



Droichead: Forming a Professional Support Team (PST)

What is a Professional Support Team?

The main objective of the Droichead process is to support the professional learning of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) during the induction phase, thus laying the foundation for subsequent professional growth and learning for the next phase of their career. Key elements of this process are an NQT's engagement with more experienced colleagues, and reflection on the professional conversations that take place on their own professional learning and practice.

A Professional Support Team (PST) is a team of experienced, fully registered teachers (which may include the principal), ideally with five years' experience who have been trained by the Droichead Induction Division to support the Droichead process. The PST works collaboratively to support and guide an NQT through their induction phase. In summary, the role of the PST is to **guide and advise the NQT** during school-based induction **and form a joint declaration with the NQT** (by signing Form D) that they have participated in a quality teaching and learning process. To guide a PST in its role, suggested responsibilities for PST members are explored in detail at PST Training.

There may be considerable variety in the size and composition of the PST to suit different school contexts. Whilst up to three PST members may be trained in a three-year period, a minimum of two PST members is required to engage in the Droichead process with an NQT. PST members are asked to give a commitment of three years to the role of PST member. Each member of the PST receives three days training from the Droichead Induction Division. The training is designed to equip PST members with the skills and knowledge required to guide an NQT through the process. Substitute cover is provided as per DE guidelines.

While many **principals** have opted to engage as a member of their school's PST, others instead opt for an oversight role - choosing to support the NQT and PST as they undertake the Droichead process - but not as part of the PST and they do not

sign Form D. As school leaders, principals foster a learning culture in which Droichead can flourish and support the PST in facilitating a quality induction process.

How is the PST formed?

There are a number of ways in which a PST can be established. The principal may invite teachers who are interested in being members of a PST and who are willing to undertake professional development to become members of the PST. Alternatively, a PST may be made up of the principal and one other (e.g., in a small school). Where the school has several NQTs, more than one PST may be formed after discussion with the Droichead Induction Division on a case-by-case basis.

What knowledge and skills do PST members need?

As the role of the PST is to guide and advise the NQT during school-based induction and form a joint declaration with the NQT (by signing Form D) that they have participated in a quality teaching and learning process, members of the PST should:

- be fully registered and have five years' experience or more as fully registered teachers
- be good communicators who are sensitive to the viewpoints of others
- be committed to providing both professional and personal support
- be good role models with a good repertoire of teaching styles
- be committed to high standards of professional practice and conduct
- be willing to commit time and effort in the interest of developing both the NQTs' and their own practice
- be open to and comfortable with their practice being observed by other teachers
- have good relationship-building skills, a clear understanding of the stages of teacher development (particularly the induction phase) and an ability to support and challenge the NQT to map their learning from ITE/Céim to the reality of the classroom.

Are there different PST models?

Yes. There are three PST models – an internal PST, a PST with an external member and an inter-school PST. The models vary from one another according to the composition of the team. A school will decide what model best serves its unique circumstances.

The PST, (comprising of a minimum of two members) may be entirely school based. This is currently the model most commonly used by schools. In the event that a school is unable to form a PST from within its own staff, there are two other possible models.

1. Schools may nominate an **external PST member**.

A principal may wish to establish a PST, involving internal school staff and one external PST member. The Droichead Induction Division operates a panel of trained PST members who are available to other schools as external PST members. Typically, these PST members have worked collaboratively as a part of a PST in their own school and have taken an NQT through the Droichead process.

To access the Droichead Induction Division **External Panel**, the principal should contact droicheadinduction@oide.ie. Alternatively, schools may choose to nominate their own external member who will attend/who has attended PST training.

Once the external PST member's appointment is confirmed and agreed, it is then up to the Droichead school to agree protocols with the external PST member regarding engagement with the process at school level. The roles and responsibilities of each PST member and the principal may vary from one school to the next and are therefore agreed before the Droichead process commences.

Supporting an NQT during Droichead is always a collaborative process. An external PST member usually visits the base/Droichead school a number of times for professional conversations with the other PST members and the NQT, and to engage in classroom observation and discussion. The base/Droichead school, in collaboration with the NQT and the external panel member, may explore the possibility of conducting a range of induction activities, including, but not limited to pre-observation and post-

observation meetings, using appropriate software, technology and visit/s to the base/Droichead school.

2. A school may also opt for an **inter-school PST model**:

If a principal is not in a position to establish a PST, perhaps due to school size, they may wish to consider linking with another school or schools to establish an inter-school PST. Where a PST is made up of teachers from more than one school, there is a need to ensure that all members of the PST attend PST professional development training provided by the Droichead Induction Division and have sufficient opportunity to engage with and support the NQT during the Droichead process. There is also a need to ensure that all PST members are familiar with the school context where the NQT is employed so that the support offered is appropriate, relevant and consistent.

It is envisaged that schools establishing an inter-school PST will be in close proximity to each other, but there may be instances where, for whatever reason, a school may not wish to partner with the school or schools that are closest to it. In such circumstances, the school may wish to work with another school, which, while not in close proximity to it, has a well-established relationship with the school or is a school with a similar context, for example, a Gaelscoil or special school. Such collaborations are encouraged, so long as the location of the schools is such as to render participation viable and allow all PSTs and NQTs to receive the level of support that they need. At least one trained PST member should be from the base/Droichead school (the school in which the NQT is employed).

For further information on anything above, please contact aine.kilbride@oide.ie (for Primary) and angie.grogan@oide.ie (for Post-primary).