



Droichead Quality Assurance Report

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Glossary

Associate

An associate is a practising and fully-registered teacher who is also an experienced mentor and/or induction workshop facilitator, nominated by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) to support the *Droichead* process in *Droichead* schools.

Continuum of Teacher Education

This describes the formal and informal educational and developmental activities in which teachers engage, as lifelong learners, during their teaching careers. It encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development and later career support.

Droichead

The *Droichead* process is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). It recognises the effectiveness of the reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education and particularly the extended school placement, in the professional preparation of student teachers. It builds on that phase, taking as its starting point the areas for further learning that have been identified by the NQT in collaboration with the HEI as part of the school placement experience. At the same time, it recognises that induction is a distinct phase of the continuum of teacher education, a socialisation process into the teaching profession. This integrated framework includes both school-based and additional professional learning activities to address the needs of teachers as they begin their careers. The main objective of the *Droichead* process is to support the professional learning of the NQTs during the induction phase, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and learning for the next phase of their career. Following the *Droichead* process, a declaration is made by the NQT that he or she is ready to move to the next phase on the continuum of teacher education. A joint declaration is made by the teacher and experienced colleagues, following collective reflection, that through their engagement in *Droichead*, they have participated in a quality teaching and learning process. The Teaching Council then removes the *Droichead* condition from the teacher's registration.

National Induction Programme for Teachers

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) is a State-funded service that supports the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), both primary and post-primary, into the teaching profession in Ireland. The main objective of induction is towards promoting the professional development of NQTs by way of systematic support in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and development. The NIPT co-ordinates the provision of a multi-faceted induction programme for teachers. Full-time team members, Regional Development Officers (RDOs), are supported in their work by a team of associates (see above).

Newly qualified teacher (NQT)

This refers to a teacher who meets the Council's requirements in terms of qualifications but has not completed the required period of professional practice. In this document, newly qualified teacher (NQT) refers to all newly registered teachers who are beginning their teaching career or may be returning to teaching after a period of absence, regardless of their date of qualification.

Taisce

A professional learning portfolio is developed over time by each NQT, to support the process of reflection on his or her practice. The term *Taisce*, (Irish for treasure trove) is used to refer to this process of portfolio-based learning. It may provide a focus for the professional conversations that are central to *Droichead* and thus enable the NQT to identify areas in which he or she may need support or guidance.

Professional Support Team (PST)

The Professional Support Team is a team of experienced and fully registered teachers, who have received specific training from the NIPT and work collaboratively to support the NQT during the *Droichead* process.

List of acronyms

DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Department of Education policy Instrument to address educational disadvantage)
DQA	<i>Droichead</i> Quality Assurance
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NIPT	National Induction Programme for Teachers
PST	Professional Support Team
SMT	Senior Management Team

Chairperson's Foreword

In our *Droichead* Quality Assurance (DQA) consideration of the school year 2020/2021, we sampled the *Droichead* process in 24 schools: 12 in Primary and 12 in Post-Primary. As outlined in policy, the schools were chosen randomly at each sector. The DQA process for the school year 2020/2021 was disrupted by Covid-19 but, as you will see in the findings, schools were very resilient and creative in overcoming the challenges posed to the process and made great efforts to ensure that the process worked for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

Our sample included several different school types in each sector. The panel chose to conduct the process in a face-to-face manner; a small number of schools requested that we work with them remotely due to individual school contexts at the time of visits. There was great co-operation from all selected schools; two schools were unable to accommodate us at the time proposed and we went to substitute schools in these instances. This was another difficult year for the operation of schools. We were conducting our process during a year which was, once again, disrupted by Covid-19, whilst looking at the process in a school year that had also been greatly disrupted by the pandemic.

This was my fifth year acting as Chairperson to both panels and it was my privilege to have the opportunity to meet with school personnel in all participating schools, albeit remotely in a small number. The *Droichead* process was conducted with great care and professionalism in all the schools we sampled. The process was conducted with even greater creativity and resilience to overcome the obvious challenges posed by Covid-19. Throughout the five years, I recognise, as chairperson, a high level of consistency in all the schools we worked with in the manner in which *Droichead* was delivered.

It was another challenging year for teachers and, therefore, for the process, particularly when teachers had to deliver lessons remotely and away from school and colleagues. I would like to pay tribute to them all for their professionalism and resilience during those difficult times, and to the members of Professional Support Teams (PST) who supported their NQTs through the *Droichead* process.

I thank all the Principals, Deputy Principals, the PSTs and NQTs in participating schools for their co-operation and for their warm welcome to us in all cases. It is certainly a privilege to enter schools and observe the unique dynamic in each school; it was also heartening. I thank all participating schools for allowing us to see how *Droichead* was accomplished with such a high level of professionalism, flexibility and generosity by all.

The spirit of *Droichead* (collegiality, co-operation, and support) is alive and well in our schools. I would also like to thank the members of our Primary and Post-Primary panels for their professionalism and generosity of spirit in conducting the DQA process, and members of the Teaching Council staff for their unstinting support and background work within a very tight timeline. Once again this year, due to time constraints and operational challenges, we had increased numbers of both Teaching Council members and Department of Education inspectors partaking in the process.

Sinéad Kelly acted as the rapporteur on behalf of the Teaching Council this year and she did an outstanding job in very difficult circumstances keeping the whole process on track with great humour and professionalism. The focus of the DQA is placed on consistency, rather than uniformity, in the operation of *Droichead* in schools. This was especially important to note, as the difficulties around delivery posed by Covid-19 challenges over recent years heightened our awareness of how the process was impinging on NQTs and the school community. The question uppermost in our minds was whether the *Droichead* process supported the NQTs in the same way during these times as it had in more normal times. We strongly believe that it has, though improvements can always be made.

Schools and school contexts vary greatly, both between and within sectors. The findings from the DQA process, as outlined, give a good indication of how schools are continuing to develop the *Droichead* process and achieve the balance between uniformity and consistency within the individual school context. It was also notable this year that *Droichead* has bedded down significantly in many schools. It is now at the point where some members of

the PST would welcome a break, which would allow for others to participate in upskilling. This highlights the need for refresher training for established PST members and the need for succession planning for teams. The greater familiarity with online work also led teachers to request that some of the training and refresher courses be held online for greater accessibility.

This is a small-scale study as the number of schools visited represents a tiny fraction of the total number of schools undertaking *Droichead*. Our findings, therefore, are valuable and indicative of the consistency with which *Droichead* is being implemented. However, they cannot be taken as conclusive. They can, and do, provide the Teaching Council with a level of assurance that the process is being conducted with a considerable level of professionalism in the schools.

This report is also affirming of the professionals engaged in the process and notes the value of their contribution to the induction process within the continuum of teacher education. As in previous years, the most valuable part of the *Droichead* process was reported by both the PST members and NQTs to be the peer-to-peer observations. The process itself, the training and the support supplied to PST members were generally received very positively in schools, as described in the findings. In this regard, a small number of caveats were expressed, which are outlined, later in the report.

Peer observations in classrooms, and the professional approach to these observations in the *Droichead* process are supporting teachers in this and, in other forms, of collaborative practice in the schools visited. For some this year, this included observing delivery of online content. The *Droichead* process is non-judgemental and provides an opportunity to share good practice between professionals.

This is a great strength, one NQT summed up their experience of the *Droichead* process in a time of Covid-19 by saying:

“ I suppose when I first heard of *Droichead* I was still obviously a PME (Professional Master of Education student teacher) and I heard about *Droichead* and I was a bit apprehensive, but I was thinking I am after going through two years of inspections and lesson plans and work and I thought “**Oh God, all over again**” but then when I actually started the process and I realized how supportive and how helpful it is, like it really was in this school very good for me to get to know the teachers especially with Covid because we were in pods and I might not have got to know the staff as well.”

This sums up the experience of many who have undertaken *Droichead*, even in challenging times.

Ciarán Flynn,
Chairperson

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Droichead Quality Assurance (DQA)

The *Droichead* process is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers, which includes the period of professional practice that an NQT in a *Droichead* school is required to undertake following his or her initial registration.

The *Droichead* Quality Assurance process was initiated with a view to examining the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process in a selection of different schools on an annual basis. For the remainder of this report, the *Droichead* Quality Assurance process will be referred to as DQA.

The conceptualisation of the DQA process has changed considerably since the early stages of *Droichead* policy development. In the first iteration of the *Droichead* Guide for Schools 2013/2014 (for year 1 of the pilot), it was envisaged that the Inspectorate would have an important quality assurance role by evaluating the work of a sample of NQTs who had completed the *Droichead* process in schools, through observation of their classroom practice.

In light of concern voiced by pilot schools in relation to the proposed approach, an alternative DQA process was developed and approved by Council in July 2014. This DQA process takes cognisance of the core values of the Teaching Council; shared professional responsibility; professionally-led regulation, and collective professional confidence. This is reflected in the composition of the DQA (see Section 3) panels, which looks to the profession to assume responsibility not only for the induction of NQTs into the profession, but also the quality assurance of that process.

In line with the quality assurance processes set out in *Droichead: A Guide for Schools 2015/2016*, the DQA process was initiated during the 2015/2016 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of eight school visits took place in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration. During these visits, the panel discussed the process with the principal, the professional support team and the newly qualified teacher. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panels. This report was approved by the Teaching Council on March 6th, 2017 and can be found [here](#).

The second cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2017/2018 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of twenty-four school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

The third cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2018/2019 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of twelve school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

The fourth cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2019/2020 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of sixteen school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

The fifth cycle of DQA was initiated during the 2020/2021 school year. A DQA panel was established and a series of twenty-eight school visits took place. A report was compiled outlining the findings of the DQA panel. This report can be found [here](#).

Droichead Quality Assurance is one of a number of mechanisms in place to assure the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process nationally as outlined in '*Droichead: The Professional Induction Framework March 2017*' at 1.1.9.

The DQA Panel does this in two main ways:

- 1. Completion of annual reviews at national level in order to promote and develop a shared understanding across schools about what works well in *Droichead*, within different school contexts.**
- 2. Consideration of requests from individual NQTs for their *Droichead* process to be reviewed.**

In line with the quality assurance processes set out in *Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework March 2017*, this DQA process was initiated during the 2021/2022 school year and refers to the *Droichead* process carried out in schools during the previous year, 2020/2021. A DQA panel was established and a series of twenty-four school visits took place, carried out, once again, in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration.

This year, DQA visits took place both online and onsite depending on the school's preference. Incidences of Covid-19 varied across schools and wider society throughout the DQA visits. Five DQA visits took place online, using Microsoft Teams the remaining nineteen school visits were carried out onsite adhering to each school's individual Covid-19 policy.

This DQA process reflects the schools' experiences based on the policy arrangements in *Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework, March 2017*.

1.2 Purpose of DQA

The purpose of the DQA process is to examine both the quality and consistency of *Droichead* across schools, and also how NQTs' experiences reflect this quality and consistency.

In achieving this, it is intended that the DQA process will seek to:

- promote and develop a shared understanding across schools about what works well in *Droichead*, within various school contexts
- examine if the *Droichead* process, as implemented, is fair, and consistent with Teaching Council Policy.
- make recommendations to the Teaching Council in relation to the procedures for quality assurance for the *Droichead* process.

As schools exist in a variety of contexts, the focus of the DQA is placed on consistency of the *Droichead* process with Teaching Council policy, rather than uniformity across participating schools.

The following key principles guide the DQA process:

- shared professional responsibility and professionally-led regulation
- sharing good practice
- the NQT is central to the process
- fairness and consistency

This is not a research report. The purpose of this document is to outline the findings of the DQA panels as a result of visits to a number of *Droichead* schools. It is intended that this process will inform future policy development in relation to quality assurance.

The findings of the research on the pilot phase of *Droichead*, conducted by the ESRI, can be found in the report *Review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme (2016)*.

In Autumn 2018 the Council commissioned Marino Institute of Education and Trinity College, Dublin to research teachers' experiences of *Droichead*, the professional induction framework for teachers. DEEPEN, which stands for *Droichead: Exploring and Eliciting Perspectives, Experiences and Narratives* is a Teaching Council funded research project which explores teachers' lived experience of the *Droichead* professional induction process. It focused in particular on small schools, Gaelscoileanna, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools, and special education settings. The key findings and recommendations will inform the Council's review of policy. This report can be found [here](#).

2. School Selection

A list of all schools in which an NQT had registered for *Droichead* during 2020/2021 was collated and a sample of schools were selected for the DQA process. During this timeframe, 1,670 schools (1115 primary schools, 555 post-primary schools) supported 3,398 NQTs (1,832 primary, 1,566 post-primary) through the *Droichead* process.

Schools were selected randomly from all lists. This selection of schools took place via Microsoft Teams on November 2nd, 2021.

A total of twenty-four schools were selected.

- Twenty-four schools, twelve from primary and twelve from post-primary, were selected randomly from the full lists.
- Four additional schools, two primary and two post-primary were also selected, to be used in the event that a selected school could not participate.

The Teaching Council and the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel wish to thank the schools involved for facilitating the work of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel. The welcome received, the openness of engagement and the enthusiasm of school staff made the experience of *Droichead* Quality Assurance a very positive one for all involved. The panel formed the opinion that *Droichead* is being conducted in a fair manner and that NQTs report a very positive experience overall. The process, as observed, despite minor variations due to school context, is remarkably consistent across the schools and carried out in line with *Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework*, March 2017.

2.1 Anonymisation

Schools participating in the DQA process are anonymised in this report. The schools' profiles are generalised and the schools are referred to using the anonymisation codes as outlined in the table below:

Code	Details
A	School A is a multi-denominational post-primary co-educational school with 640 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 six NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
B	School B is a catholic girls' voluntary post-primary school with 760 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
C	School C is a catholic boys' voluntary post-primary school with 585 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
D	School D is a catholic co-educational voluntary post-primary school with 625 pupils. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

Code	Details
A	School A is a multi-denominational post-primary co-educational school with 640 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 six NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
B	School B is a catholic girls' voluntary post-primary school with 760 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
C	School C is a catholic boys' voluntary post-primary school with 585 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
D	School D is a catholic co-educational voluntary post-primary school with 625 pupils. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
E	School E is a catholic girls' voluntary post-primary school with 888 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 three NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
F	School F is a catholic co-educational voluntary post-primary school with 401 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
G	School G is a catholic girls' voluntary post-primary school with 543 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 six NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
H	School H is a multi- denominational post- primary co-educational school with 915 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 ten NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
I	School I is a catholic girls' voluntary post-primary school with 670 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 four NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
J	School J is a multi-denominational vocational post-primary co-educational community school with 290 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the <i>Droichead</i> process in the school. The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

Code	Details
K	School K is a catholic girls' post-primary school with 244 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
L	School L is a multi-denominational post-primary co-educational community school with 1015 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 four NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
M	School M is a catholic co-educational mainstream primary school with 429 pupils. The school is mixed up to first class, from second to sixth class the girls continue in the school and the boys attend another school locally. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
N	School N is a catholic co-educational mainstream primary school with 239 pupils. The school is mixed up to first class, from second to sixth class the girls continue in the school and the boys attend another school locally. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTS completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
O	School O is a catholic co-educational infant primary school with 221 pupils. The school participates in DEIS. During the school year 2020/2021 three NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
P	School P is a catholic girls' mainstream primary school with 208 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
Q	School W is a catholic co-educational special school with 120 pupils. It caters for pupils from ages 4-18 and has both primary and secondary sections on campus. During the school year 2020/2021, one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school. All PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
R	School M is a catholic co-educational mainstream primary school with 183 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 three NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
S	School S is a catholic co-educational mainstream primary school with 442 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

Code	Details
T	School T is a catholic co-educational mainstream primary school with 388 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 three NQTS completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
U	School U is a catholic boys' mainstream primary school with 255 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
V	School V is a Church of Ireland co-educational primary school with 210 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
W	School W is a Church of Ireland co-educational primary school with 286 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 one NQT completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.
X	School X is a catholic boys' mainstream primary school with 452 pupils. During the school year 2020/2021 two NQTs completed the Droichead process in the school . The PST was formed from within the school and all PST members have completed <i>Droichead</i> professional development with the NIPT.

Across the 24 schools involved in this process, the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel met with 34 principals and deputy principals, 60 PST members and a total of 41 NQTs who had experienced and completed the *Droichead* process.

3. Droichead Quality Assurance Panels

3.1 Composition of the Panels

The composition and work of the DQA panels may be summarised as follows:

Review panels are established by the Teaching Council to quality assure the *Droichead* process. Each panel includes an independent Chairperson, a registered teacher from the relevant sector and a person with expertise in the support and/or evaluation of teaching and learning at school level. The review panel visits a sample of schools where the *Droichead* process has taken place and discusses the process with the Principal, the PST and the NQT(s). Such visits are pre-arranged and take place in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration (see Appendix 2). Following its review, the panel submits a report to the Teaching Council setting out its findings and recommendations in relation to the process. The report is considered by the Council and, following ratification, is published on the Council's website and circulated to the NIPT and the Inspectorate.

In 2021, two DQA panels, one primary and one post-primary, were established by the Teaching Council. In order to ensure consistency, one Chairperson was appointed to oversee the work of both panels. Sinéad Kelly, acting in the role of rapporteur, supported the work of each panel on behalf of the Teaching Council. DQA panel membership can be found in Appendix 1.

Each panel visited the selected schools relevant to its sector. The Chairperson visited all schools, both primary and post-primary. This report outlines the findings of these visits.

3.2 Preparation for the DQA Process

On January 13th, 2022, there was a hybrid panel meeting hosted in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone and online via Microsoft Teams to engage in professional development before school visits commenced. An additional online training event was held on January 17th to facilitate new panel personnel and those who had not been able to attend on January 13th. During these events, the panels were briefed on the *Droichead* process, including the procedures and criteria involved in the process, the rationale for DQA and the roles and responsibilities of the panel members. A visit schedule and provisional dates for drafting and finalising the report were agreed by the panels and rapporteur on that day.

4. Process for Droichead Quality Assurance

4.1 School Visits

In January 2022 following public health advice, the government agreed that most of the public health measures in relation to Covid 19 be removed. This allowed school visits to occur in an onsite capacity. However, schools had the option of requesting online visits in situations where they could not safely accommodate the panel in an onsite capacity. Five schools engaged with the process via Microsoft Teams.

All school visits for the DQA process were carried out in a spirit of collegiality and co-operation. All visits took place between January 28th 2022 and 5th May 2022. It was planned to have the DQA process completed by 7th April but, due to local outbreaks of Covid-19, it was necessary to reschedule two school visits.

During each school visit, the panels endeavoured to meet with a member(s) of the school's senior management team (Principal/ Deputy Principal), PST members and with NQT(s) who had completed the *Droichead* process. These meetings were conducted in an open and collaborative manner and, in addition to the recordings, notes were taken by the Rapporteur.

At the end of each visit, the panel met briefly to define the emerging themes of the visit and to consider same with a view to determining levels of consistency with other schools participating in the DQA process.

4. Droichead Quality Assurance Findings

5.0 Information Tables

Quantitative terms used in this report	Percentages of References in Reports Analysed
Almost all	More than 90%
Most	75% - 90%
Majority	50% - 74%
Fewer than half	15% - 49%
A few	Up to 15 %

All schools A-X		
Strand A – School Based Induction	NIPT training for all members of the k	Completed by all schools
	Completed minimum period of professional practice in an eligible setting	Completed by all schools
	Engagement in professional conversations	Engagement in all schools
	Taisce	Completed in all schools
	Observations by/ of NQT	Completed in all schools
Strand B – Additional Professional Learning Activities	One Cluster Meeting per term	Completed in all schools
	Professional Learning Activity	Up to Completed in all schools 15 %

The DQA process this year highlighted similar findings to those published in DQA reports throughout the growth phase 2016-2021. These similarities acknowledge the consistency of the process as well as indicating the adaptability and resilience of *Droichead* policy and its continuation despite the challenges brought about by Covid-19. Ultimately the flexibility of the policy ensured that a high value process was accessed by the NQTs which can be seen through the findings below.

The findings from each school have been compiled and a composite image has emerged that covers the *Droichead* process as it was experienced by NQTs and schools during the *Droichead* process.

5. Role of Senior Management Team (SMT)

- 5.1.1** In almost all schools visited across both sectors a Senior Management Team (SMT) member (Principal or Deputy Principal) was involved on the PST as either a member of the PST or in an oversight role.
- 5.1.2** The Principal was a PST member in the majority of schools visited. In most schools where the Principal was not a PST member the Deputy Principal was. Only three schools did not have a SMT member on the PST. However, in these schools full training had been undertaken by the Principal and they took a strong oversight role discussing the process with the PST and NQTs regularly.
- 5.1.3** Some Principals decided not to be members of the PST. Where the Principal was a member of the PST, both PST and NQTs highlighted the benefit of having the Principal on the PST. Although some NQTs would prefer that a Principal did not engage in observations, it was felt that having a Principal who understood and supported the process was a considerable advantage. One Principal spoke about the greater awareness they had of the struggles faced by the NQTs as a result of being on the PST.
- 5.1.4** It was felt by the majority of PST that there were more advantages to having a Principal on the PST than disadvantages and that having the Principal/ Deputy Principal on the PST sent a message to the school community regarding the importance of the *Droichead* process in the school. It was also widely felt that this ensured that school management understood the process, supported it, and ensured that it was sufficiently resourced at school level.
- 5.1.5** Principals were asked to scale the impact that *Droichead* had on their role as Principal in the school in terms of time management and workload. Most Principals reported that the *Droichead* process had either a minimal impact on their role or a highly positive impact on their role by enhancing relationships with staff members and allowing them an opportunity to empower their PST. One primary Principal reported that the *Droichead* process had an enormous impact on their role and that they found the workload time consuming.
- 5.1.6** Overall, NQTs were positive about the fact that the Principal or Deputy Principal was a member of the PST.
- 5.1.7** In schools where the Principal was a member of the PST and/or involved in observations, NQTs were positive and commented that it allowed them to develop a professional relationship with the Principal. This was especially important given the restrictions Covid-19 placed on the mixing of staff members. One NQT commented that having the Principal on the PST made her feel “less anxious asking for advice” from the Principal and led to a feeling of being “more welcome and accepted as a staff member”.

5.2 PST Selection & Roles

- 5.2.1** All schools visited had a fully internal PST. No schools chose to nominate an external member for their PST or to avail of an inter-school PST.
- 5.2.2** In the majority of schools visited, PST were selected by the Principal based on an interest in developing competencies in teaching and learning, their personal strengths in communication and collaboration, because they were empathetic or caring, and were experienced staff members.
- 5.2.3** In fewer than half of schools visited staff members had an opportunity to express an interest in or volunteer for the role of PST member.
- 5.2.4** In three schools visited *Droichead* was assigned as part of a post holder's responsibility.
- 5.2.5** In other schools, staff members who had experience with the NIPT as an Associate or workshop facilitator and those who had already been involved in mentoring and induction in the school were put forward for the role. The panel met three current NIPT Associates, two of whom were involved in their schools PST. These Associates were teachers in three post-primary schools across the twenty-four schools visited.

- 5.2.6** Some post-primary schools sought PST members for subject areas or experience in suites of subjects e.g., languages/practical to match the subject needs of the incoming NQTs. At primary level the class level /role of the NQT was considered when deciding on a PST to provide support. At post-primary it was seen as preferable by the NQTs for the mentor to share their subject specification.
- 5.2.7** In the majority of schools visited, the PST worked collaboratively as a team. In the schools where NQTs were matched with a mentor they felt that they could approach any of the PST for advice and all PST members engaged in observations.
- 5.2.8** Most schools visited undertook regular reviews of the *Droichead* process both formally and informally. Notably, they identified the need to promote awareness of *Droichead* at staff meetings and that NQTs at primary level should have an opportunity to teach Gaeilge. In one school visited, an NQT in SET received an opportunity to teach a block of Gaeilge to the class she was supporting. This time in the classroom was considered extremely beneficial and supportive.
- 5.2.9** The PST also noted that it was not always possible for PSTs to get an opportunity to observe NQTs in a SET/ ASD setting interacting with a full mainstream class.

- 5.2.10** The DQA panel asked the PST to scale the impact that *Droichead* had on their role in terms of time management and workload. Over half of PST reported that the *Droichead* process had no impact or a minimal impact on their role. The benefits of being involved in the PST were numerous and included an opportunity to develop leadership capacity, forge new professional relationships as well as personal growth. PST members benefitted from engagement with the innovative practices that NQTs bring to schools.

5.3 Droichead Expectations

- 5.3.1** In almost all schools visited by the DQA panel a timeline for the *Droichead* process was explicitly outlined by the PST to NQTs. This occurred at an introductory *Droichead* meeting at the start of the school year, or at the beginning of an NQTs contract if this did not coincide with the beginning of the school year.
- 5.3.2** In all schools visited, the PST clarified their roles and responsibilities in relation to the *Droichead* process at the introductory meeting. NQTs were also given an overview of the procedures and criteria for *Droichead* during this meeting.
- 5.3.3** In half of the schools visited by the DQA panel, *Droichead* timelines did not change and were consistent with the timelines outlined by the PST at the introductory meeting with NQTs. In schools where there were slight amendments made to timelines, this was as a result of teacher absences due to Covid-19 or substitute shortages.

- 5.3.4** In the majority of schools visited NQTs were satisfied that the duration of professional practice required to complete the process was attainable. In five schools visited the PST continued to support NQTs beyond completion of the process and submission of Form D. In these cases, it was felt that extending support for a full year was of benefit to the NQT.
- 5.3.5** Across all schools visited there was no consideration given to extension of the *Droichead* process by the PST. However, PST are concerned that if a decision is made to extend an NQTs process ,extra guidance is needed on how best to communicate this decision to the NQT, and what an extended process would involve.
- 5.3.6** In most schools visited, there was consensus from the SMT, PST and NQTs that there was strong whole school support for *Droichead*. Schools were asked to rate this support on a scale of one to five (with one being no support and 5 being strong whole school support). In fewer than half of schools visited it was reported that although there was strong school support for *Droichead* and that staff were willing to allow NQTs visit their classrooms to observe their practice, that not all staff beyond the PST were aware of *Droichead* policy.

5.4 Droichead Standards

5.4.1 All schools visited used the *Droichead* standards to guide the process. Schools developed indicators of good practice to guide the *Droichead* process in their schools. The standards and indicators of good practice were explained to NQTs at their introductory meeting. The SMT acknowledged the “integral” nature of the standards as a “benchmark” for the *Droichead* process.

5.4.2 Schools visited discussed the benefits of using the *Droichead* standards with the panel. Among the benefits noted were that the standards created consistency for NQTs across all schools involved in the process by creating a success criterion. Other benefits noted were that the standards promoted reflection, they ensured that a high standard of professionalism was achieved and that they correlated with the standards outlined in the Looking at Our Schools Document.

5.4.3 *Droichead* standards and indicators of good practice that reflect the school context are explored as part of professional development for PST, delivered by the NIPT. The indicators of good practice allow schools autonomy to align *Droichead* standards to current practice and school policy. PST members appreciated the time given to developing these indicators of good practice during their professional development session and highlighted it in their discussion with the panel.

5.4.4 In all schools visited where more than one NQT undertook the *Droichead* process they felt that the standards and indicators of good practice were applied consistently to each of them.

5.5 Droichead Training & Support

5.5.1 Most Principals and Deputy Principals had engaged in full PST training with the NIPT. One Principal had attended a Principals information session.

5.5.2 All PST had engaged in professional development with the NIPT. At post-primary level, eight schools had engaged in a refresher course offered by the NIPT. They found this refresher greatly beneficial as it gave the PST an opportunity to cluster with other schools and to ensure that they had the most up to date information.

5.5.3 The majority of schools at primary level requested that a refresher be made available. Many schools suggested that regular refresher training is necessary for PST members, especially PST who engaged in this professional development at the beginning of the growth phase. Schools also indicated that they would prefer if the full PST could access the current provision of Professional Development days organised by NIPT as this opportunity for staff collaboration off site is very important.

5.5.4 There was consensus across the SMT and PST about the high-quality professional development facilitated by the NIPT with one PST stating that it was “one of the best training’s ever attended”. This comment echoes the comments heard across nearly all schools visited.

5.5.5 It was reported across all schools that PST felt that the training received prepared the PST adequately for their role. Among the aspects of training that were identified as most useful were discussions and scenarios around conflict resolution and difficult conversations, conversations with other schools, role plays, and toolkits provided.

5.5.6 Almost half of schools visited had been in contact with their NIPT RDO and they were satisfied with the quality of support received. Three schools had NIPT Associates on their staff, while another three schools had contacted their designated NIPT Associate. Schools were aware of the supports available to them via the NIPT and Teaching Council websites. PST highlighted that they would welcome regular communication from the NIPT, and that newsletter updates should be sent to all PST members rather than one designated PST member in a school.

5.5.7 The panel visited a small number of schools where NQTs had completed *Droichead* in a SET or ASD setting. Some Principals and PST acknowledged that they would prefer if an NQT was placed in a mainstream class; however, this was not always possible. It was noted that schools may benefit from more support and guidance focussing on how best to support NQTs in these settings.

5.5.8 Guidelines on the process of portfolio-based learning, referred to as Taisce in the *Droichead* policy, and giving appropriate feedback was also sought. Several PST members and NQTs requested that examples of the different models of compiling a Taisce discussed at PST training would be provided.

5.6 Induction Release Time for Droichead

5.6.1 Fewer than half of schools visited were able to use all the induction release time available to schools engaging in the *Droichead* process.

5.6.2 The accessibility and availability of substitute teachers was cited as a significant issue in half of schools visited across both sectors.

5.6.3 Those schools who accessed the induction release time made use of paid substitution. The availability of substitute panels established to address the shortage of teachers was cited as a useful and important resource that allowed the SMT to prebook a substitute in advance of a scheduled observation day.

5.6.4 Schools used substitution (including S & S at post-primary level), PME teachers, SET and the goodwill of other staff members to release PST members and NQTs for professional conversations, observations, and PST meetings.

5.6.5 The panel visited one special school during this year’s DQA process. This school highlighted the difficulties met when trying to avail of a substitute teacher due to the specific context of their school.

5.6.6 Some schools visited requested clearer guidance on how to maximise use of release time.

5.7 Observations

- 5.7.1** Observations are a key feature of *Droichead*. This includes observations by the NQT of more experienced teachers' practice, as well as observation of the NQT's practice by the PST. It is recommended in policy that there would be at least two of each type of classroom observations. All schools visited engaged in the minimum requirement of two observations by and of the NQTs.
- 5.7.2** In nearly half of schools visited NQTs got an opportunity to observe above the minimum of two observations set out in policy. Observations are a fundamental element of the *Droichead* policy and NQTs recognised that this was of notable benefit to their professional development. In five schools, NQTs spoke about how observations provided them with reassurance and gave them confidence in their practice.
- 5.7.3** In most schools visited, observations took place over two terms of the academic year. In fewer than half of the schools visited, observations took place during one term. Covid-19 and shorter contracts were mostly cited as reasons for this condensed observation process.
- 5.7.4** In almost all schools visited, NQTs observed their more experienced colleagues before being observed by the PST. All observations were based on the individual needs of the NQT and they chose a focus for these observations.
- 5.7.5** Observations occurred onsite in most of the schools visited. These schools ensured that observations occurred following Covid-19 protocols in the school. Two schools engaged in online observations following consultation with the NIPT.

- 5.7.6** The impact of observations was multi-faceted and mutually beneficial, some of the benefits identified were:
- In almost all schools visited, observations were based on NQTs' needs. NQTs felt that their practice was affirmed and, as a result, they gained confidence. NQTs perceived the observation of colleagues as important and reported gained a great deal from observing more experienced teachers.
 - Notably, NQTs spoke about the value of observing a more experienced teacher teach their class group as very beneficial. Some NQTs noted that they would like an opportunity to engage in more observations. One PST member also reported that "it can be even more beneficial for an experienced teacher to go in and teach in the NQTs class, because she could be trying to juggle behaviour management, special needs, differentiation, and teach her lesson. She can see the experienced teacher doing all of them and dealing with her children".
 - PST members enjoyed having an opportunity to see newer or innovative teaching methodologies when observing NQTs. They also cited the satisfaction gained from observing NQTs mature and develop as professionals from one observation to another.
 - PST members and Principals in the majority of schools acknowledged that being involved in *Droichead* observations "opened doors" and led to a more collaborative culture throughout the school. Most schools reported that experienced teachers, who were not members of the PST were willing to be observed by NQTs.

- 5.7.7** A PST member in one school acknowledged that "So many teachers are talented in certain areas", and observations ensures that the whole school community benefits from "these skills and talents".

5.8 Professional Conversations

- 5.8.1** In all schools visited NQTs had several conversations with their more experienced colleagues on the PST. In all schools visited these professional conversations occurred regularly throughout the *Droichead* process with more conversations occurring at the commencement of the process and around observations.
- 5.8.2** In the majority of schools NQTs reported that either the PST or the NQT could initiate professional conversations. In fewer than half of the schools visited the PST instigated the professional conversations that occurred.
- 5.8.3** Professional conversations focussed on the needs of the NQT throughout their *Droichead* process. The PST provided affirmation, reassurance, and support to the NQT as well as guiding NQTs around areas such as school policy, classroom management, behaviour management, planning, communicating with parents and parent teacher meetings. This support was provided to NQTs in a timely manner as needed throughout the process.

- 5.8.4** In all schools visited both formal and informal conversations occurred throughout the process. The more formal conversations occurred at the beginning of the process and during pre and post observations conversations. NQTs reported that they felt they could instigate an informal conversation at any time and any questions they had would be answered immediately by their PST.
- 5.8.5** In January 2021, on foot of public health advice schools closed for a period due to high incidence of Covid-19. Schools reported that professional conversations continued during this time via online platforms such as Zoom, MS teams and emails. PST and NQTs also communicated via phone calls and text messages.
- 5.8.6** One PST member described how *Droichead* had labelled and promoted conversations that were happening in schools organically and that the fact that these conversations are "actually recognised as part of our job is brilliant".
- 5.8.7** It was suggested that a bank of professional feedback language be generated by the NIPT for use by PST when giving feedback to NQTs around their observations.

5.9 Taisce

- 5.9.1** The Council uses the term Taisce to refer to the process of portfolio-based learning within *Droichead* policy. Taisce affords NQTs an opportunity to reflect on their professional learning and to identify areas in which they may need further support or guidance. All NQTs visited reported they had engaged in Taisce.
- 5.9.2** NQTs visited discussed the different approaches they took to Taisce with the DQA panel. Some innovative forms of Taisce were highlighted including a loom video and an action research project based on the improvement of fundamental motor skills using digital video feedback at primary level. The use of social media was also highlighted for the first time this year; it was used to reflect and share lessons that went well. Other formats such as folders, diaries, notebooks, journals, weekly school blogs and online storage platforms were used by NQTs.
- 5.9.3** Although the PST recognised the benefits of Taisce and its importance for formalising reflection during early career development, the PST sought more guidance on their role in Taisce. In schools where the PST asked NQTs to share part of their Taisce, this was reported as a meaningful and beneficial learning opportunity. However, the majority of PST members admitted to some confusion as to their role regarding Taisce.

5.9.4 Several PST members and NQTs requested that examples of the different models of compiling a Taisce discussed at PST training would be provided as exemplars that they could share with NQTs when engaging in the process.

5.9.5 Some NQTs lacked understanding of the Taisce element of *Droichead* and lacked clarity as to the purpose and benefits. They were seeking more clarification from their PST and at cluster meetings.

5.10 Records

5.10.1 It was reported that detailed and diligent records are being kept from the *Droichead* process across all schools visited. All schools reported using the templates provided by the NIPT. Some schools made adaptations to these templates to suit their own school context.

5.10.2 A mixture of paper and digital records are being kept by the Principal, PST and NQTs. This year, the panel found that a number of schools, especially at post-primary were moving towards online storage solutions such as Google Drive, One Drive etc. These schools highlighted that one of the notable benefits of online storage solutions was that they could restrict access to ensure appropriate confidentiality.

5.10.3 The most useful records for the process were reported to be the observation templates. PST members and NQTs alike also cited the usefulness of the *Droichead* outline plan and calendar. Among other records kept by the PST were minutes of PST meetings, the standards and indicator document, Form D, and the needs analysis document.

5.10.4 Schools expressed concern around the retention of documents. They would like clear guidance in *Droichead* policy and from the NIPT on how long these records should be retained once Form D has been completed and the process has been concluded. Presently schools are recommended to maintain records in line with their own data protection policy.

5.10.5 There was consensus across all schools based on the high quality of templates provided by the NIPT. Templates promote consistency across schools as well as acting as a prompt for conversations between the PST and NQTs. Suggestions for improvement to these templates was minimal and included having a folder available on the website that could be downloaded instead of downloading each template individually. Other suggestions included having more examples in the standards and indicators of good practice document and a calendar updated yearly to reflect the dates of the current academic year.

5.10.6 Almost all schools used the NIPT planning documents and several NQTs indicated that they would appreciate more support and clearer guidance in regard to planning. NQTs in a small number of primary schools expressed frustration around weekly planning. These NQTs were involved in planning at their class levels with their colleagues who plan on a fortnightly basis. These NQTs indicated that they were anxious to complete *Droichead* to allow them to follow their schools planning guidelines however, they would have been happy for *Droichead* to continue if they could engage in fortnightly planning.

5.11 Additional Professional Development

5.11.1 All NQTs visited reported that they engaged in one cluster meeting per term during the *Droichead* process.

5.11.2 Cluster meetings received mixed feedback from NQTs across the schools visited. Some NQTs found them beneficial, especially the information about the process delivered at the first online cluster meeting. However, some NQTs voiced criticism as they found them to be repetitive of their Initial Teacher Education content and felt that they did not address their needs.

5.11.3 Cluster meetings were facilitated online last year because of Covid-19. NQTs found the most valuable element of cluster meetings was the opportunity to interact and network with other NQTs during time spent in break out rooms.

6. Recommendations

- 5.11.4** The flexibility of being able to attend cluster meetings online was acknowledged by NQTs however they felt an in-person cluster meeting would afford them an opportunity for more interaction and to network with other NQTs.
- 5.11.5** NQTs who derived the most benefit from cluster meetings and who were most positive about them, tended to be those who were the only NQT in their schools. Where there were multiple NQTs in a school they did not generally cite the social or networking benefits of cluster meetings as they appeared to have these networking opportunities in school.
- 5.11.6** There was a lack of awareness among PST members as to the content of cluster meetings, the PST felt that an agenda and information for each of these meetings should be shared with the PST. This would facilitate further professional conversation with the NQTs.
- 5.11.7** *Droichead* policy states that NQTs should engage in one cluster meeting per term. For some NQT's the process can straddle more than one term. Both PST and NQTs felt that there should be more consistency in the number of cluster meetings attended by NQTs. The average number of cluster meetings attended across schools visited was two. However, NQTs in five schools only attended one cluster meeting while NQTs in seven schools attended all three cluster meetings. This inconsistency was deemed unfair by NQTs.
- 5.11.8** Recommendations for improvement of cluster meetings included ensuring the sessions were more NQT led, and included more input around planning and SET. A specific cluster meeting for NQTs working in SET was recommended. NQTs at post-primary suggested having cluster meetings organised according to curricular subjects but acknowledged the logistical difficulties of this.
- 5.11.9** The value of NQTs engaging with the Induction Workshop Programme was noted by both PST members and NQTs, due to the topic-based nature of the workshops and due to the fact that they could be accessed online as and when required by the NQTs.
- 5.11.10** In all schools visited NQTs were availing of additional professional learning opportunities across and beyond the curriculum as an aid to induction into school life. This was viewed as a positive of the *Droichead* process. There was huge variety in the activities undertaken and NQTs felt they had a positive impact on their teaching.

In order to ensure the quality and consistency of the *Droichead* process in schools, the panels made the following recommendations:

6.1 Role of Senior Management Team

- 6.1.1** Throughout all school visits, the panel identified that the *Droichead* process is enhanced when the Principal or Deputy Principal are involved in it. Principals or Deputy Principals should be made aware of and to receive access to training and appropriate refresher courses to ensure that they have the most up-to-date information to allow them to guide and oversee the *Droichead* process in their schools.
- 6.1.2** While it was very apparent to the panel across all schools visited that there was strong whole school support for *Droichead*, Awareness of the process could be further developed by incorporating *Droichead* on the agenda for staff meetings and by asking NQTs to disseminate their learnings from their Professional Learning Activities among their class level at primary and subject area at post-primary. In one school visited, NQTs who had recently completed their *Droichead* process provided detailed information on their experience to those NQTs commencing their process. This was considered by the panel to be excellent practice. The SMT or PST can also request school support or a school visit from the NIPT via their website to promote awareness of the process among all staff.
- 6.1.3** The panel recommends that information sessions on *Droichead* be provided to newly appointed principals. A hybrid model of delivery for these sessions could be explored to allow greater access and flexibility. There may be an opportunity for increased and ongoing cooperation across the support services to identify the most efficient opportunities for this information session.

- 6.1.4** Senior Management in three primary schools indicated that they would like additional oversight of the process, for example, by the Inspectorate to ensure that schools are engaging with *Droichead* in a manner that is fair and consistent with the *Droichead* framework. The panel recommends that this would be explored further during Council's review of *Droichead*.

6.2 PST Selection and Roles

- 6.2.1** Schools across both sectors are engaged in selecting their PST to best suit the needs of their individual school context. The panel recommends that schools continue to be afforded the autonomy to develop their PST teams in a fair and transparent manner and that staff are made aware of how members are selected.
- 6.2.2** Given the wealth of experience and skills NQTs who have been through the process acquire, it is recommended that consideration be given for membership of the PST to those who have been through the *Droichead* process and who otherwise meet the requirements. Strong consideration should also be given to including staff members with experience in mentoring or those engaged in roles with the NIPT.
- 6.2.3** It is recommended that in smaller primary schools the use of a PST member from an external panel or the development of an inter-school PST be considered.

6.3 Droichead Expectations

6.3.1 In all schools visited, the PST provided an introductory meeting to welcome NQTs to the school and to inform them of the *Droichead* process on commencement of their contract. Timelines and the roles and responsibilities of the PST were also discussed at this meeting. This practice is recommended as it ensures clarity of communication for all NQTs engaging in the *Droichead* process.

6.3.2 The roles and responsibilities of the PST were clearly communicated at the beginning of the process to NQTs engaging in the process. This practice is recommended. Although some PST decided to mentor an individual NQT according to the NQTs class level, setting or subject, all NQTs should be made aware that they had access to all team members as appropriate for their needs.

6.3.3 In all schools visited, there were clear and transparent timelines evident. School timelines did not change except where other events intervened. During the 2020-2021 school year, school closures and teacher absences due to Covid-19 caused timelines to be amended slightly. Most schools had taken the challenges of Covid-19 into account and planned timelines accordingly. Schools should continue to ensure consistency and appropriate communication around timelines.

While it was acknowledged that Covid-19 impacted the operational work of Council and NIPT, The Panel noted that quicker responses from the NIPT and Teaching Council would more adequately meet their needs of NQTs.

6.3.4 Using NIPT templates for short and long-term planning at primary level is considered best practice for NQTs engaging in the *Droichead* process. The NCCA Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning circular published in May 2021 will also influence NQT planning into the future. The panel recommends that flexibility be afforded to NQTs to adhere to local planning requirements.

6.4 Droichead Standards

6.4.1 The use of the three *Droichead* standards as a benchmark reinforcing the *Droichead* process was evident in all schools visited. The panel strongly recommends that schools continually review and adapt their indicators of good practice to reflect the most current policies in their schools and nationally.

6.5 Droichead Training & Support

6.5.1 The panel acknowledges the importance of regular upskilling for the PST. Refresher training for all PST members is also an excellent way to ensure that the PST are adequately prepared for their role and aware of any policy updates. An online or hybrid solution could be explored allowing greater access and flexibility for PST members.

6.5.2 In many of the schools visited this year, there was consensus across the SMT and PST in relation to expanding the PST with additional staff members. There were several reasons for this request as described in the findings. The panel proposes that more training be made available as a priority in so far as NIPT capacity allows.

6.5.3 The Panel recommended that NIPT should provide specific guidelines for PST members supporting NQTs engaging with *Droichead* in a SET setting. Further guidance for NQTs working in this setting are also required. One suggestion was that this could be supported by means of the provision of a SET specific cluster meeting.

6.5.4 The panel recommends that schools consider more regular contact with the NIPT. The panel noted that many schools are unaware of the multi-faceted support available to them via the NIPT. Each school has an assigned Associate and RDO that can be contacted to discuss any element of the process. School visits can also be requested.

6.6 Induction Release Time

6.6.1 The panel strongly recommends that schools use all release time (paid substitution) that is allocated to schools each year specifically to support the *Droichead* process.

6.6.2 The Panel recommends that the flexibility of release time is retained to ensure release time that suits both sectors and varying individual school needs

6.6.3 Given the challenges reported by many schools in accessing substitute cover, we recommend the expansion of the current supply panels to cater for the substitution needs of schools providing *Droichead*. These panels were cited as very useful when planning for observation days.

6.6.4 It is not envisaged that the Supervision & Substitution (S & S) scheme or Special Education Teaching (SET) be used to resource *Droichead* related activities. The situation surrounding Covid-19 as well as the challenges faced accessing substitutes meant that the *Droichead* process in the 2020/21 school year relied on volunteerism and goodwill in some schools. This is not a sustainable model for the process. The panel strongly discourages the use of S&S, SET or volunteerism to facilitate release time for *Droichead* and advises schools to avail of paid substitution in so far as possible.

6.6.5 The current induction release time model in schools allows schools flexibility and autonomy to prepare for *Droichead* induction activities as appropriate. The flexibility of the release time allocation at post primary level should be maintained so that schools can decide how to use it best in their specific context. At primary level flexible release time models should be explored further. Commendable practice was seen in schools where release time was planned, structured, and organised. Some schools at primary indicated that they would like more guidance from the NIPT in relation to ensuring that they maximise use of release time for their NQTs.

6.7 Observations

6.7.1 Observations continue to be the most highly valued element of the *Droichead* process for NQTs and PST. NQTs who engaged in multiple observations beyond the minimum requirement stipulated in *Droichead* policy noted the benefits of this. The panel deemed that engaging in multiple observations enriches induction release time and that NQTs should be encouraged to observe beyond their subject area and class level as this valuable experience may not be as openly available again throughout their teaching careers.

6.7.2 Some schools in both sectors highlighted that NQTs had requested to observe a PST member teaching the NQTs class. This was regarded as very good practice especially in cases where an NQT was struggling with classroom management or challenging behaviours.

6.8 Professional Conversations

6.8.1 It is deemed best practice for PST members and NQTs to meet regularly while engaging in *Droichead* either formally or informally where feasible.

6.8.2 Consideration should be given to the development of a bank of professional feedback language for the PST when communicating constructive feedback to NQTs.

6.9 Taisce

6.9.1 The panel noted that there does not appear to be a shared understanding of the portfolio-based learning process Taisce. The panel therefore recommends that Taisce, the private reflective portfolio of the NQT, is clarified for PSTs and NQTs. NQTs require more guidance around their use of Taisce and PSTs have requested clarification around their role in relation to it. This could be done across numerous platforms such as PST training, Professional Development days, cluster meetings and in NIPT correspondence with schools and communication via the NIPT website.

6.9.2 PST members should play an active role in encouraging NQTs to engage in personal reflection of their key learning moments, Taisce can then be used to build on reflective practice and professional portfolios developed during Initial Teacher Education. The panel were fortunate to hear wonderful innovative uses of Taisce this year. These exemplars of excellent practice should be shared with the PST to ensure that it is a more meaningful part of the process. These exemplars need to be highlighted and disseminated across all NIPT platforms for PST and NQTs.

6.10 Records

6.10.1 The panel commends all schools visited for their maintenance of diligent records of the *Droichead* process. It is recommended that schools should continue to maintain clear records of their *Droichead* process.

6.10.2 In light of GDPR concerns, schools should be given more detailed advice on retention of records when the process for the NQT is completed.

6.10.3 As more schools move towards digital retention of documents via online storage solutions the panel advise that care is taken to ensure that appropriate restrictions and confidentiality are applied to these records.

6.11 Additional Professional Development

6.11.1 NQTs have both general and specific needs and attempts need to be made to address these needs through cluster type meetings using hybrid and face-to-face models. Cluster meetings need to meet the needs of all NQTs and be cognisant of varying backgrounds and educational experiences.

6.11.2 The panel recommends that the development of a cluster meeting to meet the needs of NQTs being inducted in a SET setting be explored.

6.11.3 PST members should continue to engage with NQTs in professional conversations about their professional learning activity. These learnings can be shared with the school and could be very valuable for dissemination across all staff members.

6.11.4 Due to the topic-based nature of the induction workshops and their potential use in addressing specific needs, the panel recommends that NQTs consider using the induction workshops provided by the NIPT as part of their additional professional development as appropriate. More information about these workshops can be found on the NIPT website.

Appendix 1: DQA Panel Membership

Ciarán Flynn Chairperson

A former teacher, VEC and Community School Principal, Ciarán Flynn served on the Teaching Council as a nominee of second level management. He was General Secretary of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), advising and supporting Boards of Management and Principals for eight years. Ciarán chaired the Teacher Supply in Ireland: Technical Working Group which reported to the Teaching Council and to the Minister for Education and Skills in November 2015. With a Master's in Education Management Ciarán has lectured in DCU on the M. Sc. in Educational Training and Management. He has worked with the National Leadership Development for Schools Team supporting newly appointed Principals and Deputy Principals countrywide. As an Educational Consultant he has worked for and with individual schools, regional and national educational bodies in carrying out investigations, supporting and promoting professional development. He also carried out work for the Department of Education and Skills. He is the Chairperson of the Boards of Management of three schools in the Leinster area and is currently the Chairperson of the Le Chéile Schools Trust Board.

Mary Curley

Mary Curley has been a member of the Teaching Council since May 2020, having been elected in the Munster Primary Panel. She currently serves on the Investigation Committee and the Registration Committee of the Teaching Council. A Clare native, Mary holds a B.Ed from Mary Immaculate College of Education and was a teacher in Sixmilebridge N.S. Co. Clare for 18 years before taking up the position of Principal in Doora N.S. Co. Clare in 2003. Mary retired from teaching in October 2020.

Mary is passionately interested in Education and was actively involved in the I.N.T.O. for over 30 years, serving as Branch Chairperson and District Secretary. She is currently the Chairperson of the Munster Province of CPSMA. She is also a Cluster Co-ordinator for the Small Schools Clusters Action Research Project 2021- 2023 established by the Minister for Education. This is Mary's second year serving on the DQA Panel for Primary School

Rosena Jordan

Rosena was elected to the Teaching Council in March 2020 by the Primary teachers of Connaught/Ulster. She is also a member of the Executive and Disciplinary Committee and Chairperson of the Registration Committee. Rosena has been a trade union activist throughout her career, serving as an Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) staff representative tutor, a branch and district chairperson and as a member of the Education Committee. She also represented INTO in the National Council for Curriculum Assessment on the Early Childhood and Primary Language Committee. During 2008-2018 Rosena represented teachers from Cavan, Monaghan and Louth on the INTO Central Executive Committee and was proud to serve as Vice-President and President.

Rosena retired from teaching in St. Mary's N.S, Virginia, Co. Cavan in November 2021. She is kept busy with her Teaching Council commitments, incidental substitute work and continued membership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Health and Safety Committee.

Michelle Keane

Michelle Keane was elected to the Teaching Council in 2020 for the Dublin Primary sector. She received her B.Ed degree from St. Patrick's College of Education (DCU) and subsequently a M. Ed from the Open University. She has taught for 35 years across all types of primary school settings, most recently as principal of St. Patrick's SNS, Skerries. She is an active member of the INTO and was chairperson of the National Principals' and Deputy Principals' Committee of the INTO for 3 years. She sat on the Primary Education Forum as principals' representative for 2 years. She also sat on the School Placement Advisory Committee with DCU. Michelle was hugely involved with the pilot project for Droichead and sat as an external member of Professional Support Teams at this time. She is currently a member of the Education and Investigating committees of the Teaching Council.

Noelle Moran

Noelle Moran is an ASTI nominee to the Teaching Council. She was first nominated in 2016 and re-nominated in 2018. A native of Tuam, Co. Galway, Noelle studied at NUI Galway and is a teacher of Accounting and Gaelige at St. Jarlath's College in Tuam. She is an active member of the ASTI at branch and national level. Noelle served on the ASTI Education Committee before being elected to serve on the union's executive, ASTI Standing Committee, representing Region 3 [Galway, Tuam and East Galway] from 2013 – 2019. She is currently a member of the union's Central Executive Committee. Noelle was elected as chairperson of the Teaching Council from November 2017 to June 2020 and was elected as deputy chairperson of the new Council in June 2020 until her term as a member of the Teaching Council finished in April 2022.

Ann Daly

Dr Ann Daly is a post-primary senior inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. She is assigned to the Inspectorate as an inspector of English and History. In the course of her work, she carries out whole school evaluations, subject inspections and programme evaluations and works closely with teams within the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). She also engages in advisory visits to support school self-evaluation.

William Donnelly

William Donnelly is a senior post-primary inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. He is assigned to the Inspectorate as an inspector of the Business subjects and to the Curriculum and Assessment section of the Inspectorate. William's evaluation portfolio includes whole school evaluations, whole centre evaluations, programme evaluations, child protection safeguarding inspections and subject inspections in Business Studies, Economics, Accounting and Business. William is the link inspector for Accounting, Business Studies, Junior Cycle Leadership and Junior Cycle Implementation Support (JCIS) as well as working in tandem with the Wellbeing teams within the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT).

Prior to joining the Inspectorate, William was a post primary school teacher in St. Mary's Holy Faith Glasnevin and has also worked with the NIPT as an associate and in-school mentor in supporting delivery of the national induction programme for newly qualified teachers.

Appendix 2: Protocol for School Visits

Caitríona Ní Bhriain

Caitríona Ní Bhriain is a Primary Divisional Inspector in the Department of Education. In the course of her work in primary schools, she conducts evaluations and also engages in advisory visits to support school self-evaluation. Caitríona is currently assigned to the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate. In her previous role within the Inspectorate's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Support Unit, she served on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Board of Early Years and Primary, and chaired the Educational Research Centre (ERC) National Assessments Advisory Group. Prior to joining the Inspectorate, Caitríona worked in schools in Hong Kong, London, Kuwait and Kenya as well as in Ireland. Her most recent overseas position was in Abu Dhabi, where she worked as a principal inspector, quality assuring inspections in both government and private schools.

Carmel O'Doherty

Dr Carmel O'Doherty is a Divisional (Senior) Inspector with the Department of Education in Ireland. She has worked with the Inspectorate since 1998. During this period, she has undertaken whole-school evaluations, curriculum evaluations, and thematic evaluations and contributed to policy development. Between 2016 and 2020, Carmel was seconded to Limerick Education Centre where she worked as Director and coordinated programmes of professional development for teachers and other learners. During this period, she was also the coordinator of the Master's programme in Educational Leadership and Management in Mary Immaculate College. Since returning to the Inspectorate in 2020, Carmel is currently assigned to work with schools at regional level and with the Teacher Education and Inclusion Evaluation and Policy Support Unit of the Inspectorate.

Liz O' Neill

Liz O'Neill joined the Department of Education Inspectorate in 2007. She is a senior post-primary inspector whose main area of expertise is in mathematics education. She conducts a range of school inspections and advisory school visits. Other aspects of her role include policy work around educational inclusion, school excellence fund, and initial teacher education.

Elizabeth Sheridan

Elizabeth Sheridan is a Senior Primary Inspector in the Department of Education. In the course of her work in primary and post-primary schools, she conducts evaluations, child protection and safeguarding inspections and also engages in advisory visits to support school self-evaluation. Elizabeth is also currently assigned to the Office of the Chief Inspector. Before joining the Inspectorate, Elizabeth worked as an administrative primary school principal and has many years of teaching experience in a variety of school types. She also worked with NIPT as an associate supporting delivery of the national induction programme for newly qualified teachers

The purpose of school visits

The *Droichead* Quality Assurance process (DQA) reassures principals, experienced teachers, NQTs and the Council that the process is fair and consistent for all. The DQA also offers your school an opportunity to shape the further development and growth of the *Droichead* induction process.

The purpose of the Quality Assurance visits is to:

- Reflect on the *Droichead* process in schools to date
- Identify recommendations and findings for future *Droichead* processes
- Ensure the process is fair and consistent with Teaching Council policy

What are the principles underpinning the work of the DQA panel?

Effecting improvement in research, reflective practice and relationships are the three pillars which support the work of the Council across all areas. As an organisation the Council seeks to ensure high standards in the induction process are upheld. In the Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education the Council acknowledges this critical period at the beginning of the newly qualified teacher's career and that the purpose of induction is to offer systematic professional and personal support to the newly qualified teacher.

The work of the Council is thus underpinned by four principles:

- Collegiality and collaboration
- Development and improvement of *Droichead*
- Fairness and consistency
- Reflective practice

These four principles, provide the standards that inform, guide and govern the work of the DQA.

Protocol for School Visits

Before the visit

- The Rapporteur contacts the school in advance of the meeting to arrange a mutually convenient date and to discuss an outline agenda for the visit. (Note: In 2021 all visits were carried out online via Microsoft Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions pertaining at that time.)
- The Rapporteur contacts the school approximately one week prior to the visit to discuss the nature of the visit and finalise the schedule for the day.
- A copy of the visit schedule will be forwarded to the school prior to the visit.

During the visit

- During the visit, all conversations will focus on the experience of *Droichead* in the school. The panel will engage in professional conversations with the Principal, PST and NQTs.
- The *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel will use agreed questions as discussion points to guide their meetings.
- The purpose of these meetings is to gain an understanding and insight into the school's experience of the *Droichead* process.
- The purpose of the Quality Assurance Panel is to ensure that policy is guiding the *Droichead* process but it is not the role of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Panel to review or evaluate decisions made by the PST in the school.
- The record keeping for the process is discussed to allow greater understanding of how the records reflect and support the experience of the *Droichead* process in the school.
- The DQA Panel Rapporteur will record the types of events/ processes which were discussed during the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Process.

After the visit

- The panel convenes to discuss key findings and recommendations of the *Droichead* Quality Assurance Process.
- All schools and participants in the process will be anonymous and the report will outline the collective experience of schools in relation to its findings and recommendations. A copy of this report will be forwarded to participant schools and will be available on the Teaching Council website.

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