Development of the *Cosán* Framework

Drafting and Consultation
Background Paper

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

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1 About this paper

In its *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* published in 2011, the Council stated its intention "to work towards a position, following the adoption of a coherent national framework for CPD … where renewal of registration with the Teaching Council will be subject to the receipt of satisfactory evidence in relation to engagement in CPD" (p.19).

In order to inform the development of a national framework, the Council initiated a comprehensive consultation process in 2014. The process took place over a number of phases and has ensured that the framework is grounded in the realities of teachers' professional lives, and of the Irish education system more broadly. This paper provides an overview of each stage of the process, the feedback received, and the ways in which the framework has developed, and will continue to develop, in response to that feedback.

The framework has also been informed by a comprehensive literature review, and a full bibliography is included in Section 4.

2 The consultation process

In order to find out more about teachers' experiences of professional learning, and to inform the development of a national framework for teachers' learning, a comprehensive, multi-layered consultation process was devised by the Teaching Council. The first phase, which took place in late 2014, comprised three avenues of consultation exclusively with the teaching profession. They were:

1.   An online survey for individual teachers

2.   25 consultation workshops in education centres nationwide

3.   Whole-school feedback following school-based workshops.

In addition, in early March 2015, the Council convened a meeting of registered teachers who had recently carried out research on continuing professional development (CPD) or related areas in order to discuss their key findings and, in particular, the learnings from their critical review of the literature in this area.

In total, 3,349 teachers participated in phase 1 of the consultation process, and a summary of the issues emerging is set out in Appendix A.

This was a unique process in that it did not involve the Council consulting on a prepared draft of the framework. Rather, it invited teachers' initial views before the drafting process commenced. In that way, it enabled the profession to lead a national conversation on the future of its professional learning. This was an entirely new approach for the Council, and for many teachers also. It proved to be an effective one, fostering rich professional conversations and generating valuable data. In doing so, the process enabled the voice of teachers to shape the language and structures that will keep learning in its rightful place — at the heart of the teaching profession.

In May 2015, the Council published *Cosán*, the first draft of the framework (available [here](#)), and began the next phase of consultation. The second phase included a national consultation event for stakeholders, which was attended by more than 100 representatives of the various stakeholder bodies.

The Teaching Council gathered a rich variety of feedback, and stakeholders were invited to request follow-up bilateral meetings if they wished.

The Council also received 65 written responses from the following institutions or organisations:

- AHEAD — Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
- Association of Geography Teachers in Ireland
- ASTI
- ASTI, Fermoy Branch
- ATECI — Association of Teachers'/Education Centres in Ireland
- Centre for School Leadership
- Educational Disadvantage Centre
- Engineers Ireland
- Forum of Heads of Teacher Education
- French Teachers' Association
- Froebel Department, NUI Maynooth
- HEA National Access Office
- Hibernia College, Dublin
- IDEA Formal Education Working Group
- Institute of Teacher Education (including TCD, UCD, MIE, NCAD)
- INTO
- Irish Primary Physical Education Association
- JCSP — Junior Certificate Schools Programme
- Mary Immaculate College
- Mathematics Teachers' Association
- Maynooth Department of Education
- NAPD — National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
- NCSE — National Council for Special Education
- NISE — National Institute for Studies in Education
- PDST — Professional Development Service for Teachers
- SLARI Committee — School Library Association in the Republic of Ireland
- St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (Special Education Department and School of Education)
- Trinity College Dublin
- Ubuntu Network — Teacher Education for Sustainable Development
- UCET — Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers
- University of Limerick
- Urban Schools Group
- WorldWise Global Schools.

More than 1,600 individual teachers and other stakeholders contributed to the conversation in the second phase of consultation, by completing an online feedback form, submitting feedback by email, or by attending one of a series of 10 workshops, which took place in education centres in Athlone, Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Kilkenny, Limerick and Galway. The workshops, facilitated by teachers seconded to the Teaching Council, gathered a broad spectrum of opinion from the profession.

As an alternative to the education centre workshops, schools, or clusters of neighbouring schools, were invited to organise their own school-based meetings. The Teaching Council developed a feedback form with prompts to aid staff reflection and discussion.

Phase 2 of the consultation closed in December 2015 and a summary of the issues and themes emerging is included in Appendix B.

All of the feedback was collated and considered by the Teaching Council, and the draft framework was revised having regard to this. This updated framework was approved by Council on 15 February 2016. The next phase of *Cosán* will be a development phase, during which teachers who opt in to that process will apply the framework in their particular context. The findings of the research will inform the ongoing evolution of the framework.

3 Summary of changes made during the consultation process

The nature of the consultation has meant that the Council has made significant adaptations and changes to the framework in light of feedback received from members of the profession and stakeholders since the first draft in May 2015. These changes are summarised below:

3.1 Introduction

The introduction to the document provides a number of clarifications, which were considered necessary based on the feedback from the consultation. In particular, the revised introduction explicitly references Council policy in relation to a future link to registration, as set out in the *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education*. This clarification was included in response to feedback from teachers, which suggested that a significant number were not aware of this. The updated text makes clear the intention of the Teaching Council to link professional learning to registration in a way that is appropriate and sustainable, following a development phase over a number of years.

3.2 Background

The first sub-section under this heading has been updated to include relevant extracts from the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, and additional information on the European policy context. The second section has been updated to incorporate an overview of the second phase of consultation.

3.3 Values and principles

- The values of *Cosán* are now linked with the ethical values **Respect, Care, Integrity** and **Trust,** set out in the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, and are more explicitly linked to the values that underpin all of the Council's work.

- The values set out in the draft document in May 2015 have been reframed as a series of principles, which address a variety of feedback received during the consultation process. In particular:

  — the value previously presented as relevance/quality has now been presented as two distinct principles

  — the value previously presented as professional autonomy has now been updated to incorporate the related concept of professional responsibility

  — the Council's understanding of the term 'impact', which was presented as a value in the draft document in May 2015, has been made explicit. The revised text notes that impact should be considered in broad terms, which facilitate teachers in considering the complex ways in which their learning can benefit their students (not just in terms of student learning outcomes, but more broadly in terms of their levels of motivation, interest, engagement, enjoyment, etc.), school culture, and the wider school community.

Values in draft document, May 2015	Principles in final document, March 2016
Professional autonomy	***Cosán* will recognise teachers as autonomous and responsible professionals.**
Flexibility	***Cosán* will be a flexible framework.**
Relevance/quality	***Cosán* will facilitate teachers in identifying relevant learning opportunities.** ***Cosán* will facilitate teachers in identifying opportunities for quality learning, and will allow for innovative approaches to quality assurance.**[1]
Accessibility	***Cosán* will recognise the importance of teachers having access to rich and varied learning opportunities.**
Acknowledgement	***Cosán* will provide a long-awaited opportunity for teachers and stakeholders to formally acknowledge teachers' learning.**
Impact	***Cosán* will facilitate teachers in valuing learning, and in prioritising learning that benefits them and their pupils.**

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1   This is further elaborated on in the Quality Assurance Section of the framework document.

3.4 Standards to guide learning and reflection

In response to feedback from the profession and other stakeholders, the varied purposes of the standards have been elaborated upon, and the standards have been revised to make explicit the centrality of students in teachers' learning. The standards have also been simplified and the proposed three standards have been replaced with two. The table below summarises these changes:

Standards in draft document, May 2015	Standards in final document, March 2016
o Teachers demonstrate a sustained commitment to quality teaching and learning. o Teachers demonstrate a commitment to continued professional growth. o Teachers demonstrate a commitment to practising professionally, and to sustaining that level of professionalism over a prolonged period.	As learning professionals, teachers should demonstrate a commitment to: o quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and o continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way.

As the standards are intended to guide learning and reflection, this entire section has been moved so that it now follows the section of *Cosán* that relates to reflecting on learning.

3.5 Dimensions of teachers' learning

A variety of alternative dimensions were offered by various individuals and bodies during the consultation process. The Teaching Council acknowledges that the key dimensions described in this section can be complemented by other conceptualisations. Furthermore, the key dimensions that are presented are not mutually exclusive, and learning opportunities can be understood through an overlap of these dimensions.

3.6 Teachers' learning processes

This section of the draft document was applauded for its broad reach throughout the consultation process. An additional learning process of research has been added in response to feedback, and additional exemplars have been included (such as MOOCs, overseas volunteering, participating in a ResearchMeet, State Examination work, membership of a research engagement group, etc.). The role of reflective practice here has been made more prominent in the graphic.

3.7   Priority learning areas

This section has been renamed as 'learning areas', as it is considered that the headings included here are sufficiently broad to allow for all areas of learning to be acknowledged, including those additional areas proposed during the consultation.

With respect to each of the learning areas, these have been defined and exemplars included. A new commitment has been given by the Teaching Council to review these learning areas once during the lifetime of the each Council, i.e., once every four years, in consultation with the profession and other stakeholders.

3.8   Planning for learning, and recording and reflecting on its impact

This section was previously titled 'Recording and reflecting on learning and its impact'. It was adjusted to reflect the necessity that emerged in feedback, that professional learning requires planning at individual, school and system levels.

The inclusion of planning as part of the cycle of evidence gathering, reflection and learning is an important feature of the next phase of *Cosán.*

This section has also been updated to include additional information on the research base for portfolio-based learning.

It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of respondents to the survey were 'not sure' about the appropriateness of teachers having an ICT-based solution for reflecting on and recording learning. The Council therefore intends to give considerable attention to this issue during the conversations that will take place as part of the development phase.

3.9   Quality assurance processes

A commitment to develop accreditation criteria and procedures in consultation with stakeholders is reiterated. The suggested criteria have been updated considerably in response to questions and issues raised during the consultation period. These have been now been presented under a number of headings, including: design and evaluation; the methodologies; content; and, facilitation. It is also now proposed that all programmes should be based on a conceptual framework informed by research and rooted in good practice.

3.10 Research base and development phase

There were requests during the consultation for more information on the research base that underpins this document. While Council acknowledges the importance of making this explicit, and has given it greater visibility by including further references to the literature, it is keen to avoid making the framework overly long and, for that reason, has chosen instead to include in this background paper the full list of the research and policy literature that was considered in the development of the framework (see Section 4).

The consultation process yielded rich data in relation to questions to be explored by the profession, in partnership with other stakeholders, during the development phase. In particular, it highlighted the question of how engagement in ongoing learning might be linked with registration in a manner that is appropriate and sustainable, and that adheres to the principles of flexibility and autonomy that underpin the framework — principles which are clearly welcomed and valued by teachers and other stakeholders. It also highlighted the need for the development phase to give greater consideration to the standards, with a particular focus on how they might apply to different cohorts of teachers. As referenced earlier, there is considerable uncertainty about the possibility of an ICT-based solution for supporting reflection on learning, and this will need considerable attention in the next phase. Finally, there are also many questions as to how learning will be recognised, in particular, less formal learning. All of these areas will be prioritised for further exploration, experimentation and collective consideration by the profession.

Further changes made to the draft *Cosán* document under this heading include:

o   the timeframe envisaged for the development phase has been included, and

o   the focus on resourcing and other systemic considerations prior to national implementation of *Cosán* has been made more explicit.

4 Literature review

As referenced earlier, the framework has been developed based on feedback from the profession and other stakeholders, and also on an extensive review of relevant literature. Below is a bibliography of all sources.

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Appendix A: Summary of issues emerging from phase 1 of the consultation

A major conclusion to be drawn from the consultation is the **complexity** of CPD/professional learning. The issues are far from simple and the development of a national framework for teachers' learning must take account of many deeply embedded factors in Ireland's education system.

Participants gave a detailed account of their experience of CPD in all its variety. What is most apparent is that teachers are extremely interested in opportunities to engage in **high-quality, relevant and appropriate** professional learning activities. Many teachers are deeply involved in the provision of CPD and all of these acknowledge that they have gained professionally from their involvement.

Allied with this deep interest in professional learning is a strong interest in **personal development**, and in the types of **collaborative learning** and professional conversations that take place in schools on a **formal** and **informal** basis. In terms of collaborative learning, **mentoring** is highlighted as a particularly valuable form of CPD.

Teachers are very keen to have **choice** in relation to how they engage in professional learning, with many participants noting the need to **respect** the professionalism of teachers and allow them to exercise **autonomy** in choosing what type of CPD would benefit them most. The feedback would suggest that CPD should be differentiated to meet the needs of the school and the individual. It was noted by many that the framework must allow for the teacher's personal circumstances.

Teachers' perceptions and **understanding of CPD** vary a good deal. A narrow frame of reference for CPD is adopted by many participants, who see it as being confined to attendance at courses and seminars, as opposed to viewing it in the broader sense as reflected in the Teaching Council's definition.

It is apparent that the **Extra Personal Vacation (EPV)** system, whereby days off are available in lieu of attendance at Department of Education and Skills (DES) approved courses, is valued by primary teachers. Much of the feedback would appear to be based on anecdotal evidence and rumours that are circulating in relation to the impact that the framework might have on EPV days and the way in which engagement in CPD might be linked to registration, and this would appear to have influenced the way in which some teachers have engaged with the process. There was considerable **scepticism** expressed by some teachers in relation to the consultation process, with some suspecting that the framework has already been developed and, therefore, not perceiving the consultation as a genuine one.

The question of **access** to CPD is a major one for all respondents. Many respondents cite the cost of travel, childcare, interference with home life, intrusion on personal time, and distance and geographical considerations, as being among the factors that preclude them from benefiting from certain CPD opportunities.

Education centres figure prominently in the feedback, and many participants spoke positively of the personal satisfaction to be derived from face-to-face courses and seminars. Respondents tend to see education centres as important resources that could play a key role as 'learning hubs' if appropriate strategic provision is made for their contribution to professional learning.

The use of **technology** and online access to CPD in all its varied forms is a major theme for those who participated in the consultation, and who revealed extensive engagement and familiarity with online opportunities. Remarkably, there is widespread recourse to online CPD, and many participants note that this type of professional learning is beneficial and rewarding. It is apparent that teachers are generally supportive of online access for professional learning and of its inclusion as part of the national framework for CPD.

Many teachers who participated in the consultation are opposed to the concept of **mandatory CPD**, and expressed fears that, if compulsory, it would promote a 'compliance mentality' with minimal real engagement. The concern was put forward by many that this would be damaging for the goodwill and professionalism of teachers. However, some participants take a different view and consider that the maintenance of professional status for teachers requires some level of obligatory CPD. While there are mixed views about this issue, there are signs that for some newly qualified teachers, there are benefits to be derived from the induction procedures now provided under the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT). The issue is somewhat clouded by various assumptions that some respondents have about possible developments in this regard.

The **'Croke Park hours'** are a significant concern for respondents and there is a broad range of opinion about their application for CPD. While the hours have been used to some extent for CPD within schools, and reference was made to their positive impact in terms of whole staff development, consistency, and "collegiality and team-building benefits", some participants are critical about features of inflexibility that they perceive. "Ticking the box" is commonly offered as a criticism of the quality of some of the CPD given in some schools. Many of those who expressed concerns in this area believe that the mandatory element of Croke Park hours has impacted negatively on levels of goodwill and engagement.

Many teachers would recommend that CPD could be **accredited**. While there are various suggestions for credits and points systems to record attendance and completion of CPD, the feasibility and practicability of these must remain as an open question that would have to be addressed as part of the national framework.

Formal academic studies and research are highly valued by participants, many of whom have pursued postgraduate diplomas and degrees to the highest levels. It is apparent that respondents rate this form of professional learning very highly, and wish that there might be incentive and reward for its pursuit. Respondents see great benefit for education and for the system when teachers are enabled to engage in scholarly inquiry.

Many teachers commented on the need for incentives generally, and drew attention to the costs of CPD, and earnestly hope that this issue would be dealt with generously. Sabbatical leave and tax **incentives** are proposed by some participants to assist teachers to pursue research and study. The suggestion was also made that CPD be linked to increments rather than registration. In general, respondents would seek to have much of the cost of CPD borne by the DES, but it is apparent that teachers have invested significant sums in CPD over the years.

Suggestions were also made on how to progress the development of the framework. They varied from reinstating middle management structures and financial remuneration, and restoring school development planning days and allowances for postgraduate qualifications, to ultimately realising that what underpins CPD is a commitment to lifelong learning. Some participants recognised that a change in culture is required.

The work of **subject associations** is given extensive attention by many respondents to the online survey, particularly those in post-primary and further education. There is high value placed on the subject associations for the benefits they have conferred on teachers over the years. Respondents expect that the national framework for teachers' learning will consolidate and support the role of the associations. **Teacher Professional Networks** are given favourable mention by some respondents also, and these merit inclusion in deliberations concerning CPD and professional learning.

Irish as a subject and Irish-medium instruction feature in the feedback received via the online questionnaire. There are particular needs that arise in respect of Irish as a language and some respondents highlight issues of concern. As regards provision of CPD, both for the language and for its use as a medium of instruction in many schools, some respondents express the desire for better resources.

A relatively small number of participants mention the use of **portfolios** to keep a record of professional learning. While respondents are anxious to have accreditation and credits for CPD, there are relatively few mentions of auditing systems for keeping account of the professional learning that has been undertaken by an individual teacher. A few respondents listed a chartered scheme for teachers as something to be developed.

Appendix B: Summary of issues emerging from phase 2 of the consultation

Approximately 1,600 teachers and others engaged in this phase of consultation. This built on the first phase of consultation, bringing the total number of individuals and organisations who engaged to approximately 5,000.

Many of the emergent themes echoed those that emerged from phase 1. In general, there is **broad support for the framework**, with many welcoming the values, standards and dimensions (in particular the emphasis on **flexibility**, **relevance, quality** and **informal learning**), the broad suggested menu of learning processes, and the inclusion of **wellbeing** as a priority learning area.

Participants generally **agreed that teachers should identify the impact of their learning on practice,** and that the Council should develop a series of resources to support professional conversations about teachers' learning. A recurring theme was that the mechanism for recording and reflecting on learning **should not be too onerous, or lead to increased administration** or paperwork. A significant proportion of respondents to the survey were '**not sure**' **about the appropriateness of teachers having an ICT-based solution** for this, or that an ICT-based solution should be developed to facilitate collaborative reflection, perhaps signalling a need for these issues to receive considerable attention during the conversations that will take place as part of the development phase.

Many **participants appear to have responded on the basis of various assumptions of how *Cosán* will work**. Indeed, as in phase 1, a number of respondents appeared to be responding on the basis of various rumours they had heard, for example, about mandatory engagement over a number of hours per year, mandatory engagement in August, links between engagement and pay, an "overly prescriptive approach, which is linked to registration renewal on a yearly basis", a "race for uniformity and conformity", etc. A considerable number who attended the workshops had not read the consultation paper in advance and, as in phase 1, many of the respondents appeared to adopt quite a restricted interpretation of what teachers' learning is.

The feedback **highlights a need for the Council to clarify its intentions in a number of areas**. For example, it needs to be clearer about the fact that it is Council policy that engagement in ongoing learning is a responsibility, as well as a right, and will (in time) be linked to registration, based on the learning from the development phase. Many participants in the process appeared to be unaware of Council policy in this area, or unclear about it. Many participants were also unclear about the purpose of, and audience for, any mechanism for reflecting and recording learning. Again, Council may wish to provide more clarity in the next iteration.

Council may also wish to **consider including definitions or exemplars to accompany some of the key terms** in the document (for example, quality and relevance, impact, what counts as research, leading learning, supporting teachers' learning, wellbeing), as some participants in the consultation appeared unclear as to what was intended.

The word impact was considered by some to be particularly challenging, and open to misinterpretation.

There are also **issues of emphasis** to be considered, with some respondents considering that some key elements, such as **reflection and research**, did not receive sufficient emphasis throughout the document and, in particular, in the learning processes section. A recurring theme throughout the feedback at the stakeholder event in Mullingar, for example, was the importance of making explicit the research base for the framework. The issue of research also arose in relation to 'Recording and Reflecting', where the need for examples of best practice and a solid research base for portfolio-based learning were identified. This was also a theme under the heading 'Dimensions of Teachers' Learning', where stakeholders felt that some presentation of best practice would help in understanding these elements. Feedback also suggested that building leadership capacity was key to the development of any framework, and that this should be emphasised throughout the document.

Throughout the consultation process, a number of questions and concerns were raised about **implementation challenges and systemic considerations.** These included the need for the framework to demonstrate how certain aspects might work in practice. A particular theme of finding and dedicating time to professional learning is evident.

Under most headings, additional areas were proposed for consideration.

- Additional values proposed included: child-centred, honesty and integrity, reflection, and responsibility.

- Additional dimensions proposed included: reflection, spirituality, and a societal/ cultural dimension.

- Additional priority learning areas proposed included: the arts and sciences, languages (including Gaeilge), technology-enhanced learning, child development, behaviour management, Assessment for Learning (AfL), leadership, communication, working with others, global citizenship education or sustainability, diversity, subject methodologies, school climate, education for democracy, conflict resolution, early school leaving and mentoring/coaching.

- Additional learning processes proposed included: involvement in economic, social and environmental organisations; overseas volunteering as an immersive professional activity; and assessment (and engaging in State Examination work) as a means of learning through practice.

- A number of additional accreditation criteria were proposed, including that programmes should:
  - draw upon and utilise relevant resources/expertise/networks
  - be rooted in best practice/research
  - impact on student learning and school culture
  - address creativity, ideation, innovation and change, and
  - allow for credit accumulation.

Much of the **feedback highlighted the importance of the development phase**, as many of the queries and concerns raised will need to be further explored and discussed with the profession during that phase. Key questions arising relate to a range of areas, including:

o the appropriate wording for the standards needs to be further explored during the development phase, as does the appropriateness of including standards for different cohorts of teachers; some respondents said **the standards** are pitched too high, others that they are pitched too low

o how learning might be recorded and, in particular, how **informal learning (and prior learning) might be acknowledged**

o the **weighting**, if any, which should be assigned to personal versus professional learning, formal versus informal, etc.

o how an appropriate **link to registration** could be developed, which would reflect the values of the framework (and in particular, professional autonomy and flexibility), ensure **true reflection and meaningful engagement,** and not be onerous or lead to increased paperwork

o how **systemic and implementation challenges** might be addressed, including those related to funding, access, time and incentivisation

o the **programme accreditation criteria and procedures**, including the link between accreditation and registration, and an audit of best practice

o the appropriateness of **an ICT-based solution for reflecting on learning**

o **the role of school culture** and **leadership,** and

o the ways in which the **framework might be tailored to apply to different cohorts of teachers**.

Interestingly, of those who responded to the workshop evaluation survey, 64% (n = 30) accepted invitations to find out more about the development phase. While the number is very small in absolute terms, this question was only asked of those completing the workshop evaluation survey (a total of 47), so the proportion is encouraging. Nonetheless, a key challenge in planning for the development phase will be to ensure that there is significant engagement, both from those who have indicated a willingness to get involved at this early stage, and indeed other groups or individuals who can constructively shape the framework. Ensuring a broad base of participants who can explore the challenges and benefits of the framework prior to any incremental growth will be crucial during this phase.