

Droichead Shared Learning Day

2 March 2016

CityWest Hotel

Opening remarks by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Teaching Council Director

Today is an historic day for the teaching profession in Ireland.

Why do I say that?

Well, one way to look at is the Life of Brian paradox. You'll remember the scene from the film where Brian is trying convince the crowd that he is not the Messiah (he's just a very naughty boy!). And in his efforts to do so, he tells them – *You don't need me, you're all individuals*. To which the crowd echoes – *We're all individuals*. And then one poor soul states – *No, I'm not*.

Droichead is about the individual and the wider group, and how we create space and time for both; how we help each other to be the best we can be. Because at the end of the day, we are all individuals, but we also work together. And Droichead is a great example of how this paradox does in fact make sense.

Today, the profession is taking a big step forward in demonstrating its leadership of learning for all.

I have a number of announcements to make in a few moments regarding the next steps in induction policy for Newly Qualified Teachers. And I hope that it will be clear how they demonstrate the leadership that you

and your colleagues have shown since the beginning of the pilot back in 2013.

They will also show how you, in collaboration with teachers who have yet to join Droichead, can continue to shape the growth and evolution of this policy in the years to come.

This is epitomised by this brief quote from an NQT in the ESRI report who said of Droichead – *“It’s a team effort”*. So even more than a profession taking a step, what we are announcing today as a Council, and what you as a profession will do throughout today, is to take a number of steps forward as teachers in shaping the future of your professional learning, together.

What is Droichead?

Droichead is fundamentally a formal welcome for newly qualified teachers by their more experienced colleagues in to the most important profession in society. It is about teachers talking about learning, your own learning as well as that of your pupils and students. It is about you valuing your own learning so that you can continue to value your students’ learning in a sustainable way.

The changes we are announcing today will confirm a shift away from external evaluation to formal induction as the route for NQTs to progress to the next phase of their professional learning. They will show how we are making a reality of the seamless transition from one phase of teachers’ learning to another. And they will show how we are recognising

the authenticity and complexity of teaching and learning in the many different settings in which it occurs.

In these opening remarks I would like to show how you have led a new, innovative and successful way of developing evidence-informed policy. I would also like to clarify where we go from here.

But before I get to all of that, on the understanding that some of you have come to learn more about Droichead, I would like to summarise some of its key aspects.

If you take only one message from what I have to say this morning about Droichead, it is this - Droichead is about the community of professional practice. It is about making explicit what has been implicit for far too long – the rich network of relationships that await an NQT when they embark on their journey of becoming a teacher.

It is about the profession being given the recognition it has sought for so long for the professional learning that it has been leading for years. Mentoring is the exemplar of this authentic professional leadership.

Giving support and guidance as mentors to a newly qualified colleague can be engaging, enriching and rewarding as you see this new member of your profession blossom and grow. But even where there are no difficulties, it requires emotional investment of you as people and professionals. One experienced mentor has told us that in Droichead, the Council's core value of shared professional responsibility is being realised. She is not on her own anymore. She is still mentoring, but in partnership

with her fellow professionals. This would be in keeping with the more nuanced understanding that many teachers have of professional leadership.

Professional leadership

Early in 2015, I spoke to teachers on the Tóraíocht programme for leadership run by NUIM. In November, I spoke to teachers who are pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership in UCC. In both cases, I asked teachers to give me a sense, in images or words, of what they understood professional leadership to mean – in the case of NUIM, sustainable leadership, and in the case of UCC, leadership of learning.

Here are some of the images which they sent:

<https://prezi.com/inbkbv3z2bno/>

Overall, across two cohorts of teachers in two different spaces and times, there is a resounding consensus that sustainable leadership of learning will have to be far more distributed and collaborative than it has been to date. Droichead is the best professional opportunity to respond to this insight of teachers.

Professional leadership

The Teaching Council is the only statutory professional standards body with a professional majority on it. No other profession has been given this unique position of trust. It means that teachers are trusted to lead the enhancement of their own standards in a spirit of partnership with others

– the Department of Education and Skills, parents, HEIs (Higher Education Institutions), unions, management, and business.

Professional leadership at a Council level means that for those beginning to become teachers, there comes a point where **fellow teachers** formally welcome their newly qualified colleagues into their profession. It is about a professionally sympathetic culture that acknowledges and nurtures the well-being of all teachers.

This opportunity to welcome others is richly deserved and necessary.

The NQTs deserve the support and guidance of their experienced colleagues; those colleagues deserve the space and time to share their learning with each other and the NQTs; and pupils deserve to benefit from that learning.

And you all deserve the recognition and acknowledgment of the statutory professional standards body for that work.

The Council intends to provide for that through Cosán, the forthcoming framework for teachers' learning.

We all know the impact that informal support and guidance can give us – the listening ear, the empathetic face, a kind word, a comfortable silence. Precisely because the personal, supportive approach of mentoring works so well, we want to ensure that every NQT receives the benefit of it, and not just those who happen to secure employment in a school which happens to have a mentor. We know from teachers that for this support and guidance to be sustainable, it must be done collaboratively – hence

the Professional Support Teams. Your work in those teams in supporting your colleagues has been a resounding success. The ESRI report clearly shows that.

It is time for this support to receive the recognition it deserves. And it is time for all NQTs to be guaranteed such support as a matter of course. It is simply too important to leave to chance.

John Hurley, a teacher based in Cork once said,

Schools are places full of humanity...

And an NQT at the Shared Learning Day in April last year, in response to this, noted that from his experience:

Droichead is a more humane process.

Note the findings in the ESRI report that Droichead principals identified greater improvement in NQTs than their counterparts in non-Droichead schools, while Droichead NQTs reported lower levels of stress than in non-Droichead schools. So we get better quality teaching and learning, and the nurturing of well-being, through Droichead!

We should all be proud of the fact, therefore, that through Droichead we are giving as much space as possible for that humanity to relate to, guide and support each other, through professional conversations and relationships.

So where are we now?

So that's a sense of the vision and reality of Droichead as you have shaped it over the past 3 years. How is the Council responding to all of the feedback you have given us on the settings for induction, on recognition of the extended programmes of ITE and on simplifying the language and form?

1. *Integration of the Droichead process and induction workshop programme.*

- a. From September 2016, all NQTs who commence Droichead will attend one cluster meeting per term and one additional professional learning activity. This will replace the current workshops condition. The additional learning activity will be identified by the NQT in collaboration with the PST. So instead of 20 hours workshops, if an NQT starts Droichead in September, they will not have the workshops condition to fulfil. Their cluster meetings (one per term) and their additional professional learning activity will be part of the Droichead process.

2. *Eligible settings*

- a. From September 2016, all NQTs who wish to avail of the Droichead process will be able to do so in a wide variety of settings, including SEN settings. I think we all understand that NQTs should normally be deployed in mainstream settings. With Droichead, in certain circumstances, where the NQT is the most appropriate teacher to meet the needs of pupils,

they can engage in the Droichead process in special schools, learning support and resource settings. The Council believes that this can build on the enhanced culture of collaboration which Droichead facilitates and thus help principals ensure that all pupils will be supported by the most appropriate teachers in each school. It has the potential to facilitate an enhanced context for inclusion where pupils can have full access to the collective pedagogical skill set of both the newly qualified teacher and the Professional Support Team. In all settings, upon completion of the process, the Droichead condition will be fully removed from a teacher's registration.

3. *Explicit recognition of the enhanced, reconceptualised programmes of Initial Teacher Education.*

- a. Under Council policy, the extended school placement in the latter half of the programmes will now be recognised towards the professional practice requirement of Droichead. In addition to the extended school placement, primary teachers undergoing Droichead will now be expected to complete a single block of 60 days, and post-primary teachers will be expected to complete a single block of 200 hours. The Council is also committed to ensuring that the learning of NQTs will be seamlessly supported in the transition from Initial Teacher Education to Droichead. What we mean here is that we will look at some means by which the ongoing learning needs of

the student teacher who then qualifies can properly inform the Droichead process, so that it is as relevant to them as possible.

4. *Guaranteed placement*

- a. In terms of the professional practice requirement, the Council, like all stakeholders, wants to see NQTs secure permanent posts as early as possible in their careers. So today I am repeating the call that the Council has made twice already for guaranteed placement for all newly qualified teachers. It is the responsibility of teacher unions and school management to help make a reality of this in their engagement with the Department of Education and Skills. But guaranteed placement is something that is urgently needed. It would also be fully aligned with Droichead, with its emphasis on sustained, continuous support for NQTs' professional learning so that they can better support their students' learning needs.

5. *Language*

- a. The language and paperwork of Droichead have been significantly simplified. The recommendation of the PST says that based on the induction phase of the NQTs' career, they are ready to move to the next phase of the Continuum of Teachers' learning. In this sense, it is not about signing off on

anybody's career – that would be impossible. It is simply saying that the NQT has met the standards of learning for this phase and is ready to move to the next one. The NQT has input to the form as well, including the identification of areas of further interest and learning that will inform their learning journey beyond Droichead.

These changes are about trust, learning and standards. As a professional standards body, we are confirming that teachers can be trusted to lead the induction of their newly qualified colleagues. We are affirming the importance of space and time for all teachers, including NQTs, to engage in professional learning as close as possible to the site of action. And we are re-affirming the profession's consistent commitment to the highest of standards at every stage of their professional practice and learning, standards that are rooted in a deep and nuanced understanding of the complexity of teaching and learning as they unfold in our schools every day.

Growth phase

So that's the bones of the policy that will apply from September of this year. How will this be implemented?

You may recall from the publication of the ESRI's interim report last October that the Council has decided that subject to the necessary resources and supporting actions, Droichead will be the sole route of induction for all NQTs from September 2018. Given the many changes the Council has approved, we will be continuing our engagement with the

Department to prepare for the transition to the new arrangements. As part of the growth towards that goal, the following steps will apply:

- Droichead and probation and PQE (Post-Qualification Employment) will continue to be available to schools in the 2016/17 school year. In other words, we will continue to encourage and drive an increase in the number of schools who are in Droichead next year, but the Inspectorate's probation process will continue to be available for mainstream non-Droichead schools.
- From September 2016, probation will not be available in SEN settings in non-Droichead schools.
- From September 2017, Droichead will be the only route of induction for NQTs in large schools. So probation will be available for NQTs in non-Droichead teaching principal schools during that school year.
- From September 2018, Droichead will be the sole route of induction for all NQTs.
- The Department has confirmed a new model of release time for circumstances where there is more than one NQT in a school. In these situations, up to a maximum of 7 days for primary schools and 37 hours for post-primary schools will be available based on a sliding scale of the number of NQTs. Release time is being maintained for PST training as is the bank of discretionary time which will continue to be held by the NIPT. Additional release time is also available to support the further professional development of PST members in existing Droichead schools.

- And in terms of those of you who have yet to join Droichead, this will continue to be an evolving policy space. The Council has decided that there will be a review of policy in 2019, to take account of the learning from the growth phase. So from the moment you join Droichead, today or in the next few weeks, you will be in a position to work with your colleagues to inform the shaping of policy as it impacts upon you and your colleagues.

In Droichead, we are talking about induction and the continuum of teachers' learning. We are talking about teachers exercising their professional leadership based on trust and their own honesty, integrity and humanity.

There are other aspects to the policy but I think that I have given you enough information for today. More information is available on our website.

Closing

As a Shared Learning Day, today is very much reflective of the spirit and ethos of Droichead – teachers supporting each other to have professional conversations about how to make the best use of your collective professional learning.

We know from the research that some teachers had a concern about the responsiveness of the Council to the concerns being raised. Good policy, like good teaching and learning, takes reflection and takes time.

Also, we as a Council are here today to, yes, talk, but also listen – so please give us your thoughts and views throughout the day.

The Council believes that there is a great prize within reach of the teaching profession through Droichead - to lead the enhancement of the quality of students' learning in schools by leading the enhancement of their own professional learning. We can be confident that you as the profession are well placed to stake your claim as leaders of professional learning, not only for your students, but yourselves and your colleagues as well.

Why are we that confident?

Look at the progress we have made, in spite of the many obstacles and challenges, by working closely with each other as professionals in schools, teacher unions, school management, principals' bodies, the NIPT, the Inspectorate and the Council. There have been robust exchanges of views, there have been fraught conversations, but there have equally been many professionally enriching discussions – at “high-level” meetings, but also at every cluster meeting and PST training sessions around the country. When you visit these sessions, as I and my colleagues in the Council have, you realise that while there have been bumps in the road, and there will surely be a few in the future, this is the right thing to do, this is a good way of working. The policy and implementation plan that I am announcing today are a carefully measured and balanced package of decisions that need to be considered in the round. By September 2018, induction will have secured the place that it has been

seeking for over 30 years and that it so richly deserves in teacher education. And I look forward to working with you who are in Droichead, those who have yet to come in, and all other stakeholders, in continuing to make progress together towards that laudable professional aim.

Tomás Ó Ruairc

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