**Teaching Council of Ireland – activities and impact**

The Teaching Council of Ireland is the statutory professional standards body for teaching in Ireland. Its primary governing legislation is the Teaching Council Act 2001, as amended in 2006 and 2012. It promotes and regulates the profession of teaching in primary, post-primary and further education. It works to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning for all, on behalf of the profession and in the interests of the public.

1. **Professionalisation of the teaching workforce**
   1. **Compulsory registration of all teachers**
      1. As of 28 January 2014, all teachers working in recognised schools at primary, post-primary and further education level must be registered with the Council in order to be paid from public funds. For the first time since the foundation of the State, there is now a comprehensive register of teachers covering all three sectors. There are over 87,000 teachers on the register at time of writing. These standards are set out in the Council Registration Regulations and include, including a minimum of a Level 8 Honours Bachelor Degree on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), evidence of suitability of character, police clearance, and a period of induction and probation.
      2. The Council’s current teacher registration [regulations](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Registration/Overview/Registration_Regulations_2009_90665047.pdf) were approved in 2009 and are now undergoing an extensive review to take account of the significant changes that the Council has spearheaded in the interim period in teacher education.
   2. **Review and accreditation of reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education (ITE)**
      1. Under the Council’s own Criteria and Guidelines, and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy of the Department of Education and Skills, the Council is reviewing all 70 programmes of ITE in the country, including the first ever further education programmes in Ireland. As part of this process, the Council has accredited the first ever programmes of ITE for FE in Ireland, which now number 10 in total. These new programmes of ITE will be of 2 years duration in the consecutive model (120 ECTS) and 4 years in the concurrent model (240 ECTS). Each HEI (Higher Education Institution) is required to reconceptualise their programmes in line with the values that underpin the Council’s work. One of the most important of these is that of the reflective practitioner. The Council believes that all NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers) must have a strong skills foundation in the area of reflective practice so that they can realise the full possibility of lifelong learning.
      2. While the Council’s learning outcomes for ITE are set at Level 8 (degree) on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, some HEIs have opted to set their qualifications at Level 9 (Masters level).
   3. **Code of Professional Conduct** 
      1. The Council approved the second edition of the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers in May 2012. The Code is first and foremost a clear, succinct statement of what high quality teaching looks and feels like. It is one of the most important reassurances that school leaders can have that the quality of teaching and learning in their school is being maintained and enhanced. All teachers on the register receive a hard copy of this Code. The main reason for this is that it has a particular legal standing in the context of the Fitness to Teach process, which is due to be legally commenced later this year.
   4. **Entry criteria**
      1. The Council has commissioned research on the entry criteria that applicants must satisfy in order to be accepted on to programmes of ITE. The research will cover a number of issues, including the minimum grades that are required in Mathematics, English and the Irish language for primary teaching, as well as the subjects that must be studied prior to entry onto concurrent programmes for post-primary teaching. A key question that will be explored is the evaluation of the appropriateness of entry criteria. In other words, do we evaluate entry criteria on the basis of their ability to predict whether or not an individual will make a good teacher? Or do we evaluate them on the basis of their ability to indicate whether or not the individual is prepared to learn to become a good teacher, in the first instance through ITE?
      2. The Council has also approved new subject criteria for subjects at post-primary level, including all those which are studied to Leaving Cert level. A graduate of a concurrent programme of ITE or an applicant for a consecutive programme of ITE must meet the criteria in the curricular subject they wish to teach. The main elements include a minimum of 60 ECTS for all subjects, including 90 ECTS for certain subjects, a residency requirement for all languages, and the specific requirement for a methodology in certain subjects.
   5. **Droichead – a new model of induction and probation** 
      1. Droichead ( *bridge* in the Irish language) is the Council’s new pilot model of induction and probation for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Distributed quality leadership is at its core. A variety of models are catered for in the pilot. A common dynamic to them all is a systemic welcome for NQTs by fellow professionals into the most important profession in society. PSTs (Professional Support Teams) are the ideal model for Droichead, comprising the school principal / head teacher (opt-in basis), the mentor and another staff member. Training for the PST is provided through the NIPT National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT). Training is provided through the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) for mentors and for all members of the PST. By supporting the creation of a community of practice around the principal, Droichead offers the potential to model a rich way of enabling all teachers in schools to do what they know best – lead teaching and learning.
2. **Promoting a culture of reflective practice and lifelong learning**
   1. **Facilitating and enhancing a culture of research in teaching**
      1. **Research Alive!** 
         1. In collaboration with the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)) and the CES (Centre for Effective Services), the Teaching Council is a partners in this project which has two main aims:
            1. To explore the way in which teachers are currently engaging in research.
            2. To enhance teachers’ engagement with research and researchers so as to maximise the positive impact on teaching and learning in the classroom.
         2. A survey was conducted of over 4,000 teachers which yielded some very interesting insights into this area.
         3. On foot of this survey, the Research Alive! conference was held in May 2013, which was attended by a mix of registered teachers, researchers and HEI staff members. There was rich and lively engagement in all the issues by all attendees. Teachers articulated two main demands:
            1. They wanted more access to research.
            2. They wanted more critical engagement with that research.
      2. Council has now secured free access to the EBSCO collection of online education journals for all registered teachers as of September 2013. There has been an active take-up of that service which continues to grow apace.
      3. Council, the NCCA and the CES are now jointly commissioning a new website to address the second demand of teachers from Research Alive! – critical engagement. The new site will be called [www.molfeasa.ie](http://www.molfeasa.ie) (from *mol feasa*, the Irish for hub of wisdom or learning). This hub will offer a new space for teachers and researchers to connect with each other and with research, to share and comment on that research, and to access research summaries. The intention is that the new site will go live in the first quarter of 2015.
   2. **Collaborative learning – FÉILTE – Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence**
      1. The first FÉILTE was held in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on 5 October last year to mark World Teachers’ Day. Its goal was to create a space and time for teachers to share, celebrate and learn their innovation in teaching. By enabling teachers to create and sustain their own communities of practice, in ways that resonate best with them, FÉILTE is creating a strong foundation for distributed quality leadership in teaching and learning across the system. The next FÉILTE will be held on 4 October 2014 in the RDS. Participation and attendance is expected to be double that of last year.
   3. **CPD (Continuing Professional Development)**
      1. The Teaching Council has a statutory role in the promoting and accrediting of continuing professional development for teachers. The Council’s Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education sets out the Council’s vision for teachers as lifelong learners, saying that CPD is a right as well as a responsibility. It also posits the three I’s that inform all aspects of its work in education:
         1. Integration
         2. Innovation
         3. Improvement
      2. The Policy on the Continuum also states the Council’s intention to develop a National Framework for CPD, and to require evidence of CPD from teachers in the near future as a requirement for renewal of registration. It is the Council’s intention that its functions in this area, as outlined in the Teaching Council Act of 2001, will be commenced no later than March 2016.
   4. **Leadership**
      1. The Council is aware of the emergence of leadership as an issue of common concern for all stakeholders in education. It is important to acknowledge that the definition of leadership in this context is quite a broad one. Clearly, it would start with the primary leaders of teaching and learning in schools i.e. principals. But as Education International itself acknowledges, the definition cannot stop there. The Council takes the view that all teachers are leaders of teaching and learning, obviously within their own classes, but also throughout the school community. Indeed, in encouraging, supporting and at times challenging the profession to broaden their continuum of understanding along this spectrum of leadership (from classroom to whole school), the Council is playing a critical role to support and enhance quality leadership for all teachers, including principals. The singular focus of this, of course, is the quality of teaching and learning of our children and young people.
   5. The Council is collaborating closely with each of the statutory public sector bodies in education to ensure that education policy is fully aligned and established on a secure and clear values base. These bodies include the NCCA, NCSE (National Council for Special Education), QQI (Qualifications and Quality Ireland) and the HEA (Higher Education Authority).
3. **Raising standards of teaching**

The Council’s work seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning across the continuum of education in a number of ways, including the following:

* 1. Developing advice on entry criteria to programmes of ITE – see 1(d) above.
  2. Review and Accreditation of Programmes of ITE - see 1 (b) above.
  3. Droichead – new model of induction and probation for NQTs – see 1 (e) above.
  4. Fitness to Teach
     1. Under Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council has the function of conducting inquiries into the Fitness to Teach of any registered teacher against whom a complaint is made in relation to their professional conduct or practice. At time of writing, this part of the Act has yet to be commenced. It is understood that this will happen before the end of 2014. Once commenced, any individual will be able to make a complaint against a registered teacher. Subject to its rules and procedures, the Council will consider these complaints and investigate and apply sanctions as appropriate.
     2. In January 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills announced his intention to amend Part 5 of the Act to bring it into line with more recent developments in other regulatory organisations, including the Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Board. Many of these amendments were previously sought by the Teaching Council. Once the Act has been amended, it is our understanding that these provisions will be commenced, subject to ongoing consultation with the Council.
     3. The Council acknowledges that many stakeholders will base their understanding of its role almost solely on the Fitness to Teach process. This is an understandable view. However, the Council maintains the view that all aspects of its work, many of which are outlined in this note, have a key role to play in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning for all learners. As noted at a previous CLEAR (Council for Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation) conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, international experience in the regulatory space would indicate that Fitness to Practice processes deal with 1% of the registrant population. How does a professional standards body assure quality and standards amongst the remaining 99%? The answer being through the areas of work outlined in this paper.