQTs to target topics according to their learning needs.
- 5.11.5 It was noted that Induction workshops could be a huge loss, due to them being topic based. NQTs felt they addressed their needs more appropriately. (Planning, Assessment, Differentiation, Classroom Management, Behaviour management etc.)
- 5.11.6 In all schools visited NQTs were availing of additional professional learning opportunities across and beyond the curriculum as an aid to induction into school life. This was viewed as a positive of the *Droichead* process. There was a huge variety in the activities undertaken and NQTs felt they had a positive impact on their teaching.

6. Recommendations

In order to ensure the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process in schools, the panels made the following recommendations:

6.1 Role of Senior Management Team

- 6.1.1 The panel recommends that the Principal or Deputy Principal continues to participate on the PST. Their support and understanding of the process is essential and therefore the panel would advise all members of senior management to become familiar with *Droichead* policy. This ensures NQTs receive the full value of a formalised integrated induction process and that they are aware of existing support structures in schools.
- 6.1.2 To raise awareness and encourage school support the panel recommends that senior management would ensure that *Droichead* is included at some staff meetings.

6.2 PST Selection and Roles

- 6.2.1 This panel recommends that schools develop guidelines outlining the selection process for PST members. These guidelines would include best practice around the selection and composition of their PST. The panel acknowledges that PST members should have an interest in developing competencies in teaching and learning, good communication skills, empathy and a supporting nature. Having a PST member with experience of Special Education is viewed as advantageous.
- 6.2.2 In small primary schools the use of a PST member from an external panel is recommended.
- 6.2.3 It is important the PST are flexible and that schools are afforded an opportunity to attend training as the need arises.

6.3 *Droichead* Expectations

- 6.3.1 The Quality Assurance panel notes positively that NQTs welcomed the non-evaluative nature of the PST, that almost all schools visited had a clear and transparent timeline for the *Droichead* process from the start of the school year and that timelines did not change except where school events intervened. It is recommended that NIPT highlight this good practice in its training programme so that any possible school extension to *Droichead* timelines is not misunderstood. Given the non-evaluative nature of the process, NIPT needs to give clearer guidance to PST relating to potential extensions of timelines.
- 6.3.2 Ensuring clarity in communication for all involved in the *Droichead* process is essential for consistency. As iterated in findings all schools visited had clearly defined the role of the PST in writing when initiating the process. This was reported to be best practice and is desirable for the process.
- 6.3.3 Using NIPT templates for short and long-term planning at primary is considered best practice for NQTs engaging in the *Droichead* process. It is suggested that there could be more alignment between the preparation for planning in a professional environment at Initial Teacher Education stage.

6.4 *Droichead* Standards

- 6.4.1** Schools should continue to use the three *Droichead* standards to underpin and guide the process. The explicit development and use of contextualised indicators is best practice and aids consistency within and across schools.

6.5 *Droichead* Training and Supports

- 6.5.1** There should be opportunity for PST members to engage in regular refresher training. NIPT training needs to include specific guidelines for NQTs undertaking *Droichead* in a SET setting.
- 6.5.2** The panel recommends that schools initiating *Droichead* could request a school visit from the NIPT where this is possible within resources. Additional contact with NIPT provides ongoing support and a common understanding of the process, raises awareness of *Droichead* and allows *Droichead* to be embedded into school culture.

6.6 Induction Release Time for *Droichead*

- 6.6.1** The panel strongly recommends that schools use release time (paid substitution) that is allocated to schools each year specifically to support the *Droichead* process.
- 6.6.2** Schools must make every effort to ensure that this paid substitution is accessed to provide for the continuity of teaching and learning alongside *Droichead* when NQTs and PST are engaging in this process. Accessing all available resources should ensure that *Droichead* does not rely on volunteerism and the goodwill of colleagues to support engagement in the *Droichead* process.
- 6.6.3** It is not envisaged that the S & S scheme be used to support *Droichead* related activities. The panel strongly discourages the use of S & S to facilitate release time for *Droichead* and advises schools to avail of the paid substitution available to schools for the *Droichead* process.
- 6.6.4** The panel strongly discourages the use of SET to facilitate release time for *Droichead* and strongly advises schools to avail of the paid substitution available to schools for the *Droichead* process.
- 6.6.5** The flexibility of the release time allocation at post-primary level should be maintained so that schools can decide how to use it best in their specific context. At primary level flexible release time models should be explored. Best practice was seen in schools where release time was planned, structured and organised.
- 6.6.6** Schools should note that it is possible to apply to the NIPT for additional discretionary release time to support *Droichead*.

6.7 Observations

- 6.7.1** It is highly recommended that NQTs should be given an opportunity where feasible and agreed to observe beyond the minimum number of observations stipulated in policy. NQTs find observations the most beneficial part of the *Droichead* process and many expressed that they would like an opportunity to continue to engage in peer observation and welcomed all learnings that observations provide.
- 6.7.2** At post primary a very good practice was observed when a school had formalised release time to allow three consecutive slots on their timetable for observation and pre and post observation conversations where feasible and agreed.

6.8 Professional Conversations

- 6.8.1** It is deemed best practice for PST members and NQTs to meet regularly while engaging in *Droichead* either formally or informally where feasible.

6.9 Taisce

- 6.9.1** All staff engaging in the process need to develop a shared understanding of the portfolio-based learning process Taisce. The panel recommends that Taisce the private reflective portfolio of the NQT is clarified for PST and NQTs. NQTs require more guidance around their use of Taisce and PST have requested clarification around their role in relation to it. This could be done across numerous platforms such as PST training, refresher training days, cluster meetings and in NIPT correspondence with schools.
- 6.9.2** The PST should play an active role in encouraging NQTs to engage in personal reflection of their key learning moments, the NQT's Taisce can then be used to build on reflective practice and professional portfolios developed during Initial Teacher Education.

6.10 Records

- 6.10.1** The panel recommends that schools should continue to maintain clear records of their *Droichead* process.
- 6.10.2** As documented in the findings some of the records kept in schools visited included minutes of PST meetings, observation templates, standard and contextualised indicator documents, needs analysis templates and correspondence from the NIPT. This was identified as excellent practice.

6.11 Additional Professional Development for NQTs

- 6.11.1** The panel recommends that cluster meetings are reviewed to ensure they address the needs of NQTs.
- 6.11.2** The panel recommends that NQTs could consider using the online induction workshops provided by the NIPT for their additional professional development. Due to the topic based nature of these workshops they are extremely useful for addressing their specific needs across both sectors and within their school context.



Appendices

Appendix 1:

DQA Panel Membership

Ciarán Flynn Chairperson

A former teacher, VEC and Community School Principal, Ciarán Flynn served on the Teaching Council as a nominee of second level management. He was General Secretary of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), advising and supporting Boards of Management and Principals for eight years. Ciarán chaired the Teacher Supply in Ireland: Technical Working Group which reported to the Teaching Council and to the Minister for Education and Skills in November 2015.

With a Master's in Education Management Ciarán has lectured in DCU on the M. Sc. in Educational Training and Management. He has worked with the National Leadership Development for Schools Team supporting newly appointed Principals and Deputy Principals countrywide.

As an Educational Consultant he has worked for and with individual schools, regional and national educational bodies in carrying out investigations, supporting and promoting professional development. He also carried out work for the Department of Education and Skills. He is the Chairperson of the Boards of Management of three schools in the Leinster area and is currently the Chairperson of the Le Chéile Schools Trust Board.

Margaret Dunning

Margaret Dunning is a Primary Divisional Inspector in the Department of Education and Skills. She carries out inspections in schools and centres for education. She is currently assigned to the Teacher Education and Inclusion Evaluation and Policy Support Unit within the Inspectorate. In the course of her work she provides policy support/advice on teacher education and liaises with Teacher Education Section and the Teaching Council. She is the national coordinator of the probationary process for NQTs. She also provides policy/advice on inclusion and liaises with Special Education Section. She provides policy/advice on leadership and management in schools and liaises with the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), the NAPD, IPPN and PDST.

Liz O' Neill

Liz O'Neill joined the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate in 2007. She is a senior post-primary inspector whose main area of expertise is in Mathematics education. Much of her time is spent conducting whole-school evaluations and subject inspections in schools. She also conducts advisory school visits to support school self-evaluation. Other aspects of her role include policy work around educational inclusion, school excellence fund, and initial teacher education.

Séamus O' Connor

Séamus O'Connor was elected to the Teaching Council in the Munster Primary sector from 2016-2020. Originally from Tralee, County Kerry, Séamus currently resides in Cobh, County Cork and is the Principal of Scoil Bhríde, Crosshaven, since 2009. Séamus is a PST member in his school as well as a mentor of newly appointed Principals. He is current secretary of INTO PDC in Cork City and PRO of Coiste Sciath na Scol Chorcaí. He is a former chairperson of the INTO Cork City South East Branch and is a holder of M. Ed in ICT.

Eamonn Shaughnessy

Eamonn Shaughnessy was first elected to the Teaching Council in 2016 and again in 2020 for the Connaught/Ulster Primary Sector. He has served on the Registration and Discipline Committees and is currently a member of both the Qualification and Registration Panels. He holds a B.Ed. from Mary Immaculate College and an M.Sc. in P.E. from Leeds Metropolitan University. He currently works in St Peter's N.S, Snugboro, Castlebar, Co. Mayo as an Assistant Principal.

Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn is principal of St Fergal's College, Rathdowney. Qualified as a post-primary teacher of History and Geography with teaching experience in different types of schools in both Ireland and England. He is also qualified with a Doctorate in Education conferred by Dublin City University (DCU). Other employment experiences include working as a tutor on the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL) and Assistant General Secretary with the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI). A former President of the TUI and Chairperson of the Teaching Council where he also served as Chairperson of the Finance Committee.

Noelle Moran

Noelle Moran is an ASTI nominee to the Teaching Council. She was first nominated in 2016 and re-nominated in 2018. A native of Tuam, Co. Galway, Noelle studied at NUI Galway and is a teacher of Accounting and Gaeilge at St. Jarlath's College in Tuam. She is an active member of the ASTI at branch and national level. Noelle served on the ASTI Education Committee before being elected to serve on the union's Standing Committee representing Region 3 [Galway, Tuam and East Galway] from 2013 – 2019. She is currently a member of the union's Central Executive Committee. Noelle was the chairperson of the Teaching Council from November 2017 to June 2020 and is currently the deputy chairperson of the Council.

Appendix 2:

Protocol for School Visits

The purpose of school visits

The *Droichead* Quality Assurance process (DQA) reassures principals, experienced teachers, NQTs and the Council that the process is fair and consistent for all. The DQA also offers your school an opportunity to shape the further development and growth of the *Droichead* induction process.

The purpose of the Quality Assurance visits is to:

- Reflect on the *Droichead* process in schools to date
- Identify recommendations and findings for future *Droichead* processes
- Ensure the process is fair and consistent with Teaching Council policy

What are the principles underpinning the work of the DQA panel?

Effecting improvement in research, reflective practice and relationships are the three pillars which support the work of the Council across all areas. As an organisation the Council seeks to ensure high standards in the induction process are upheld. In the *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* the Council acknowledges this critical period at the beginning of the newly qualified teacher's career and that the purpose of induction is to offer systematic professional and personal support to the newly qualified teacher.

The work of the Council is thus underpinned by four principles:

- Collegiality and collaboration
- Development and improvement of *Droichead*
- Fairness and consistency
- Reflective practice

These four principles, provide the standards that inform, guide and govern the work of the DQA.

Protocol for School Visits

Before the visit

- The Rapporteur contacts the school in advance of the meeting to arrange a mutually convenient date and to discuss an outline agenda for the visit.
- The Rapporteur contacts the school approximately one week prior to the visit to discuss the nature of the visit and finalise the schedule for the day.
- A copy of the visit schedule will be forwarded to the school prior to the visit.

During the visit

- During the visit, all conversations will focus on the experience of *Droichead* in the school. The panel will engage in professional conversations with the Principal, PST and NQTs.
- The *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel will use agreed questions as discussion points to guide their meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to gain an understanding and insight into the school's experience of the *Droichead* process.
- The purpose of the Quality Assurance Panel is to ensure that policy is guiding the *Droichead* process but it is not the role of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel to review or evaluate decisions made by the PST in the school.
- The record keeping for the process is discussed to allow greater understanding of how the records reflect and support the experience of the *Droichead* process in the school.
- The DQA Panel Rapporteur will record the types of events/ processes which were discussed during the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Process.

After the visit

- The panel convene to discuss key findings and recommendations of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Process.
- All schools and participants in the process will be anonymous and the report will outline the collective experience of schools in relation to its findings and recommendations. A copy of this report will be forwarded to participant schools and will be available on the Teaching Council website.

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