

**Mapping professional development pathways for those who teach in Irish higher education:
Where are we now and where do we want to go?"**

Dublin Institute of Technology response to the consultation call from the [National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) on proposals for the establishment and management of a professional development framework for those who teach in Irish higher education.

Q1 What kind of professional development framework is needed to meet the needs of those teaching in higher education in Ireland?

We would support the introduction of a national professional development framework and a focus on continuous professional development (CPD) for staff involved in teaching. If Irish HE is to attract talent into the system on an ongoing basis, a structured approach to professional recognition and development would be attractive. By way of supporting this, any framework should be

- **Dynamic, inspiring, authentic** recognising core, high quality professional values of Irish Higher Education – capturing, developing our strengths and uniqueness while directly linking to a high quality experience for all HE students
- **Inclusive, flexible and relevant** to recognise and value
 - all those who are involved in HE teaching in whatever capacity eg as supervisors, demonstrators, tutors, trainers, developers, part-time industry practitioners etc.
 - a wide range of teaching related activities eg non-accredited and accredited, informal and formal, generic and specialist etc.
 - the student voice within all processes as appropriate
- **Clearly structured, evidence based, practical, easily accessible, transparent, institutionally supported (top down and bottom up)** enabling direct links to institutional systems such as strategic planning, PMDS, promotion opportunities, QE processes etc.
- **Collaborative and negotiated**, where possible, to provide a number of options and choices so that development can be both professional and personal, to meet the needs of the professional bodies as well as evolving institutional academic development needs. Ideally, a system that supports dual recognition for the above (eg at the same time).
- **Responsive, agile and effective** to identify areas for development, to address issues as they evolve, to build capacity (in particular digital capacity) at a national level, to cater for current and future needs of learners across a range of different contexts through the creation of an Irish HE teaching community. To have a demonstrable impact on the quality of student learning across the sector.
- **Transferrable, nationally and internationally**, to provide recognised local specialist career pathways, while maintaining strong national links with QQI processes, that are in turn recognised globally to facilitate staff mobility, in particular within subject discipline niche areas.

Q2 Based on the models of professional development presented, is there any particular model either whole or in part which you think might be relevant to an Irish professional development framework?

- **A framework should aim to be inclusive (can one size fit all?). It is important to recognise and value different roles, responsibilities and activities related to HE teaching as well as accredited offerings** of relevance to different stages of career development and/or as specialist options within different career choices. However, there needs to be a balance from being clear but not too prescriptive and flexible but also maintaining coherence.
- **An evidence based system** around competencies /pathways of activities, perhaps with descriptors aligned with core professional values (eg UK PSF structure) would support

integration and implementation with local, institutional and national strategies (eg digital roadmap) and provide a way to identify gaps /address areas of need. A values based model related to core skills and competences that celebrates teachers as reflective practitioners, collaborative workers, innovators, creative thinkers, student centred in their approach etc. would help prioritise and make these explicit.

- **Raising the profile of teaching within third level** vis-a-vis research and in line with primary/ second level. At the same time recognising the importance of the scholarship of teaching, teaching being informed by their own research (through their own CPD activities?) and an institutional focus towards a research informed, industry focussed, internationalised curriculum etc.
- **Terminology used in the framework is important.** It is suggested that there is a move away from terms such as novice, beginner, excellence etc. to perhaps develop evidence based descriptors, to which staff can relate within their professional role and align activities and responsibilities as appropriate, similar to the UK standards framework for example.
- **A coherent structure for professional development plus specialist options that provides a clear progression pathway.** It was felt important that recognition be given to a range of different roles. A combination of models 3 and 4 could include specialist routes for researchers/ managers/ Heads of School/ Librarians/Academic Developers etc., perhaps a pre- entry level for post docs as academics of the future, and PT staff etc. A similar example is the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) where there are three levels i.e. Associate, Chartered & Chartered Level. However, it is suggested that rather than progressing along a linear path to an endpoint, there is a feedback loop and the qualified 'teaching expert' (or equivalent) is expected to become a mentor (or teaching fellow) to support early career teachers or those who are starting on a specialist pathway. In this way, CPD is viewed more as an ongoing activity and one for which individuals/institutions take shared responsibility, rather than one undertaken until competence and/or expertise is achieved.
- **A recommendation for a shift from a linear to a sustainable cyclical model (developed from Model 3) has the potential to build capacity, supporting individual development within a community of practice or within the Institution** (linking in to model 4). This recognises the development of the individual within the context of the department/school/institution development etc. Utilising model 4 gives a degree of autonomy/control to the institution.
- **An institutional model (eg model 4) aligned to core values /standards within a national framework** (recognised in turn within international frameworks) encourages institutions to take responsibility for their own CPD. It provides coherence and consistency of approach and at the same time provides the flexibility for institutions to possibly recognise the role of academic leaders, programme teams, schools/departments in creating their own culture, fostering innovation/industry focus to curriculum development (eg Athena Swan model).

Q3 How can the framework integrate and recognise the following:

Existing accredited and non-accredited provision? Existing professional work-based learning

- DIT has a requirement that all new staff who do not already have a teaching qualification are required to undertake the Postgraduate Diploma in third level learning and teaching. In line with recommendations from the Hunt report (2011 p 62) that all staff be qualified and competent in teaching and learning, national recognition of different strategies by which all teaching staff can develop and improve their skills is to be encouraged. The creation of 'a common culture where there is a commitment to teaching and learning excellence' (Forum consultancy document, p9) across the sector would build capacity/address needs/enhance quality at a national level.
- To ensure coherence and consistency in implementation, guidance around the recognition of the accredited and non-accredited provision, informed by key stakeholder groups, directed and led at a national level but implemented by institutions is recommended. Recognition of provision

could be aligned to values (eg SEDA in the UK) and/or a set of National Framework Standards (HEAcademy in the UK) or a combination of both (eg Irish Teaching Council Cosan proposal). A combination of the two would serve to make explicit key national professional values in addition to the provision of a structured development framework.

- It was considered important to formally recognise past activities /learning through a clearly aligned RPL process, as well as ongoing/future non-accredited activities, linked to professional role, within the framework. For example, in DIT, this would include undertaking Teaching Fellowships, seed funded projects, committee involvement, coordinating working groups/ seminars/events within relevant topic areas.
- An outcomes/evidence based approach that can be integrated into existing teaching allocation and record CPD within teaching hour allocation would be favoured rather than a ‘bolt on’ additional commitment. It was felt that if CPD is to be viewed as important, it needs to formally recognised and, if possible, staff provided with an appropriate time allocation to support this.
- There was a suggestion that a centralised/professional body process be put in place that might be used to support the capture of evidence (eg ePortfolio). Descriptors/best practice exemplars to be provided to define/guide recognition/logging of appropriate evidence at different levels. That staff take responsibility for demonstrating their continuous professional development through scholarly activity/achievement (eg UK HEAcademy model to ‘remain of good standing’ could evolve).

Q4 What management structure would help to make the professional development framework sustainable and give it on-going credibility nationally and internationally?

- There is recognition that there needs to be buy-in from institutions, departments, staff and students for the framework to have credibility. Therefore, it was suggested that there needs to be either an incentive to engage and/or penalty for non-engagement.
- In order to be sustainable, the framework would need to be robust, practical, fair and realistically achievable by all eligible staff and from all institutions. Institutions and central bodies would need to oversee processes at local level. This would involve access to supports/ training/resources/ recognition of evidence based procedures being established. These need to be quality ensured and linked into existing local QA processes and feedback mechanisms, taking into account feedback through ISSE etc.
- Formally linking promotion/progression opportunities directly to professional development would provide national credibility and buy in. A need to be formally recognised /registered within the Framework, to be of ‘good standing’ in order ‘to practice’ could be considered (eg model similar to Teaching Council, UK PSF etc.). But there would need to be transparency and consistency of any model that is put in place in order to ensure transferability.
- Model 4 shifts responsibility to the institution but as such could be more resource intensive. In addition, institutions could opt out: if they are too small to be able to provide accredited offerings/put in place evidence based recognition processes or too large to be able to scale up to cater for all staff involved in teaching. Options might be to
 - offer initial financial support as institutional systems are put in place,
 - generate evidence (eg from associated Forum research projects) to demonstrate benefits (eg increased retention, higher ratings) and/or
 - support institutional (geographical) clusters as a way to share responsibility for implementation.
- If centrally managed through the Forum, then institutional implementation would also need to be put in place and monitored. The Irish Teaching Council Cosan draft framework suggests ‘accreditation of approved providers or third parties who will review and accredit programmes on Council’s behalf’. Cosan also suggests ‘the creation of opportunities for teachers to share practice (eg through a mediated online forum), in particular of learning experiences and the

impact of these on their learning'. Another model, the UK CPD Certification Service, established in 1996, operates as an independent CPD accreditation institution across industry sectors to complement the CPD policies of professional and academic bodies.

- Any framework developed will need to benchmark internationally. This would also be helpful in attracting international talent into the system and facilitate colleagues in outward exchange and mobility endeavours.

Overall, a model that makes explicit a set of high quality Irish professional values of HE teaching, which builds upon a strong existing national foundation of existing best practice, that recognises past, ongoing, future alignment of professional development activities with a national and international context, that encourages engagement by both individuals, teams and institutions and builds capacity at an Irish level within a supportive collaborative community would be favoured.