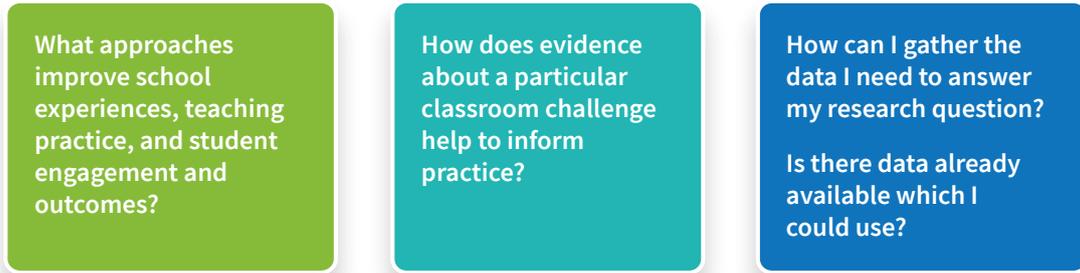# Teaching Council Research Support Framework

Building on the popularity of the previous Research Bursary Schemes and reflecting evolving thinking on research, teaching and learning, the Teaching Council is pleased to announce a research support framework. The framework is designed to support teachers' ongoing professional learning through their engagement in and with research, and the sum of €100,000 is being made available for the framework in the current year.

Through a number of different strands, the framework will support activities that consider evidence from different perspectives, in a variety of educational contexts and with the involvement of a range of stakeholders.

The new framework, called the Teaching Council *Research Support Framework*, aims to support and promote learning by using a range of approaches. These will include practitioner research, and the application of an enquiry-based approach through, for example, systematic reflection on current practice, a specific curriculum area, and new methods and approaches. It encourages teachers to be innovative and creative in their use of research to support their practice. It places a strong emphasis on research activities which will strengthen the links between research, policy and practice, and on collaboration between different stakeholders in education. Research can also help teachers to acquire a different understanding of their practice, and to see and imagine their practice differently. The Framework will also support this kind of exploration and reflection.

The *Research Support Framework* reflects learning from a range of sources and settings. The Research Strategy and Priority Research Areas of the Council, the process and activities of *Research Alive!*, contributions and conversations via #molfeasa, and Research Webinars have all informed the design of the framework. Direct consultation with teachers who have received support for their research from the Teaching Council has highlighted the importance of helping teachers to access support. The members of the Council's Research Engagement Group have also contributed, so as to ensure that the Framework is relevant to a broad range of teaching contexts and research interests.

These influences help the framework to reflect the needs and interests of teachers, and to support teachers in addressing the important questions they have about their everyday practice, such as:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What approaches improve school experiences, teaching practice, and student engagement and outcomes?** | **How does evidence about a particular classroom challenge help to inform practice?** | **How can I gather the data I need to answer my research question?**<br><br>**Is there data already available which I could use?** |

## Strands of support

The *Research Support Framework* will support different forms of engagement with research, and impact at different levels. It is anticipated that there will be three strands of support under the new framework:
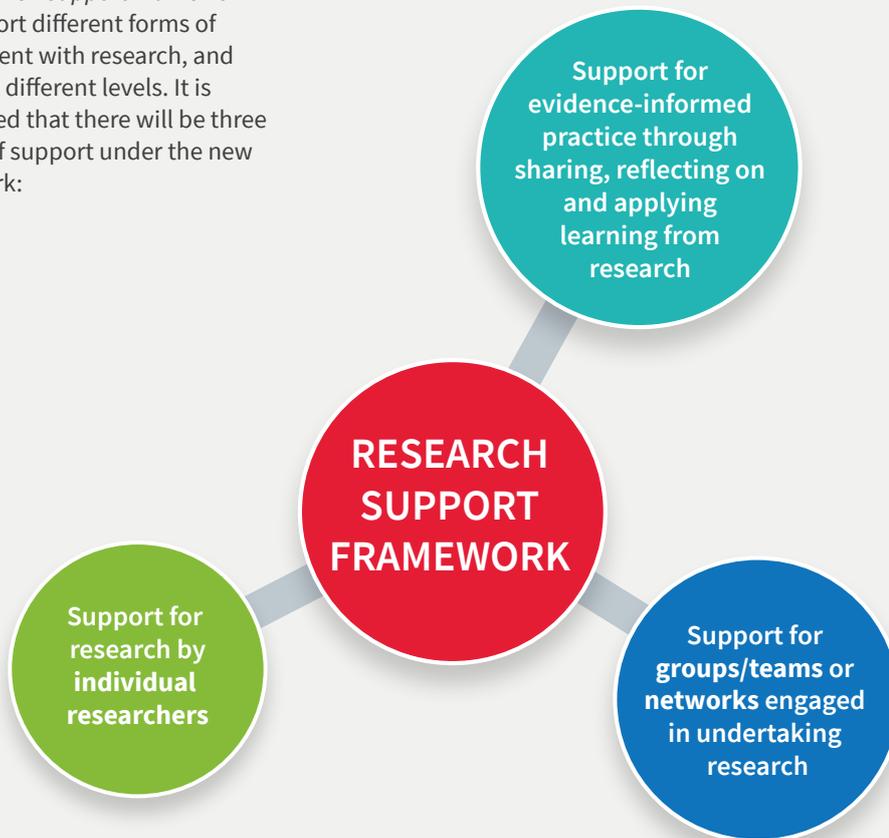
**Support for evidence-informed practice through sharing, reflecting on and applying learning from research**

**RESEARCH SUPPORT FRAMEWORK**

**Support for research by individual researchers**

**Support for groups/teams or networks engaged in undertaking research**

# Support for evidence-informed practice, through sharing, reflecting on and applying learning from research

This strand is focused on supporting the implementation of an evidence-informed approach to practice. Teachers strive to do the best for their students, and this strand of the framework is designed to facilitate this by supporting teachers in sharing the learning from relevant research with their colleagues, and to implement this in their everyday classroom practice.

A great deal of valuable research has been undertaken which:

o  addresses contemporary issues in teaching and learning

o  compares and evaluates approaches to a wide range of policy and practice issues in education and

o  identifies critical influences on practice and practitioners.

The value of this large and increasing volume of research is realised only when teachers can access it, make sense of it and use it.

Through this strand of the framework, teachers could, for example:

o  examine the existing evidence about a classroom or practice issue

o  compare different approaches arising from research evidence

o  bring people together to learn about the evidence and to explore and reflect with other stakeholders on different approaches which reflect current evidence.

Proposals to support learning about tools for accessing evidence or other practical research skills would also fit well in this strand.

As well as being interested in how research might inform and improve practice, teachers are also interested in 'bigger picture' ideas that might illuminate how their leadership of learning at a local level can inform wider developments in educational policy nationally and globally, and indeed vice versa. This trend resonates strongly with the Council's vision of enhancing connections between research, policy and practice, as is reflected in its ongoing collaboration on *Research Alive!* with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Centre for Effective Services (CES).

Underpinned by its core values of collective professional confidence and shared professional responsibililty, the Council is keen to support teachers in engaging in national conversations about teaching and learning that are backed up by sound and authentic research. Such research can raise questions which help teachers to see themselves and their students in a wider context.

This strand is likely to have a focus outside of academic institutions and/or formal research programmes/courses, and will support one-off, and also series of, research-focused events and activities.

## Example of one type of research activity that falls under this category:

When I was first appointed as a learning support and resource teacher, I felt that I was floundering. I arranged with the school principal that our support teachers meet for one hour monthly in a planning session. This involved show-and-tell and try-and-report where we each brought resources for a specific area of need (e.g. expressive language), demonstrated them, swapped them, tried them in our classrooms then reported back at the next session. Often, a teacher who had expertise in the specific field, such as the theoretical background to the resources, shared it. This also took the form of sharing and discussing relevant articles from REACH and LEARN journals. We also invited outside experts, such as speech and language therapists, psychologists, and occupational therapists, to give an input of 30 minutes. Gradually, the group expanded to a cluster of local schools. Research was a resource and teachers were also a resource, often unrecognised: we were 'learning together to teach together.' (SCoTENS, 2016 theme.)

Finola, teacher in a large primary school.

# Support for groups/teams or networks engaged in undertaking research

This strand provides funding for activities involving collaboration among practitioners conducting research. Teachers may wish to link with full-time researchers to bring together classroom practice and skills in research methodologies, analysis, reporting and dissemination. Multi-disciplinary collaboration, bringing together different perspectives and knowledge, could also be supported under this strand. This could include collaboration around primary or secondary research.

The opportunity to participate in collaborative research activities will contribute to teachers' ongoing professional development and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The Framework would also encourage applications in this strand to focus on learning about the process of collaboration, as well as direct research findings.

**Example of one type of research activity that falls under this category:**

In a review of the Transition Year Programme, it has come to light in feedback from students, parents and teachers that the programme needs restructuring. Having conducted this internal review, in collaboration with two other colleagues, we have decided to synthesise the evidence from existing research on the programme. We also intend to organise a school visit to a similar school to seek out best practice. The results of the review and visit will form the basis of a report to stakeholders about a possible way forward for the programme.

Terry, Programmes Co-ordinator in a small rural post-primary school.

# Support for individual researchers

This strand of the *Research Support Framework* is a continuation of the *Research Bursary Scheme* for teachers and other researchers interested in conducting research, but will be more focused on:

**Targeted research areas:** This will help the Council to adopt a more strategic approach to research funded under the scheme. It is anticipated that the current Priority Research Areas will be reviewed through online consultation with teachers, the Research Engagement Group, the wider teaching profession, and other stakeholders in education..

**Building on existing research:** This involves making use of existing evidence. The growth of new data and research publications is as significant as it is rapid, and it is important to focus on research synthesis to help us consolidate this learning. This strand will encourage teachers to conduct syntheses such as literature reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses and analysis of existing datasets such as Growing Up in Ireland.

**Example of one type of research activity that falls under this category:**

I teach a number of students with language processing difficulties. I would like to examine the existing research in the field and highlight the successful strategies that have been used to develop language in mainstream and special settings. My intended outcome would be to compile a resource for teachers to identify and support students with language difficulties, with a view to early detection and early intervention.

John, mainstream class teacher, primary.