

## **The role of the teaching council in ensuring quality of teaching in schools**

*Presentation by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director of the Teaching Council, to the Annual Conference of the Inspectorate – 21 March 2013*

I would like to thank Harold and the Inspectorate for the opportunity to have a conversation with you this morning about the role of the Teaching Council in ensuring quality of teaching in our schools. There will be a formal presentation that will last about 35 minutes, and the remainder of the time will be available then for questions and answers.

At the core of any quality assurance process in education is the learner, and the quality of their learning experience. No matter who is conducting the quality assurance, nor how they are doing it, this will never change. What is changing already, and will continue to change, is the “who” and the “how”. As I see it, this will mean that the balance of roles will change. All those who have a role now will still have one in the future – schools, teachers, pupils, parents, Boards of Management, Teaching Council, and DES Inspectorate. But the relative placing of each stakeholder in the quality assurance landscape will change. These shifting roles will continue to reflect the evolving expectations of our education system, especially the extent to which it prepares our children and young people for the unknowable challenges of the future.

In this context, I would like to talk to you about clarifying what we mean by quality assurance, and how it relates to education in practice. I would like to talk about what quality teaching means to the Teaching Council, and what we do at the moment in this area. I would like to talk with you about quality of teaching in our schools. And I would like to puzzle out loud the question – as the Inspectorate and Teaching Council both have a responsibility for assuring this quality, and as we both agree on how this can most effectively be done in the foreseeable future, how can we work together to support others as they find their new place in the shifting education landscape?

I would like to hear your views on all of this in the Q and A. But from a Council perspective, this process will be informed by professionally-led regulation, shared professional responsibility and collective professional confidence.

It is a landscape where we will talk about quality assurance – not quality assessment or evaluation; and where we will talk about how the Teaching Council and the Inspectorate can most effectively provide assurance as to **how** other stakeholders assure quality of teaching and learning, rather than the detail of **what** they do.

### **Bridging the “Centre” and the professional – an evolving dynamic of quality assurance**

As stakeholders with a particular strategic responsibility for quality assurance in education, I think that together, we in the Council and the Inspectorate need to give the initial impetus for the processes that will lead to new ways of quality assurance – agreeing the direction of traffic, the overall aim, and clearly enunciating the values that will underpin the journey in that direction. There is clearly a sense in which this is happening – SSE, Droichead. But I think that we could improve the clarity and co-ordination of our key messages about these initiatives in the context of the broader landscape, especially the common values base that underpins them all. I think that we need to remind ourselves – and I count the Council in this as much as the Inspectorate – that everything we do, every document we generate, all land on the desk of one principal. I believe that there is a powerful story of professionalism working in the public interest behind everything that the Council and Inspectorate do. But I am not sure that this is as clear as it should be to teachers, principals, pupils and parents.

We therefore need to support the profession as they begin that journey towards new understandings of quality assurance, and new ways of doing it. New understandings means that we will all see the process as assurance for quality i.e. a process that is primarily aimed at supporting ongoing professional development, and thus facilitating continuous improvement. Assurance of

quality will still be part of the landscape. It may well be done mainly, but not exclusively, by external agents e.g. Inspectorate. But my understanding is that this will also evolve to assurance of quality of the process, more so than the result. How well are teachers reflecting on their teaching, and acting on that reflection?

Over time, at a steady, sustainable pace, we “external agents” need to step back, but not out, and let the profession enhance assurance for quality and assurance of quality. And while the balance between the input from us and from the profession will shift towards the profession over time, I do not think that either the Inspectorate or we will be folding up our tents. Human nature being what it is, and also cognisant of our responsibility to demonstrate our implementation of public policy, there will always be a need for verification. But here we would be talking about verification of the “how”, rather than the “what”.

Such verification would look at language, communication and relationships – what language is used by teachers to talk with each other, with pupils and parents about what they do? How do they assure each other, pupils and parents that the teaching and learning is all it could be, and is empowering learners to unlock their own learning? How well do they assure each other, pupils and parents that they are identifying areas for ongoing improvement, and addressing them? How well are relationships nurtured, maintained and enhanced to support these conversations, which have the potential to be fraught and difficult if poorly handled, but also have the potential to unlock learning for all if properly supported and professionally navigated?

### *The Quality Assurer in Education – Sauron or Gandalf?*

Some teachers when they read this may adopt a sceptical attitude and compare us both to the eye of Sauron from Lord of the Rings – a big brother type of overbearing presence, and if you are unlucky enough to trip a fault line, make a mistake, you will be subjected to ferociously focused inspection and intrusion.

Such a view, even if it were true, would simply not work for anyone. Look what happened to Sauron, whose edifice crumbles at the end of the saga at the hands of Hobbits, despite the fact that his lidless eye could see anything in Middle Earth! I think that the role of any of us with a quality assurance responsibility would be more analogous to that of Gandalf – engagement with an individual as a member of a community, the default position being that of an open, supporting attitude and disposition, facilitating other people in finding their own path, but capable of rapid response and fierce resolve when that is what is required to safeguard what we all know to be important.

This “Gandalf” view of the quality assurer resonates with key values that inform the Council’s work - professionally-led regulation, collective professional confidence, and shared professional responsibility. Behind these values is the core concept of community – of a community of learners, infused by a culture of lifelong learning. Research in many different fields of endeavour would indicate that this is how widespread change is effected for the benefit of the greater good – not by rewarding super-high standards of excellence, nor by punishing poor performance. Quality is assured, standards are maintained and enhanced, when all members of a community are given responsibility for their own learning and change, and empowered to drive and lead that change themselves. In that context, the Council’s structure and ways of working are ideally suited to the challenges facing us.

#### *Professionally-led regulation and quality assurance*

Professionally-led regulation is at the core of our structure and our way of working. There is a teacher majority on the Council, 22 out of 37 members. This is a unique privilege for the profession to have. But it is not about a closed-shop approach to regulation and quality assurance. It is about teachers understanding and appreciating the high regard for their profession that the Irish people have historically had, and reassuring them that they can be trusted to lead their own quality assurance processes benchmarked against the highest standards.

In this context, we in the Council are seeking to nurture the seeds of an approach that is quite similar to the latest thinking on assessment – assessment of learning and assessment for learning. By encouraging teachers to take greater “ownership” of quality assurance in their profession, we are seeking to do so in a way that is based on professional conversations about assurance for quality as well as assurance of quality. In other words, that quality assurance in both respects would be genuinely seen as a dynamic process that weaves in and out of professional practice, enriching it in real time through conversations with fellow professionals, of course, but also with pupils, parents and school leaders.

Essentially, our way of working is to collaborate with the Department and Inspectorate in ensuring policy consistency as a framework for change. Such collaboration will create a framework that will enable teachers to adapt and change as practitioners throughout their lives with courage and confidence.

Teaching can be described as a commitment to the immeasurable so that others can face the unknowable. Does this mean that quality assurance is a futile exercise, in terms of the oft cited quote of Albert Einstein’s – everything that can be counted...? It does if you view quality assurance as a dynamic driven **solely** by external agents that “assesses” or “evaluates” solely on the basis of phenomena that are observable or measurable from the outside. But we do not talk about “quality assessment” or “quality evaluation.” We talk about “quality assurance.” Quality assurance **does** make perfect sense if you view it as a dynamic whose initial impetus may come from external agents, but which must become self-sustaining and self-correcting if it is to cope with the unknowable challenges of the future. This dynamic can only be self-sustaining and self-correcting if the “self” of that dynamic, i.e. teachers, have the language, courage, confidence, motivation and capacity to teach their colleagues of the future.

*Strategic contribution to quality assurance*

It is in these areas that the Teaching Council, Department and Inspectorate can make the greatest strategic contribution to quality assurance. We in the Council will continue to help shape and inform the language of teaching and of professionalism in teaching. We will continue to listen to teachers and others in doing that. Through our work on policy consistency and contribution to the broader discourse, we will work on the courage and confidence; through our work on entry requirements, ITE, induction, probation and CPD, we will assist with capacity throughout the continuum. But this will only realise the best possible results if we step back, but not out, and allow teachers to take these dynamics to places we can hardly imagine. In terms of “step back, but not out”, there will always be a need for an element of external verification. But it should not be the dominant dynamic.

### **Evolution of quality assurance – where are we now, and what are our next steps?**

#### *Key overview*

In terms of where we are now, and where we are going, there are a number of points worth noting here:

1. Although the Teaching Council is relatively speaking a young organisation, we do a lot already to contribute to quality assurance in the education system.
2. We are due to do a lot more (Part 5 – Fitness to Teach, CPD).
3. Other stakeholders have a responsibility to contribute to quality assurance in the system.
4. How we relate to those stakeholders, especially the Inspectorate, needs to be explored and clarified further, particularly in the context of professionally-led regulation, and the evolution of quality assurance in education that I talked about already.
5. Quality assurance can be viewed by some in terms of a simplistic dichotomy between “hard power” (e.g. Fitness to Teach, review and accreditation) and “soft power” – e.g. promotion of professionalism, the nurturing of collective professional confidence. There is a grain of truth to be found here. Each concept can be said to represent one end of the spectrum of

quality assurance. But I hope that it is clear now that we in the Teaching Council hope that the discourse will move beyond this. Concepts that are rooted in “power” are ultimately in danger of using a cannon to kill a fly and missing. They convey the impression of a top-down, centre-out direction, and of “possession”. As I have indicated earlier, we would see quality assurance as a much more fluid dynamic, where the balance will shift towards empowerment of the profession, rooted in trust, and geared towards continuing, ongoing improvement in teaching and learning. The Inspectorate and Council will still have a key role to play, but it will play out in a different way on a different landscape.

### *Quality assurance as prevention rather than cure*

Our work in quality assurance prior to the entry of the NQT into the schools and the profession covers the following:

1. Entry criteria
2. Review and accreditation of programmes of Initial Teacher Education
3. Induction and probation – provisionally to be reconceptualised as Droichead.
4. Registration (including Evidence of Character, Garda Vetting)

### **Entry criteria**

On entry criteria, our role is advisory. Entry criteria are something of a hot topic at the moment, due in no small part to our consultation on the standards required at Primary ITE level in the areas of literacy and numeracy – English, Gaeilge and Maths. At Post-primary level the Council has completed a major piece of work in relation to revamping entry criteria for entering a PDE programme.

But there is a broader strategic issue here. This is the benchmark by which we assess or evaluate the processes of entry criteria, the how rather than the what. At the moment, in the discourse, people

tend to ask – to what extent are the process and content of entry criteria a good predictor of the kind of teacher the person will be?

The “what” is important. International commentators, including Pasi Sahlberg, say that we have one of the highest standards of entry into ITE in the world – the top 15% of Leaving Certificate candidates, and that we should not lose that.

But what about the “how”, the processes by which we select individuals to enter programmes of ITE? To what extent does the person applying to enter a programme of ITE display the potential for learning? To what extent do they show the attitudes and dispositions that indicate they will learn from, and engage with, all that a programme of ITE has to offer, so that they can become a truly reflective practitioner? No one selection process or set of entry criteria will resolve these questions. Every process has its drawbacks. But the pilot project being conducted by TCD offers some interesting questions to consider as to how we might begin to explore solutions. The key elements here appear to be:

1. We must accept and agree that the current process, although it may be “brutal but fair”, is not as good as it could be. Our hope as a Council would be that teachers would take the cliché about broken items and fixing them, and would say, “If it ain’t broke, how can we / others do it better? Is what we have the best it possibly could be to help others face the challenges of the future?”
2. We should be willing to consider piloting different approaches as appropriate, and to gather evidence on their impact.
3. In light of the inherent weaknesses which any one model of human endeavour inevitably will have, while striving constantly to improve what we do at the moment, we must consider the idea that we may need 2 or 3 different criteria or processes in tandem when considering entry to initial teacher education. In launching its Feasibility Study in Admissions, Trinity

quoted Prof. Steven Schwartz, author of the UK government's report on "Fair Admissions to Higher Education", who said:

The best approach [in a fair admissions system] is not to use a single indicator or score. It is better to use a comprehensive set of predictors in the hope that the weaknesses of one might be compensated by the strengths of another.

So what Schwartz is doing here is acknowledging that we will never get it perfectly correct, but neither can we plump for one crude, brutally fair pathway. Based on this argument, we should consider the possibilities of a multi-faceted approach.

There is a school of thought which says that entry criteria are not really that important, that exit standards are all that matter. On the face of it, the logic seems inescapable. But to leave it solely to exit standards would be to miss the point. Firstly, I used the labels of literacy and numeracy deliberately in my reference to the current entry criteria – I don't think that it is unreasonable for us to ask that those seeking to become teachers have a basic standard in these core areas that are essential to the study of all other subjects. Feedback we have received from student teachers would reinforce this point, where some have said that the gap between what is required in terms of Leaving Cert grade and what is required in a programme of ITE can be quite large. Secondly, we and the Department did not insist on an extension and reconceptualisation of these programmes so that they could compensate for lower standards at point of entry. I think that these policy decisions were made so that the programmes could build on the minimum standards already in place and enhance them further. The importance of this endeavor is emphasised by Hargreaves and Fullan in Professional Capital (Hargreaves, Fullan) P17:

..what we've learned is that the successful countries don't only prize academic qualities in their teachers; **they also focus on "suitability to teach" in initial selection...** [my emphasis]

In short, we have consistently stated as a Council that subject or curricular knowledge is one key element of the complex skill set required to be a teacher. But the Council has always said that it is also about a lot more than that. The ultimate solution to the question of entry criteria, if it is to be sustainable, will have to take cognisance of this.

### **Review and accreditation**

In this context, we are talking about the quality of teaching of those teaching the teachers. To some extent, that is not entirely within the Council's control. What do I mean by that? We hosted a conference on the teacher educator on behalf of the Irish EU Presidency last month, where a number of people referred to the teacher educator as the "hidden profession". This is the idea that when you hear the words "teacher educator", you may automatically think of lecturers in a college of education or a University education department. But arguably, mentor teachers and co-operating teachers (those who support student teachers on school placement) in schools are also "teachers of teachers", teacher educators.

But this concept of "teachers of teachers" goes much further than that. I was struck to hear recently that a transition year group in a school in Wicklow, on completing a module in Development Education, sought a meeting with student teachers, so that they could impress upon them the importance of including this area in their study as "becoming teachers". Last October, at a SCoTENS conference on creativity in education, I attended a workshop given by the Education Department in Maynooth on a module of their PDE, where student teachers teach each other, not just within a year group, but also across year groups in the course. What is happening is that third year students are "mentoring" their second year colleagues on this module, and have been proactively making space and time to do so!

In so far as these "teachers of teachers" are not working in HEIs, and indeed in one case are not even teachers, we do not, on the face of it, have a direct influence over the quality of their teaching. But

we do have an impact on teachers through the Code of Professional Conduct, which is first and foremost a guide and framework for them as they develop and enhance their own professional identity. Also, when our powers in CPD are commenced, there will be further provisions for ongoing quality assurance for all teachers, including those who teach fellow teachers.

From a Teaching Council, and I would think an Inspectorate perspective, we are about enhancing the quality of teaching and learning for all learners. We are about ensuring a common, basic standard of excellence across the board. The quality of teaching of those teaching the teachers is clearly of great importance here. When I was in a college of education, you might hear it whispered in the context of teaching practice that *“that person is an excellent teacher because they innovate, because they are a really good reflective practitioner”*. The sub-text, unintentionally, was that these traits were the preserve of the “A” grade teacher, that only the lucky groups of students who were fortunate to pass through these teachers’ classes would get the benefit of this top class teaching. But there is a notion gathering strength in the educational discourse. This is the notion of a common standard of excellence, available and applicable to all. Look at the Literacy and Numeracy strategy – literacy is not just decoding text, and numeracy is not just doing your sums. Higher level skills are defined as being at the heart of what it means to be literate and numerate. Similarly with teaching and with the Code of Professional Conduct – it is not an optional extra to reflect on your practice continuously, it is not an optional extra to collaborate with your colleagues. Every teacher, as a member of the most important profession in society, is expected to exemplify these traits.

Wonderful, you may say, but what is happening now to bring this about? Our **review and accreditation of all initial teacher education programmes** in the State. Over a period of about 2 years, we will be reviewing over 40 programmes of teacher education to make sure that they meet the standards set by the Council for the profession of teaching, as set out in the Criteria and Guidelines. This is a formal process with a legal standing in the context of the Teaching Council Act. Each programme must first have academic accreditation. But if they do not have professional

accreditation from us, on behalf of the profession and in the interests of the public, then people who study on them will not be able to register as teachers.

### **Induction and probation**

Some teachers may quietly whisper, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The Inspectorate have been doing a fine job for years, many principals want them to keep doing what they are doing. So why all the fuss?

Firstly, I would remind you of my earlier point made in the context of entry criteria, of what both we as a Council, and dare I say the Inspectorate, hope professionals will say now and in the future –

Fine, it ain't broke. But can we continue to improve it?

Secondly, Michael Fullan's research would suggest that if we are serious about whole system reform, the current approach to induction and probation is not the optimum. Truly collaborative cultures, where the profession is empowered to drive its own change, where collaboration is authentic and not contrived, where the dynamic is not driven from the centre out nor the top down, these are the cultures in which whole system reform thrives, in which quality is assured in a constant way in the public interest.

This process is a very clear example of the evolving dynamic that I talked about at the beginning – recasting the balance from assurance of quality (from and by ourselves and the Inspectorate) towards assurance for quality (professionals supporting each other and helping each other as their newly qualified colleagues pass the gateway into the next stage of the continuum, and thus assuring quality for each other and their stakeholders). But this approach does represent a significant change in mind-set which will take time to achieve.

As the professional standards body, we do need to have some mechanism in place to verify this. We need to step back, but not out. And we need to do so together with you in the Inspectorate. As I prepared this address, one of the questions that came to mind was- where does the role of the Council end, and that of the Inspectorate begin? The best question to start with, though, might be –

how should the Inspectorate and Teaching Council relate to each other in a way that maintains and enhances the quality of teaching and learning?

The core of what we are about is very clear. Who is at that core is also very clear. The role of other agents in the education “world” is reasonably clear – to support all that happens at the core, and all those people involved in it. Each group of agents work within a given layer of the education “world’s” mantle. The Department, Inspectorate, Teaching Council and other national bodies are analogous to tectonic plates on the outer rim of this world. Therefore, I think that it would be more accurate to say that there will never be one fixed model for the relationship between all of us; the dynamic will be fluid. And just as we will be looking at language, communications and relationship in what teachers do, so these elements will be of critical importance for us as we seek to work together in supporting, nurturing and overseeing all that happens at the core.

## **Registration**

The accreditation of programmes of ITE, their completion by teachers, and probation (at primary level) or PQE (at post-primary) are building blocks of the registration process. In just a few days’ time on April 1st there is a key date for our Registration Regulations when new teacher entrants to all three regulated education sectors Primary, Post-primary and PLC programmes will have to have a Level 8 degree and a teacher education qualification. There are other important registration requirements such as all applicants must undergo Garda Vetting for the purposes of registration, even if they have been vetted already, and must also comply with Evidence of Character provisions. Transcripts of results must also be provided. Some teachers have complained about the amount of work and time an application takes. It is a rigorous process of verification. Its status will be further enhanced when section 30 is commenced. At that point, we will finally be able to say that every teacher in the country is a registered teacher. And there are already 80,000 on the register! But this registration process is also reflective of the new value in Ireland, that to trust alone is not enough –

you must trust, and verify. Verification, if it is to be accepted by the public, does have to be rigorous, but fair.

### **Quality assurance beyond ITE and Induction and probation – Innovation in a community of professionals?**

Beyond this point of entry into the profession, how will quality assurance work? Never fear, some of you might say, the Inspectorate is here. The Teaching Council has done its bit, it can now relax and let the Inspectorate do what it has done so well for decades. Some would say that the Council's role at this stage becomes essentially passive, especially if you look at the Fitness to Teach process. And that seems self-evidently true. But firstly, there is a lot more to it than that. Secondly, this view underestimates the importance of the professional. And this would be a disaster for both Inspectorate and Council, if you cast your minds back to the evolutionary dynamic that I outlined at the beginning.

*A lot more ... to it...*

The Council's 'Code of Professional Conduct is part of the professional landscape now. The Council published the second edition of it last summer. It will have a lot more "presence" in teachers' minds, and the public's, when Fitness to Teach goes live, after Part 5 of the Act is commenced. But in the here and now, the Code seeks to facilitate and support teachers in realising the vision of the Professional that is core to the evolution of quality assurance. It seeks to give teachers a new language now, and to support and direct them in developing their own language into the future, in a way that makes sense to pupils and parents – hence the importance of quality relationships.

A deeply rooted research culture will be absolutely essential to the realisation of this vision. This is where medicine is now. But lest we lose heart, Ben Goldacre has shown that it only got here relatively recently, and that a number of "vicious" battles were fought out in medicine to make it an evidence-based profession. In this day and age, no-one would dare tell doctors what to prescribe

and how to prescribe it. Why? Firstly, of course, because they trust them. Secondly, because that trust is verified through the Medical Council. And thirdly, because they have a strong research culture which has led to the evolution of an evidence-based profession as the norm, all of which is reflected on and assessed by doctors informed by their professional judgment.

The challenge here is to help teachers develop the understanding that many may have of professionalism now – *I am a professional! I know what I am doing! You must trust me! I don't need a Teaching Council to tell me that I'm a professional!* – to one where they all talk about themselves as professionals in a community – *we are professionals, you can trust us, and here are the reasons why.....* Quality assurance will be self-evident if the conversations unfold in this way. Our role as a Council is to develop that understanding to a point where ownership of their profession is not a closed, static concept, but a dynamic, ongoing process, where teachers drive their own change in a never-ending journey to help others to reach the stars.

- *Part 5 of the TCA – Fitness to Teach* –. This is predicated on the commencement of section 30 sooner rather than later. But assuming that all goes to plan, it is quite possible that the first hearings under Fitness to Teach should take place no later than the middle of next year. This will deal with breaches of the Code of Professional Conduct, and breaches of other pieces of relevant legislation.
- **CPD** – our powers in this area have yet to be commenced. But once a framework for CPD is in place, and it is made a condition for renewal of registration, as it is for other professions, then that will be another concrete manifestation of the evolving nature of quality assurance within the relationship between teachers, schools, inspectorate and Council. It will be an interesting nexus where the assurance for quality (CPD of the teacher) will intersect with the assurance of quality (Council).

## Quality assurance in a community of individual professionals

This is all fine and well – new systems of induction and probation, rigorous review of programmes of ITE, a new culture of research. But, you may ask, *what about all this talk of professionally-led regulation, of teacher majority on a Council? Surely this boils down to the teacher in the classroom. If they are “master and lord” of all they survey when the classroom door is shut, quality assurance won’t be long going out the window, will it, if they are effectively regulating themselves?*

If anything is on the way out the window, it is the stereotype at the heart of this image. Deliberately, consciously, we want to talk more in terms of “teachers”, rather than the teacher. Classroom doors are opening, teachers are observing each other’s practice. It is not happening in every school yet, but it is beginning to happen. And as this collaborative culture begins to spread even further and embed itself in the norm of teachers’ lives, then quality assurance will if anything, be enhanced. As Paul Black said last year,

Put an idea to a teacher and you get a response; put an idea to a group of teachers, and it explodes.

In this context, I have been thinking for some time about the exact link between our work in both promoting and regulating the profession of teaching. The danger is that others will see "promotion" as the soft underbelly of regulation - it's all fine and well to place articles, take part in debates etc., but that's not the real deal is it, as opposed to regulation?

I was struck by Prof. Kieran Murphy's comments on this topic at the Maynooth symposium on leadership earlier this month, where, as President of the Medical Council, he said that all the regulatory structures in the world cannot detract from the personal professional responsibility of the practitioner. In those moments when a teacher is interacting with children and young people, and neither the inspector nor any other "big brother" is in the room, what assurance does the public

have that quality teaching is occurring? Feedback from pupils, yes, but more than that, the professional's own sense of their ethical, professional responsibility.

This is consistent with key messages that I heard at the EU Conference on assessment earlier this week. Paulo Santiago of the OECD in talking about teacher appraisal said that it would have to be implemented initially in terms of the developmental benefits for teachers, and the accountability dynamic would come subsequent to that. This would resonate with the importance of teachers having professional conversations with each other, first and foremost in order to improve teaching and learning. Indeed, the Chief Inspector in his response queried the use of the term “teacher appraisal”, in so far as it overlooked or ignored the important balancing role of reflective professional practice.

### **Quality assurance – language, communication, relationships**

Ultimately, quality assurance will evolve at and between the individual, school and national level through maintaining and enhancing language, communication and relationships between each level, and between the tectonic plates of our education “world”. This would seem to reflect what Hargreaves had to say in 2009 about the “fourth way”:

We are entering an age of post-standardization in education. It may not look, smell, or feel like it, but the augurs of the new age have already arrived and are advancing with increasing speed. [This] "Fourth Way" pushes beyond standardization, data-driven decision making, and target-obsessed distractions to forge an equal and interactive partnership among the people, the profession, and their government.

Professionally-led regulation, shared professional responsibility, collective professional confidence – these were initially coined by teachers for teachers. When you step back, but not out, and think about it, they are also the values that should drive the evolution of the relationship between the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council. By working out how best to collaborate with each other, I

believe that we can both model the kind of work we wish to see at the level of the school and teacher, and also give the most effective support to them in a way that will become self-sustaining.

If we are to be consistent with a focus on the “how”, rather than the “what”, then I think that we may have to accept that it will be neither possible nor desirable to delineate our relationship in a fixed, immutable way. Our relationship in terms of quality assurance will need to evolve to respond to the new challenges of future generations of pupils, parents and teachers. Just as tectonic plates seem to be fixed and permanent, but we know that they are in a state of perpetual motion, so we need to bring reassurance and clarity to our stakeholders, while nurturing and maintaining the fluid dynamics of our relationship ourselves. All we have to do is to minimise the number of earthquakes and volcanoes!

What this means in layman’s terms is that the Council and Inspectorate need to negotiate the relationship between us and articulate how we will work within our respective remits to maintain and enhance standards in teaching and learning. We need to do so in a way that acknowledges the different responsibilities that we have, but that also maximises the synergies that can be realised from our shared commitment to the goal of enhancing the teaching and learning experience of every pupil and student.

Like every other good endeavor in teaching and education, there will never be an end to our work. But supported and informed by such values, I believe that we can shift the discourse away from a focus on where responsibilities begin and end to more on how they work, in a way that I hope future generations will thank us for.

**Tomás Ó Ruairc**