



Press Release

Development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland – publication of Phase 2 report

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is delighted to launch a report on the second phase of a four-year study commissioned by the Department of Education, the purpose of which is to develop an evaluation framework for Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) in Ireland. The framework will be applied to TPL for student wellbeing in the first instance. The report – **Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland: Phase 2 Survey of teachers and principals** – was written by Caroline Rawdon, Lorraine Gilleece, Sylvia Denner, Kara Sampson, and Jude Cosgrove. The report represents an important step towards meeting commitments made by the Department of Education to evaluate and enhance professional development activities of teachers and school leaders.

Minister for Education Norma Foley TD said: "I am delighted to see the publication of this survey report. This is the second step in the development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning. We have committed in the Programme for Government to reviewing the provision, content and delivery of teacher education and professional development. This evaluation framework will help us to meet that commitment and to ensure that the professional learning opportunities provided to teachers meet their needs, the needs of their school, and most importantly the needs of their students. It has been an enormously challenging eighteen months for school communities, in which everyone has adapted and shown great resilience. Many important lessons have been learned, and I have no doubt that these will inform the ongoing development of the framework in the coming phases."

The report, available from ERC's website at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>, presents the findings from a survey of teachers and principals which was carried out in Spring 2020. Over 350 primary teachers, almost 550 post-primary teachers and about 70 teachers in special schools responded to the survey along with principals from 53 primary schools, 41 post-primary schools and 11 special schools. In addition to providing a profile of the teachers and principals who participated in the survey, the report gives a detailed description of the schools and their communities. It also describes respondents':

- Views on TPL in general and their preferred approaches,
- Recent uptake of professional learning, and
- Involvement in activities related to student wellbeing at school.

Findings from the survey highlight a high level of engagement with professional learning by teachers and school principals in Ireland:

- Very large majorities of teachers and principals agreed that professional development activities helped them to develop new approaches to teaching.

- Teachers and principals also largely agreed that students benefited from exposure to new approaches to teaching and learning due to their participation in TPL activities.

The survey findings also point to challenges related to TPL:

- Virtually all teachers and principals reported that the integration of learning from TPL was limited in some way. For example, teachers and principals identified a lack of time as a key barrier to implementing learning from TPL activities.
- In general, principals had somewhat more positive attitudes to professional learning activities than teachers. Further research is needed regarding attitudes of post-primary teachers to TPL as current survey findings suggest somewhat less favourable attitudes amongst this group.

A key impact of TPL on professional practice identified by respondents was a change in their approaches to lesson planning and implementation. Teachers were more likely than principals to indicate that all TPL was evaluated by the TPL facilitator.

The project to develop an evaluation framework for TPL is overseen by a Steering Committee, chaired by the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education. The group includes senior representatives from a range of relevant stakeholders and agencies: the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), Education Centres, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Health Service Executive (HSE), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), National Council for Special Education (NCSE), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), SOLAS, and the Teaching Council. Representatives from the Department of Education's Inspectorate, Social Inclusion Unit, and Curriculum, Assessment and Policy Section also sit on the Steering Committee. Detailed input from the Steering Committee informed all stages of the development of this phase of the research including the survey content, interpretation of findings, and the application of survey findings to inform the development of the TPL evaluation framework.

Dr Caroline Rawdon, one of the report's authors, said that "findings from the current report add to our existing knowledge of teachers' professional learning in Ireland. We know that teachers engage in a wide variety of professional learning activities each year and that there is variation in the manner in which the impact of professional learning activities is measured. It is hoped that the development of a new evaluation framework for the Irish context will help to address our current gaps in knowledge about the impacts of teachers' professional learning".

Dr Lorraine Gilleece, another of the report's authors, said that "we thank the teachers and principals who responded to our survey in Spring 2020. This was undoubtedly a difficult time for school communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey respondents have provided rich data and insights into teachers' participation in, and views of, professional learning activities in Ireland. We look forward to gathering more in-depth information from the schools who have agreed to participate in the final phase of this project in the coming school year. This applied phase of the project will complement findings from the earlier phases".

Notes:

Overview of the project

- Phase 1: The Phase 1 report was published in December 2020. The report contains a review of existing TPL evaluation frameworks and considers best practice for process evaluation and impact assessment of TPL. The report also provides a description of the broader school and policy context for student wellbeing; a review of key findings from large-scale national and international studies pertaining to the wellbeing of 5-18 year olds; and a description of TPL in the area of student wellbeing provided over the preceding 5 years. The Phase 1 report is available at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>
- Phase 2: Survey of teachers and principals outlined above.
- Phase 3: Data have been gathered on the perspectives of agencies involved in the provision of TPL in Ireland. A small-scale consultation was held with children and young people in mid-2021. A report on Phase 3 will be published in 2022.
- Phase 4: Further focused data collection (in collaboration with the Professional Development Service for Teachers) will be conducted with a small number of schools in the academic year 2021/2022.
- Develop and publish the final TPL evaluation framework by the end of 2022.

Contact details and further information

- The full report is available at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>
- ERC's TPL study website including study timeline and Steering Committee membership: <https://www.erc.ie/overviewTPL>
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