

Press Release

Development of an evaluation framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland – publication of two reports from Phase 3 of the project

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is delighted to launch two new reports from the third 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 first report – **Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland: Phase 3a Consultation with TPL providers** – was written by Caroline Rawdon and Lorraine Gilleece. The second report – **Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland: Small-scale consultation with children and young people** – was written by Caroline Rawdon, Caitríona Fitzgerald, and Lorraine Gilleece. The reports represent an important step towards meeting commitments made by the Department of Education to evaluate and enhance the professional development activities of teachers and school leaders.

Minister for Education Norma Foley TD said: "I am delighted to see the publication of these reports. This is the third 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."

The new Phase 3 reports are available from the ERC's website at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>, together with previous reports from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project.

The first Phase 3 report (*Consultation with TPL providers*) describes the perspectives of respondents from 10 organisations that provide TPL in Ireland. Respondents described a TPL programme designed and facilitated by their organisation and suggested areas for improvement with respect to TPL in Ireland.

The report also **describes respondents' perspectives** on how their organisations:

- identify TPL needs;
- design and facilitate TPL;
- evaluate and assess the impact of TPL provided; and
- cater for different school contexts and participant diversity in the TPL provided.

Key findings highlight:

- The role of system priorities in determining TPL in Ireland.
- TPL providers' awareness of the need to take school characteristics into account when designing and facilitating TPL.
- The recognised importance of 'facilitator competencies', i.e., that facilitators have qualifications relevant to the TPL or engage in induction or training with the organisation itself before facilitating the TPL.
- The role and importance of reflective practice in TPL and for the TPL evaluation framework.

The findings also point to **challenges** related to TPL evaluation:

- TPL providers showed a high degree of awareness of the need for an improved approach to the evaluation of TPL – at system-level, provider-level, and school-level. This underscores the need for the current research project and the development of a framework for the evaluation of TPL.
- Capacity building in relation to data analysis among TPL providers may be needed.

The second new report (*Small-scale consultation with children and young people*) outlines **children and young people's views** on:

- What makes learning easier?
- What makes learning more fun/engaging?

In June 2021, 427 primary pupils and 25 post-primary students answered the consultation questions. Consultation was carried out at primary level using a pen and paper task and at post-primary level via two online meetings.

Grouped under 4 themes, participating **primary school pupils suggested that teachers can make learning easier or more fun**:

- With clear explanations, educational games, and one-to-one support which link to *curriculum, teaching and learning*;
- Via the *culture and learning environment*, e.g., with more lessons outside;
- Through *relationships and partnerships*, i.e., by including greater student choice/voice; and
- With more *play, recreation, and stress reduction*, e.g., increased playtime/yard time or more learning breaks.

Grouped under 3 themes, participating **post-primary students suggested that teachers can make learning easier or more engaging**:

- Through *teaching methods*, e.g., using a variety of teaching methods, increasing opportunities for classroom discussions, and encouraging participation and critical thinking;
- By being respectful, friendly, and approachable to students and fostering or encouraging positive relationships with students, i.e., *student-teacher relationships*; and
- Through changes in the *learning environment*, e.g., improving classroom management.

Dr Caroline Rawdon, one of the authors of the reports, said that "findings from Phase 3 add to our existing knowledge of teachers' professional learning in Ireland from the perspective of organisations responsible for TPL provision. The findings also give insight into the views of children and young people in relation to teaching and learning. It is hoped that the development of an

evaluation framework will help to fill current gaps in knowledge about the impacts of teachers' professional learning in Ireland".

Dr Lorraine Gilleece, another of the authors, said that "we thank the TPL providers who took the time to participate in this research. The past three years have proved to be a challenging time for the provision of professional learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. TPL providers have contributed rich data and insights in relation to their perspectives on professional learning activities in Ireland. We are also delighted to have included the views of children and young people on their experiences of teaching and learning and we thank Hub na nÓg, the primary schools, and children and young people that participated in the consultation."

Notes

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 questions used for data collection, interpretation of findings, and the application of findings from both consultations to inform the development of the TPL evaluation framework.

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.
- Phase 2: The Phase 2 report, published in October 2021, contains findings from a survey of teachers and principals in relation to their views on TPL. The survey was carried out in Spring 2020. The survey addressed respondents' views on TPL in general and their preferred approaches; their recent uptake of professional learning; and their involvement in activities related to student wellbeing at school.
- Phase 3a: Consultation with TPL providers outlined above.
- Phase 3b: Small-scale consultation with children and young people outlined above.
- Phase 4: Further focused data collection (in collaboration with the Professional Development Service for Teachers) is currently being conducted with a small number of schools and will continue in the academic year 2022/2023.
- Publication of the final TPL evaluation framework is anticipated by March 2023.

Contact details and further information

- The full reports from this project are 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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