

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta



The Teaching Council



Droichead Quality Assurance Report

June 2021

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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

In this school year 2020/2021, we sampled the *Droichead* process in 28 schools, a higher number than we have ever done before. Due to Covid-19 last year, 2019/2020, we were only in a position to visit 16 schools in total whereas we had planned to visit 24. Once again, the schools were chosen randomly in each sector with equal numbers of primary and post-primary schools included in the sample. As the DQA process for the school year 2019/2020 was very disrupted by Covid-19 we included four schools where the process was completed during the lockdown in the 2020/2021 sample. Our sample included most, but not all, school types in each sector. As in previous years we covered a good variety of school types as can be seen from the schools list later in the report.

We chose to conduct all our research with the schools remotely. We got great co-operation from all the selected schools; one school was unable to accommodate us at the time proposed and we went to a substitute school in that instance. While we all wished that we could have conducted the process in a face-to-face manner, we didn't encounter any significant difficulties with the online process. We do not see any reason why conducting the process in this manner would have any effect on the outcomes.

This was another difficult year for the operation of schools. We were conducting our research during a year greatly disrupted by Covid-19, whilst looking at the process in a school year that had also been greatly disrupted by the pandemic. In spite of this it was clear that the responsibility for conducting the *Droichead* process with NQTs was taken every bit as seriously in 2019/2020 as in previous years. The *Droichead* process was conducted with equal care, though in some instances, this required even greater creativity and resilience to overcome the obvious challenges. It was a very difficult year for teachers, particularly when they had to deliver lessons remotely, and I would like to pay tribute to them all for their bravery and professionalism during those difficult times and to the members of Professional Support Teams who worked closely with their NQTs.

I would like to thank all the Principals, Deputy Principals, 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, even though some technical issues were encountered in a small number of 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 in these trying times was entered into 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. Due to time constraints, we increased numbers of both Teaching Council members and Department of Education inspectors this year due to the time constraints. Máirín Ní Chéileachair acted as the rapporteur on behalf of the Teaching Council this year and she did an outstanding job in very difficult circumstances keeping the whole process on track with great humour and professionalism.

The focus of the DQA is placed on consistency rather than uniformity in the operation of *Droichead* in schools. This was especially important to note as the difficulties around delivery posed by Covid-19 challenges over the past two years heightened our awareness of how the process was impinging on NQTs and the school community. The question uppermost in our minds was whether the *Droichead* process support the NQTs in the same way during these times as it had in more normal times. We strongly believe that it has, though improvements can always be made.

Schools and school contexts vary greatly, both between and within sectors. 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. It was also notable this year that *Droichead* has bedded down significantly in many schools now. Some schools have been engaging in the process for a number of years and some issues are arising in these schools. In particular, schools are highlighting the need for refresher training for established Professional Development Team members and the need for succession planning for teams. The greater familiarity of online work also led teachers to seek that some of the training and refresher courses could be held online for greater coverage and for ease of access.

We are privileged as members of the *Droichead* DQA panels to conduct our Quality Assurance process for *Droichead*, albeit this time in an online manner, and to report to the Teaching Council on our findings. This is a small-scale study as the number of schools visited represents a tiny fraction of the total number of schools. Our findings, therefore, are valuable and indicative of the consistency with which *Droichead* is being implemented. However, they cannot be taken as conclusive. They can, and do, provide the Teaching Council with a level of assurance that the process is being conducted with a significant level of professionalism in the schools. The importance of the DQA for the Council should also be matched by further externally commissioned research to give more detailed findings and to give additional indicators for improving the process into the future.

As we have done over the last number of years, we have used the DQA process to provide valuable qualitative insights into *Droichead*. From these insights we are in a position to make recommendations for the process. This 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. The process itself, the training and the support supplied to PST members were generally received very positively in schools. In this regard a small number of caveats were expressed which are outlined in the report.

Peer observations in classrooms and, for this year, observing delivery of online content, and the professional approach to these observations in the *Droichead* process are supporting teachers in this and, in other forms, of collaborative practice in the schools visited. The *Droichead* process is non-judgemental and provides an opportunity to share good practice between professionals. This is a great strength, one NQT summed up their experience of the *Droichead* process by saying: "I think that having a school which is supportive of the process, willing to help and open to supporting you is really important..." and it is!

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 a number of 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 March 6th 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](#).

The fourth cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2019/2020 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of sixteen school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

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, this DQA process was initiated during the 2020/21 school year and refers to the *Droichead* process carried out in schools during the previous year, 2019/2020. A DQA panel was established and a series of twenty-eight school visits took place, carried out, once again, in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration.

This year, for the first time due to Covid-19 restrictions in place in schools and wider society, DQA visits took place online, using Microsoft Teams. The panels acknowledged that it would have been preferable to engage in a face to face process but felt that it was more important to engage in the process, albeit online, rather than to defer it to a later date.

This DQA process reflects the schools' experiences based on the policy arrangements 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 also 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 found in the report *Review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme* (2016).

At the time of writing, this report the DEEPEN research project is entering its final phase. DEEPEN, which stands for *Droichead: Exploring and Eliciting Perspectives, Experiences and Narratives* is a Teaching Council funded research project which explores teachers' lived experience of the *Droichead* professional induction process.

2. School Selection

A list of all schools in which an NQT had registered for *Droichead* during 2019/2020 was collated and a sample of schools were selected for the DQA process. During this timeframe 1,479 schools (982 primary schools, 497 post-primary schools) supported 3,122 NQTs (1,858 primary, 1,264 post-primary) through the *Droichead* process.

A list of schools that had completed the process with NQTs during the period of school closures was also compiled. Four schools were purposefully selected from this list to ensure that schools that had completed the *Droichead* process during lockdown would be represented in the sample visited.

Schools were randomly selected from all lists. This selection of schools took place via Microsoft Teams on November 18th, 2020.

A total of twenty-eight schools were selected.

- Twenty-four schools, 11 from primary and 11 from post-primary and two special schools were randomly selected from the full lists.
- Two additional schools, one primary and one post-primary were also selected, to be used in the event that a selected school could not participate.
- Four schools, two primary schools and two post-primary schools were randomly drawn from the purposefully selected list.

One primary school indicated immediately after initial contact that they would be unable to participate due to serious pressures caused by a local Covid-19 outbreak. The alternate school was used as a substitute.

During the course of further communication with schools it transpired that two further schools, one primary and one post-primary, would not be able to participate. NQTs in these schools had not completed the process, one due to the fact that the NQT had taken maternity leave and another due to Covid-19 closures. On January 28th, three additional schools, two primary and one post primary, were selected from the main lists in order to ensure that twenty-eight visits could be completed. Of these three alternate schools only one was required.

The Teaching Council and the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel wish to thank the schools involved for facilitating the work of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel. Even though our interactions this year were online, schools were more than willing to engage with the process, save for the exceptional circumstances outlined above. The welcome received, the openness of engagement and the enthusiasm of school staff made the experience of *Droichead* Quality Assurance a very positive one for all involved. The panel formed the opinion that *Droichead* is being conducted fairly in schools and that NQTs report a very positive experience. The process, as observed, despite minor variations due to school context, is remarkably consistent across the schools and carried out in line 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 catholic junior primary co-educational school with 258 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020 three NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school . The school participates in DEIS. The PST 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 primary co-educational Gaelscoil with 526 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school . The PST 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 catholic primary co-educational school with 191 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school . The school participates in DEIS. The PST 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 catholic primary co-educational school with 214 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020 one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the 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 A is a catholic primary co-educational school with 497 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the 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 senior boys' primary school with 68 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school . The school participates in DEIS. The PST was formed between both schools on the campus, the BNS and GNS, and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
G	School G is a catholic primary co-educational school with 940 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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 primary co-educational school with 639 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT commenced the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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, primary co-educational school with 348 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, five NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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 multi-denominational, primary co-educational school with 411 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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 primary co-educational school with 201 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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 an interdenominational co-educational post-primary school with 950 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, four NQTs completed the Droichead process in 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, boys' post-primary school with 368 pupils. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2019-2020, three NQTs completed the Droichead process in 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, voluntary secondary boys' school with 493 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in 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 an interdenominational co-educational post-primary school with 1113 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the Droichead process in 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 voluntary girls' secondary school with 746 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
Q	School Q is a multi-denominational co-educational post-primary school with 465 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
R	School R is a catholic girls' secondary school with 566 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
S	School S is catholic boys' secondary school with 505 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
T	School T is a catholic girls' secondary school with 274 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
U	School U is a catholic co-educational post-primary school with 302 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
V	School V is a catholic co-educational post-primary school with 307 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
W	School W is a catholic co-educational special school with 135 pupils. It caters for pupils from ages 9-18 and has both primary and secondary sections on campus. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and is cross sectoral. All PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

X	School X is a catholic co-educational special school with 80 pupils. IT caters for pupils from Junior Infants to Sixth Year. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
Y	School Y is a catholic co-educational primary school with 299 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
Z	School Z is a catholic boys' primary school with 187 pupils. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2019-2020, two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
AA	School L is a catholic girls' secondary school with 840 pupils. During the school year 2019-2020, one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
BB	School L is an interdenominational co-educational community school with 766 pupils. The school participated in DEIS. During the school year 2019-2020, five NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in 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 28 schools the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel met with 29 principals and deputy principals, 65 PST members and a total of 39 NQTs who had experienced and completed the *Droichead* process. While engaging with the schools, a total of 84 meetings took place on the Microsoft Teams platform.

The panel did not meet with principals in a small number of schools; five in total. In some of these schools, responsibility for the coordination of *Droichead* had been delegated to the Deputy Principal who engaged with the panel. In a number of schools (two) the principal was unavailable due to illness or a bereavement.

The panel engaged with NQTs in twenty-four of the twenty-eight schools visited. In the schools where NQTs were no longer employed, they were offered the opportunity to engage with the panel and several did so.

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 2020, 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. Máirín Ní Chéileachair, acting in the role of rapporteur, supported the work of each panel on behalf of the Teaching Council. 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

On December 21st 2020 the panels met online via Microsoft Teams to engage in professional development before the school visits. An additional online training event was held on January 22nd to facilitate new panel personnel and those who had not been able to attend on December 21st. During these events 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

In 2021-2022 Covid-19 restrictions dictated that face to face school visits could not take place during the course of the DQA process. It was decided to move the process online and engage with the schools via Microsoft Teams. All schools consulted during the initial telephone conversation with the panel rapporteur were happy to engage with the process online. Any concerns expressed by schools related to familiarity with the proposed platform and connectivity issues. The panels and the schools experienced very few technical difficulties during the course of the online visits. The visits were recorded for the purposes of accuracy and with the consent of all participants.

All school visits for the DQA process were carried out in a spirit of collegiality and co-operation. All visits took place between January 18th and March 25th 2021.

During each school visit, the panels met with the school's Principal, PST members and also with the NQTs who had completed the *Droichead* process. The meetings were conducted in an open and collaborative manner and, in addition to the recordings, notes were taken by the Rapporteur.

At the end of each visit, the panel reconvened 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

Quantitative terms used in this report	Percentages of References in Reports Analysed
Almost all	More than 90%
Most	75% - 90%
Majority	50% - 74%
Fewer than half	15% - 49%
A few	Up to 15 %

		All schools A-BB
Strand A School Based Induction	<i>NIPT training for all members of the PST</i>	Completed by all schools
	<i>Completed minimum period of professional practice in an eligible setting</i>	Completed by all schools
	<i>Engagement in professional conversations</i>	Engagement in all schools
	<i>Taisce</i>	Completed by all schools
	<i>Observations by/ of NQT</i>	Completed by all schools
Strand B Additional Professional Learning Activities	<i>One Cluster Meeting per term</i>	Completed by all schools
	<i>Professional Learning Activity</i>	Completed by all schools

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 *Droichead* process.

5.1 Role of Senior Management Team

- 5.1.1** The importance of having a senior management team member (Principal or Deputy Principal) on the PST was highlighted by most of the schools visited. Only one school did not have a senior management team member on the PST.
- 5.1.2** In over half of the primary schools visited, the Principal was a member of the PST. In cases where the Principal was not a member of the team, the Deputy Principal was. In the majority of cases, the Principal or Deputy Principal had introduced and led the process initially and had undertaken training.
- 5.1.3** In the majority of post primary schools visited the Deputy Principal was a member of the PST and was responsible for leading *Droichead* in the school. In fewer than half of the post-primary schools visited, the Principal was a member of the PST.
- 5.1.4** In fewer than half of the schools visited, the panel encountered newly appointed principals who had very little knowledge of the operation of the *Droichead* process in the school. All of these newly appointed Principals expressed an interest in engaging in training to redress this but in almost all cases these Principals cited the impact of Covid-19 in schools as a barrier to this.
- 5.1.5** Both PST members and NQTs reported that having the Principal/ Deputy Principal on the PST sent a message to the school community regarding the importance of the *Droichead* process in the school. It was also widely felt that this ensured that school management understood the process, supported it, and ensured that it was sufficiently resourced at school level.
- 5.1.6** Overall NQTs were positive about the fact that the Principal or Deputy Principal was a member of the PST. However, at post-primary level some reservations were expressed when members of senior management, particularly Principals, were involved in classroom observations. This concern was not as evident at primary level, with concerns expressed in only a few schools.
- 5.1.7** In schools where the principal was a member of the PST and/or involved in observations NQTs were positive and commented that it allowed for them to develop a professional relationship with the principal. One NQT commented “it’s great to be able to chat with her, she has great experience and has taught the same classes. She has given me great advice.” Another NQT commented, “it was very beneficial for me (to have the principal on the team) I was able to showcase what I was capable of and develop a good rapport with him.”
- 5.1.8** Senior management recognised the time commitment involved in implementing *Droichead* in schools. This was not felt to be excessive in the majority of schools and the importance of giving time to the induction of NQTs and to the *Droichead* process was widely recognised.
- 5.1.9** In fewer than half of the schools visited, in which the *Droichead* process had been in place for 5 years or more, PST members expressed a preference to step back from the role, even temporarily, and to allow other experienced colleagues to engage with the process. Most schools commented on the difficulties experienced in accessing training for new PST members.

5.2 PST Selection and Roles

- 5.2.1** In most schools visited staff members had an opportunity to express an interest in 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 or workshop facilitator and those who had already been involved in mentoring and induction in the school were put forward for the role. There were two current NIPT associates, both of whom who had become associates as a result of their schools' involvement in Droichead, and two former/inactive associates on PSTs in four of the twenty-eight schools visited.
- 5.2.3** All schools visited had fully internal PSTs. However, two schools which operated on campuses with others did share PST members across the campus.
- 5.2.4** The PST members were consistently strong in supporting the NQTs 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 and collaboration, empathy or caring, and were experienced staff members.
- 5.2.5** PST members recognised the positive and 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. One PST member commented that he could learn as much from the NQT as they could learn from him, this comment is reflective of the comments of most PST members.
- 5.2.6** A few schools expressed concern over the time commitment involved in the process and some PST members were concerned that they were missing contact time with their own classes in order to conduct the process. This concern was more prevalent in the post primary schools visited, particularly in relation to exam classes. Several schools reported PST and NQT meetings were held after school hours in order to preserve class contact time.
- 5.2.7** In most schools visited, NQTs felt that they were supported by PST members who were acting collaboratively, and they could approach any member of the PST for advice or guidance. They welcomed the non-evaluative nature of the PST. One NQT commented "I didn't feel I was being assessed or watched...I felt it was professional development for my career."
- 5.2.8** There was a broad range of experience of the process across the schools visited. One of the schools had been involved in the process since the pilot phase, a few had been involved for 4-5 years. This year a significant number of schools visited (albeit less than half) had less than two years' experience with Droichead and a number had engaged in the process for the first time. An average number of five NQTs had gone through the process in the schools visited with a range from one NQT to 13 NQTs.
- 5.2.9** All schools visited undertook regular reviews of the Droichead process both formally and informally. Most schools stated that a formal review had not taken place at the end of the 2019-2020 school year due to the closure of schools due to Covid-19. Schools who had NQTs engaging in the process in the current school year, did indicate that they had carried out a more formal review prior to the commencement of the current process.
- 5.2.10** Most schools 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.
- 5.2.11** Several schools reported operating PSTs with two members because of attrition due to retirement, promotion or members transferring to other schools. The panel met PST members who had transferred from other schools and were continuing to serve as PST members in their new settings.

5.3 *Droichead* Expectations

- 5.3.1 In most schools visited, a timeline for the *Droichead* process was outlined by the PST to the NQTs at the beginning of the school year or at the commencement of the NQTs contract if this did not coincide with the beginning of the school year.
- 5.3.2 Timelines in 2019-2020 were in some cases affected by the closure of schools on March 12th due to Covid-19. Fewer than half of schools reported signing Form D in March if observations and other elements of the process had been completed. Some schools continued the process throughout the lockdown with various methods of engagement between NQTs and PSTs being cited, including engagement via phone, Teams, Zoom and outdoor meetings.
- 5.3.3 No NQT had their process extended beyond the agreed timeframe in the year 2019- 2020 in the schools visited.
- 5.3.4 One school continued the process into the following year, by agreement with the NOT, due to time constraints related to the Covid-19 lockdown.
- 5.3.5 In all schools visited the role of the PST was clearly explained to the NQTs, usually at an initial meeting at the beginning of the process.
- 5.3.6 In most schools visited there was consensus from senior management, PST and NQTs that school support for *Droichead* was evident. At post primary a few schools felt there was an awareness of *Droichead* however this did not always extend beyond the PST. In the majority of 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 members, not only those on the PST supported NQTs by facilitating observations.
- 5.3.7 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.
- 5.3.8 In a small number of schools PST members reported that NQTs were anxious to complete the process within the minimum timeframe, regardless of the duration of the contract of employment and expressed concerns at this.

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 discuss and explain the standards when meeting NQTs at the initial meeting. These standards were used throughout the *Droichead* process and were referred to during discussions following observations and in professional conversations between the PST and NQT. In several schools visited, links from *Droichead* standards to the standards outlined in the publication Looking at 'Our Schools' had been made.
- 5.4.2 PST members and NQTs alike felt that the *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 a document outlining indicators of 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. PST members appreciated this element of training and highlighted it in their discussion with the panel.

5.5 Droichead Training and Support

- 5.5.1** In all schools visited PST members had attended full NIPT training. In the majority of schools visited, a member of senior management had also attended training. Several PST members and a few Principals also had other qualifications in Mentoring and Induction achieved both in Ireland and in other jurisdictions.
- 5.5.2** Training was consistently lauded as aiding the process and PST members felt it clarified the process clearly. PST members in several schools commented that it prepared them well to undertake the process and that they felt confident in their roles as a result.
- 5.5.3** Comments made about training ranged from ‘very good’ to ‘fabulous’. One PST member commented that it was the best CPD they had engaged in with any support service. This comment is reflective of other comments made in most schools.
- 5.5.3** A majority of schools expressed a wish to access training for extra PST members and some commented on difficulty in meeting the criteria for accessing training.
- 5.5.4** In a number of schools PST members had completed training at a Summer Course in an Education Centre during the summer holidays (four primary schools and one post primary school). Schools expressed disappointment that this option is not currently available in addition to the current PST training provision, particularly at a time when providing substitute cover for absences is proving very challenging.
- 5.5.5** The majority of schools were aware of the external supports available to them, particularly schools which had been involved in the provision of *Droichead* for some time. Some schools had engaged with external support through contact with NIPT RDOs and/or Associates, particularly in relation to transitional and other arrangements for *Droichead* associated with school closures from March 2019.
- 5.5.6** A number of schools, albeit fewer than half, were unaware that they could access support from an NIPT RDO or Associate and relied on the NIPT and Teaching Council websites for information.
- 5.5.7** Many schools indicated that regular refresher training is necessary for PST members. Some schools suggested holding an annual webinar to update PST and Senior Management members at the beginning of each school year, a recording of which could be accessed as necessary during the year. Schools also indicated that they would prefer if more than one PST member could access the current provision of Professional Development (PD) days organised by NIPT.
- 5.5.8** Some schools would like training to focus on supporting NQTs in a SET setting. Schools also indicated further training on challenging conversations and supporting NQTs experiencing difficulties would be welcome.
- 5.5.9** Guidelines on the process of portfolio-based learning, referred to as Taisce in the *Droichead* policy, and giving appropriate feedback was also sought. Several PST members and NQTs requested that examples of the different models of compiling a Taisce discussed at PST training would be provided.
- 5.5.10** Despite some uncertainty around Taisce in many schools, the panel discovered some excellent practice in regard to this element of *Droichead* in a few schools. Examples of this included a “Taisce Day” at the conclusion of the process in a small number of schools and some very insightful reflection by a few NQTs.

5.6 Induction Release Time for *Droichead*

5.6.1 In most of the schools visited release time was accessed in order to facilitate the operation of the *Droichead* process. The flexibility of release time is very important to ensure release time suits both sectors and varying individual school needs. The panels encountered two schools at post-primary level who were using an allocation model, where PST members had a period on their timetable to allow for induction activities.

5.6.2 The accessibility and availability of substitute teachers was cited as a serious issue in schools visited.

Schools used substitution (including S & S at post primary level), SET and the goodwill of other staff members to release PST members and NQTs for professional conversations, observations and PST meetings.

5.6.3 The Special Schools visited reported using non-classroom based staff to provide cover rather than drawing down release time available for the process due to the extreme difficulties encountered by their schools in securing substitute cover.

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 A few of the schools visited indicated that they had not used any of the release time available in 2019-20 due to the Covid-19 lockdown in schools.

5.7 Observations

5.7.1 In all schools visited the observations were viewed as fundamental to the *Droichead* process. NQTs found them very beneficial with one NQT citing them as “a most amazing opportunity I will probably never have again in my career”.

Another stated that “I think that having a school which is supportive of the process, willing to help and open to supporting you is really important...I didn't feel I was being assessed or watched...I felt it was professional development for my career”.

5.7.2 All schools visited engaged in a minimum of two observations by the NQT and of the NQT. In some schools NQTs were provided with an opportunity to engage in more than the minimum two observations prescribed in policy. However, a number of schools stated that due to Covid-19 closures that only the minimum number of observations was possible in 2019-20.

5.7.3 Less than half of schools engaged in observations in an online setting once school closures had occurred in March 2019. The panel and the schools felt that this was related to the schools' level of experience and expertise with online platforms at the time.

5.7.4 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 feedback that gave the PST members an opportunity to identify and affirm good practice. All NQTs cited the benefit of these conversations.

- 5.7.5** The impact of observations was multi-faceted and mutually beneficial, some of the benefits identified were:
- In almost all schools visited, 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 more experienced teachers. Some NQTs noted that they would like an opportunity to engage in more observations.
 - PST members enjoyed having an opportunity to see newer or innovative teaching methodologies when observing NQTs. They also cited the satisfaction gained from observing NQTs mature and develop as professionals from one observation to another. One PST member stated that being observed by NQTs made him much more reflective on his own practice, stating "every teacher can learn from observing others and being observed and observations can be used as resource for any teacher who has an area of need."
 - PST members and Principals in the majority of schools acknowledged that being involved in *Droichead* observations "opened classroom doors" and led to a more collaborative culture throughout the school. Most schools reported that experienced teachers, who were not members of the PST were willing to be observed by NQTs.
- 5.7.6** The panels also noted that the introduction of *Droichead* in several schools seemed to have led to the formalising of the induction of all new staff members, not just NQTs.

5.8 Professional Conversations

- 5.8.1** A combination of both formal and informal professional conversations took place in all schools visited. Both types of conversations were recognised by PST members and by NQTs 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, almost all NQTs reported having pre-observation and post observation conversations which had been scheduled with their PST members. Most post observation conversations took place on the day of the observation or on the next day at the latest.
- 5.8.3** Informal conversations took place more regularly or as needed and this allowed the PST to provide ongoing support in a timely manner to NQTs.
- 5.8.4** Almost all NQTs felt that they could approach PST members for advice and guidance at any time and that they were readily available to them. Both PST members and NQTs initiated professional conversations as necessary in all of the schools visited.
- 5.8.5** Several schools, while assuring the panels of wholly positive experiences in their schools, expressed concern around possible difficult conversations in the future. PST members felt that more specific training or an additional module at Professional Development days could be useful in this regard.

5.9 Taisce

- 5.9.1** The process of portfolio-based learning, referred to as Taisce in the *Droichead* policy was engaged in by all NQTs in the schools visited. A variety of formats of collection was used by the NQTs, including folders, diaries, notebooks, journals, and online portfolios.
- 5.9.2** The benefits of using Taisce from the NQTs' perspective was the collection of resources and of students' work. The majority of NQTs found it beneficial as an aid to professional reflection and learning.
- Three schools reported a "Taisce Day" or a formal sharing of key learning moments as a celebratory event at the conclusion of the *Droichead* process. These events were seen as extremely positive by both PST members and NQTs alike.
- 5.9.3** The PSTs felt that Taisce was important for formalising reflective practice and that NQTs should be encouraged to do this, however a majority of PST members would like more clarification on their role in the Taisce process and admitted to some confusion as to their role in regard to Taisce.
- 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.
- 5.9.5** A few NQTs reported that they were more honest in their reflections when they felt that PST members would not be reviewing them and found Taisce a more useful process as a result.

5.10 Records

- 5.10.1** All schools visited were using the templates provided by the NIPT for the *Droichead* process. Some schools reported adapting them for use in their individual settings. All schools felt that the templates were useful in guiding the process at school level, for promoting consistency and to ensure clarity for all involved.
- 5.10.2** The most useful records for the process were the observation templates. PST members and NQTs alike also cited the usefulness of the *Droichead* outline plan and calendar. Among other records kept by the PST were minutes of PST meetings, the standards and indicator document, Form D, and the needs analysis document.
- 5.10.3** Almost all schools used the NIPT planning documents but several NQTs referred to the necessity to plan on a weekly basis when other colleagues were planning on a fortnightly basis as a source of frustration. NQTs reported that the templates gave structure to their planning. Some NQTs also made use of the weekly reflection document.
- 5.10.4** The NIPT website was considered a useful and valuable resource for PST members and for NQTs.
- 5.10.5** Schools had limited suggestions for how templates could be improved. Suggestions made included additional templates to support NQTs completing *Droichead* in a SET setting, but almost all schools indicated that the templates needed little or no improvement.

5.11 Additional Professional Development

- 5.11.1 In all schools visited NQTs had attended at least one cluster meeting. However, due to Covid-19 closures from March 2020, almost half of NQTs had to avail of transitional arrangements due to their inability to attend cluster meetings during lockdown.
- 5.11.2 Cluster meetings received mixed feedback from NQTs across the schools visited. Half of NQTs found Cluster Meeting 1 beneficial especially the information presented about the *Droichead* process, other NQTs felt this was a repetition of information already received from their PST members at the initial meeting in school.
- 5.11.3 Some NQTs found cluster meetings to be repetitive of their Initial Teacher Education content and felt that they did not address their current needs.
- 5.11.4 Some NQTs reported it was difficult to get a place at cluster meetings especially in larger urban Education Centres and recounted travelling long distance to access cluster meetings in other areas.

Several NQTs found travelling to their local Education Centres after school, sometimes a journey of up to an hour and a half, to be onerous and recommended online provision to address this.

Conversely, they acknowledged that what they saw as the most valuable element of cluster meetings, which is the opportunity to interact and network with other NQTs could be lost in the online environment.

- 5.11.5 NQTs who derived the most benefit from cluster meetings and who were most positive about them, tended to be those who were the only NQT in their schools. Where there were multiple NQTs in a school they did not generally cite the social or networking benefits of cluster meetings as they appeared to have these networking opportunities in school.
- 5.11.6 There was a lack of awareness among PST members as to the content of cluster meetings, the response cited below is a typical response from an PST member. "I reminded them of the need to attend and checked that they did, but I didn't ask for feedback and they didn't volunteer it".
- 5.11.7 Recommendations for improvement of cluster meetings included ensuring the sessions were more NQT led, more input around planning and SET and perhaps having specific cluster meetings aimed at NQTs working in a SET setting.

NQTs at post primary suggested having cluster meetings organised around the subjects being taught by NQTs but acknowledged the logistical difficulties of this.

- 5.11.8 The value of NQTs engaging with the Induction Workshop Programme was noted by both PST members and NQTs, due to the topic-based nature of the workshops and also due to the fact that their frequency ensured more supportive informal networking opportunities for NQTs.
- 5.11.9 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. These activities took place both inside and outside of the school setting, including online and in local Education Centres. There was a significant variety in the activities undertaken and NQTs felt the activities undertaken had had a positive impact on both their teaching and professional development. The panels noted however that more than half of PST members were unable to recall what additional learning activity the NQTs in their schools had engaged in and were also unsure as to the area of future learning identified by the NQT. It was felt that the Covid-19 closures and the fact that many PSTs had not engaged in person with the NQTs between March and the end of the school year may have been a factor in this.
- 5.11.10 The panels also noted that mandatory CPD, such as Child Protection Training, JCT in-service at post primary level and Primary Language Curriculum Training at primary was used by some NQTs as an additional professional learning activity for the purposes of *Droichead*.

Impact of Covid-19

The following impact of the Covid-19 school closures was observed:

- A number of schools which had completed the minimum number of observations and whose NQTs had reached the minimum timeframe by March 12th reported signing Form D at that point.
- A few schools reported that NQTs had started very shortly prior to lockdown. These schools reported concluding the process in September.
- One school which employed an NQT during the lockdown did not commence the process with this NQT.
- Schools reported concerns and uncertainty regarding the completion of the *Droichead* process until *Droichead* Covid-19 Guidelines for NQTs were issued by the Teaching Council in June.
- The majority of schools that continued the *Droichead* process reported that opportunities to observe NQTs were limited due to the lack of expertise and experience in the use of online platforms which allowed for live teaching, particularly at primary level.
- PST support for NQTs, in the absence of face to face meetings took many forms, including phone calls, online meetings on Teams, Zoom and other platforms, outdoor meetings and walks on the beach to conclude the process.
- A number of schools (fewer than half) indicated that they had made provision for NQTs who had concluded the process prior to the summer, to engage in the observation of experienced colleagues when schools reopened in September, as they had missed out on this opportunity due to Covid-19 closures.

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 in the PST. The support and understanding by senior management 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 ensure that *Droichead* is included at staff meetings, at least once per term, if possible.
- 6.1.3** The panel recommends that information sessions on *Droichead* would be provided to newly appointed principals as a matter of urgency. There may be scope for increased and ongoing cooperation across the support services and other providers to identify the most efficient opportunities for this.

6.2 PST Selection and Roles

- 6.2.1** Based on the variety of practice observed from school to school, the panel recommends that schools develop guidelines outlining the selection process for PST members and that staff are informed of the process used.

These guidelines would include best practice around the selection and composition of the PST. The panel acknowledges that PST members should have an interest in teaching and learning, good communication skills, empathy, and a supporting nature. While having a PST member with experience of Special Education is viewed as advantageous, it is also important that NQTs have access to PST members with experience of teaching different class levels.
- 6.2.2** In smaller primary schools the use of a PST member from an external panel or the development of an inter-school PST is recommended.
- 6.2.3** It is important that schools are afforded an opportunity to attend training as the need arises. This would allow PST members, some of whom have been in situ for up to seven years to step back from the process, without declaring themselves as inactive PST members, and allow others to upskill.

6.3 *Droichead* Expectations

6.3.1 The panels noted positively that NQTs welcomed the non-evaluative nature of *Droichead* and the supportive nature of PST input. It is also noted that 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 other events intervened. In 2019-20 the greatest impact was that of the Covid-19 school closures.

It is recommended that NIPT highlight the good practice of establishing a timeline in its training programme. It is also important that the issue of any possible extension to initially agreed *Droichead* timelines is not misunderstood and that PST members have the skills to mediate such decisions at school level.

6.3.2 Ensuring clarity in communication for all involved in the *Droichead* process is essential for consistency. All schools visited had clearly defined the roles of PST members when initiating the process and these were communicated to NQTs at the initial meeting and usually in writing. This is considered to be best practice and is desirable for the process.

6.3.3 Using NIPT templates for short and long-term planning at primary level is currently considered best practice for NQTs engaging in the *Droichead* process. While it is recognised that there is now some alignment between the preparation for planning in a professional environment at Initial Teacher Education stage, it is recommended that this should be expanded upon. Recent NCCA Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning will also influence NQT planning in the future.

6.4 *Droichead* Standards

6.4.1 There was ample evidence that schools are using the three *Droichead* standards to underpin and guide the process. The explicit development and use of contextualised indicators is recommended practice and aids consistency within and across schools. Schools should continue this practice and review and revise contextualised indicators as necessary.

6.5 *Droichead* Training & Support

6.5.1 The panel noted that most schools expressed a wish to train additional PST members due to several factors as noted in our findings. The panel feels it is desirable that training would be made available to upskill additional members of staff to support the *Droichead* process.

6.5.2 There should be opportunity for PST members to engage in regular upskilling and updates at refresher training. This training should be made available to all PST members, it is currently available to only one member per school. The possibility of providing an online or blended solution could be explored here.

6.5.3 The panel recommends that the option of providing PST training as a Summer Course would be explored again as an addition to the existing PST training provision.

6.5.4 NIPT should provide specific guidelines for PST members supporting NQTs undertaking *Droichead* in a SET setting. Further guidance for NQTs working in this setting are also required. This could be addressed by means of the provision of a SET specific cluster meeting.

6.5.5 The panel recommends that schools initiating *Droichead* could receive a school visit from the NIPT where this is possible within resources.

6.5.6 The panel recommends that schools would make additional contact with NIPT to ensure a common understanding of the process and to facilitate the embedding of *Droichead* into school culture. The panel noted a lack of awareness among PSTs members and school principals that additional support was available from NIPT in its findings.

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 Given the challenges reported by the majority of schools in accessing substitute cover, we recommend the expansion of the current supply panels to cater for the substitution needs of schools providing *Droichead*.
- 6.6.3 Schools must make every effort not to rely on volunteerism and the goodwill of colleagues to support engagement in the *Droichead* process.

Accessing all available resources is vital to ensuring that the *Droichead* process is properly supported and continuity of teaching and learning is maintained.
- 6.6.4 It is not envisaged that the Supervision & Substitution (S&S) scheme should 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.
- 6.6.5 The panel notes the widespread use of SET staff to facilitate release time for *Droichead* and strongly discourages this practice. The panel advises schools to avail of the paid substitution available to schools for the *Droichead* process.
- 6.6.6 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.
- 6.6.7 At primary level flexible release time models should be explored. Commendable practice was seen in schools where release time was planned, structured, and organised. Almost all schools commended the NIPT documents regarding the efficient use of release time and these should be used on a more widespread basis.
- 6.6.7 Schools should note that it is possible to apply to the NIPT for additional discretionary release time to support *Droichead* and should utilise this facility as required.

6.7 Observations

- 6.7.1 Given the benefits reported by NQTs who engaged in multiple observations, the panel recommends that NQTs should be given an opportunity to observe beyond the minimum number of observations stipulated in policy.

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 The panel notes that there does not appear to be 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 PSTs and NQTs. NQTs require more guidance around their use of Taisce and PSTs have requested clarification around their role in relation to it. This could be done across numerous platforms such as PST training, Professional Development days, cluster meetings and in NIPT correspondence with schools and communication via the NIPT website.
- 6.9.2 PST members should play an active role in encouraging NQTs to engage in personal reflection of their key learning moments, Taisce can then be used to build on reflective practice and professional portfolios developed during Initial Teacher Education. Some excellent examples of the use of Taisce as a reflective tool were reported during visits, these should be referred to at training events.

6.10 Records

- 6.10.1 There appears to be a clear understanding among PSTs of the importance of maintaining clear records of the *Droichead* process in schools. The panel recommends that this practice should continue.
- 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 and should continue.

6.11 Additional Professional Development

- 6.11.1 The panel recommends that cluster meetings are reviewed to ensure they address the needs of NQTs in all settings.
- 6.11.2 The panel recommends that the development of a cluster meeting to meet the needs of NQTs inducting in a SET setting should be explored.
- 6.11.3 The panel recommends that mechanisms to facilitate more informal networking for NQTs should be explored.
- 6.11.4 The panel recommends that the use of mandated CPD as an additional professional learning activity for the purposes of *Droichead*, should be discussed and reviewed.
- 6.11.5 Due to the topic-based nature of the induction workshops and their potential use in addressing specific needs, the panel recommends that NQTs could consider using the induction workshops provided by the NIPT for their additional professional development as appropriate.

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.

Anne Howard

Anne Howard was elected to the Teaching Council in 2020 for the Community and Comprehensive sector. She serves on the Registration and Discipline Committees. A native of Clare, she studied in NUI Maynooth and NUI Galway. She served as a post primary teacher for most of her 30 years in St Patrick's Comprehensive, Shannon and was an Assistant Principal 1 holder. She is a member of the NCCA Junior Board. Anne was an elected member of the TUI Executive and was chairperson of both the Education and Joint Second Level Subcommittees. She currently works as an Assistant General Secretary with the TUI.

Kathleen Burke

Kathleen Burke is a registered teacher and a member of the Teaching Council. She is Deputy Principal in the Presentation de la Salle College, Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow since 2004. She is a graduate of St. Angela's College, Sligo where she qualified as a teacher of Home Economics and Biology. She holds a Master's degree M.Sc Agr (Food Science) from University College Dublin. She also has attained a Higher Diploma in Educational Management from NUI Maynooth. She is a member of the ASTI Principals and Deputy Principals Advisory Committee. Kathleen is a member of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and she has been involved as a mentor in the mentoring programme for newly appointed deputy principals.

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.

Mary Curley

Mary Curley has been a member of the Teaching Council since May 2020, having been elected in the Munster Primary Panel. Mary graduated from Mary Immaculate College of Education and was a teacher in Sixmilebridge N.S. Co. Clare for 18 years before taking up the position of Principal in Doora N.S. Co. Clare in 2003. Mary retired from teaching in October 2020.

Mary has been a very active member of I.N.T.O. for over 30 years and served as Branch Committee Member and Chair of Ennis Branch. She has been a member of District XI Committee for many years and is currently Secretary to District XI. She has been a regular attendee and speaker at Congress.

Mary is also involved in CPSMA and regularly represents Killaloe Diocese at their AGM. She is also an Independent Assessor for Killaloe Diocese.

In her new-found spare time since retirement, Mary has taken up golf, knitting and cycling, while continuing to foster her lifelong love of music.

William Donnelly

William Donnelly is a post-primary inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. He is assigned to the Inspectorate as an inspector of the Business subjects and to the Curriculum and Assessment section of the Inspectorate.

In the course of his work, he carries out whole school evaluations, subject inspections and programme evaluations and works closely with many teams within the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT).

Siobhán Aherne

Siobhán Aherne is a post-primary inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. Siobhán's evaluation portfolio includes whole school evaluations, whole centre evaluations, child protection safeguarding inspections and subject inspections in Home Economics and SPHE. She also supports the school self-evaluation process through advisory visits in schools. Siobhán is the link inspector for SPHE, working in tandem with the Wellbeing and SPHE teams within the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). She is an Inspectorate nominee to the judging panel of the annual BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. Prior to joining the Inspectorate, Siobhán was a post primary school teacher in St. Aloysius College, Carrigtwohill, Cork and she also authored a Leaving Certificate Home Economics textbook.

Carmel O'Doherty

Dr Carmel O'Doherty is a Divisional (Senior) Inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. She has worked with the Inspectorate since 1998. During this period, she has undertaken whole-school evaluations, curriculum evaluations, and thematic evaluations and contributed to policy development.

Between 2016 and 2020, Carmel was seconded to Limerick Education Centre where she worked as Director and coordinated programmes of professional development for teachers and other learners. During this period, she was also the coordinator of the Master's programme in Educational Leadership and Management in Mary Immaculate College.

Since returning to the Inspectorate in 2020, Carmel is currently assigned to work with schools at regional level and with the Teacher Education and Inclusion Evaluation and Policy Support Unit of the Inspectorate.

Caitríona Ní Bhriain

Caitríona Ní Bhriain is a Primary Divisional Inspector in the Department of Education. In the course of her work in primary schools, she conducts evaluations and also engages in advisory visits to support school self-evaluation. Caitríona is currently assigned to the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate. In her previous role within the Inspectorate's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Support Unit, she served on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Board of Early Years and Primary, and chaired the Educational Research Centre (ERC) National Assessments Advisory Group. Prior to joining the Inspectorate, Caitríona worked in schools in Hong Kong, London, Kuwait and Kenya as well as in Ireland. Her most recent overseas position was in Abu Dhabi, where she worked as a principal inspector, quality assuring inspections in both government and private schools.

Elizabeth Sheridan

Elizabeth Sheridan is a Senior Primary Inspector in the Department of Education. In the course of her work in primary and post-primary schools, she conducts evaluations, child protection and safeguarding inspections and also engages in advisory visits to support school self-evaluation. Elizabeth is also currently assigned to the Office of the Chief Inspector. Before joining the Inspectorate, Elizabeth worked as an administrative primary school principal and has many years of teaching experience in a variety of school types. She also worked with NIPT as an associate supporting delivery of the national induction programme for newly qualified teachers.

Máirín Ní Chéileachair

Máirín Ní Chéileachair is the principal of Gaelscoil Uí Fhiaich, Maigh Nuad, a position she has held since 1997. Tá an cuid is mó dá saol mar mhúinteoir agus mar phríomhoide caite in earnáil na Gaelscolaíochta. Since 2015 she has spent time on secondment as National Coordinator of the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and as Director of Dublin West Education Centre. She is passionately interested in Education and has been a member of the Bord Stiúrtha of Gaeloideachas and An Foras Pátrúnachta. She has lectured extensively in Initial Teacher Education settings and spoken widely at conferences both in Ireland and abroad. Serving as rapporteur to the DQA panel was one of the more interesting projects Máirín engaged in while on career break in 2020-21.

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. (Note: In 2021 all visits were carried out online via Microsoft Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions pertaining at that time.)
- 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 convenes 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.

An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

Block A, Maynooth Business Campus,
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, W23 Y7X0, Ireland

Lo-Call 1890 224 224

Telephone +353 1 651 7900

Facsimile +353 1 651 7901

Email info@teachingcouncil.ie

www.teachingcouncil.ie

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

