

## Press Release

### First results from the national evaluation of the Digital Learning Framework

*Seminars for schools on digital technologies very positively received; large variations in infrastructure and gaps in technical support provision remain.*

Dublin, January 14, 2020

#### Background

The Digital Learning Framework (DLF) is a resource to assist schools to effectively embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment activities, and is a key element of the national Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020. It emphasises a whole-school approach, is underpinned by constructivist principles, and is aligned to existing school self-evaluation activities. The national implementation of the DLF was preceded by a trial in 2017-2018 in 48 primary, post-primary and special schools. The trial showed strong evidence of improvements schools' embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment, as well as increases in collaborative and whole-school approaches.

National roll-out of the DLF commenced in autumn 2018. Between October 2018 and April 2019, the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers) Technology in Education team delivered seminars to almost 2,000 schools across the country. The DLF is also supported through the PDST website [www.DLplanning.ie](http://www.DLplanning.ie), [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie), and the delivery to schools, since 2017, of 110 million euro (of a total of 210 million euro) under the ICT Infrastructure Grant (for infrastructure and equipment).

The Educational Research Centre (ERC), Dublin, is conducting a longitudinal evaluation of the Digital Learning Framework on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The evaluation runs from 2018-2022. The study is currently at its initial baseline phase whose aim is to describe the system at the beginning of the implementation of the DLF. Follow-up longitudinal surveys will provide detailed information on progress and change since initial implementation at baseline, and final results and recommendations are planned for publication in 2022.

The ERC has just published the results of the initial baseline phase. The report draws together information from three sources: a survey completed by school leaders and teachers from almost 2,000 primary, post-primary and special schools (data collected October 2018-April 2019); feedback provided by school leaders and teachers in response to one-day seminars across the country on the implementation of the Digital Learning Framework provided by the PDST Technology in Education team (data collected October 2018-April 2019); and interviews with the PDST Technology in Education team (data collected May and June 2019).

## Key findings

- *Participants' experience of the PDST Technology in Education seminars* was extremely positive, with large majorities of attendees from primary, post-primary and special schools expressing positive views about seminar content, the practical approach taken, time given to planning, and the opportunity to network or collaborate with staff from other schools.
- Some of the *top priorities identified by schools in implementing the DLF* were developing a whole-school approach; developing teachers' skills in using specific apps or software; using digital technologies to improve learning outcomes; and making improvements to the sharing of documents or resources. This confirms that schools' priorities are in line with many of the overall objectives of the DLF.
- *Current levels of embedding digital technologies*: At the initial baseline phase, primary schools were significantly more likely to rate their school as emerging or developing (56%) in their current levels of practice than post-primary (41.5%) or special schools (52%). Post-primary school respondents were significantly more likely to rate their school as advanced or highly advanced (13%) in comparison with primary (7%) and special schools (6%). It will be of interest to monitor this as the implementation of the DLF progresses.
- *Variations across schools*: There was a lot of variation across schools in perceived levels of adequacy of infrastructure, connectivity and technical support at baseline. Perceived adequacy was significantly and substantially higher (better) in post-primary than primary and special schools.
- *Key challenges* identified in the baseline phase of the study included:
  - the prioritisation of the DLF among other school initiatives, though the alignment with the school self-evaluation framework was welcomed by many schools
  - problems with digital technology infrastructure and connectivity which varied across schools
  - the perceived need for regionalised technical support for schools, with about half of schools positively disposed towards the clustering of schools to receive this support.
- The report contains a number of suggestions:
  - The work of the DES' Technical Support Working Group should be supported and prioritised. Given the willingness of many schools to work with other neighbouring schools in establishing technical support solutions reported through the baseline survey, piloting of clustered provision of technical support should be explored.
  - Currently, all post-primary schools have access to broadband in excess of 100 Mbp/s and it is envisaged that up to 1,800 primary and special schools will have 30 Mb/s broadband connectivity by the end of 2020. A further 700 primary schools are located in the National Broadband Plan intervention area. To support the implementation of the DLF in primary schools that do not have adequate or reliable Internet connectivity, tailored, offline tools and resources are needed.
  - There is a need for increased awareness of high-priority CPD initiatives and, where applicable, any linkages with funding, for example through a DES Circular.
  - Further analysis into the variations in digital technology infrastructure, connectivity and technical support is needed, and in particular, the extent to which these variations are related to progress in implementing the DLF over the next two years.

## Further information:

Baseline report and press release: <http://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/dlf/>

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