



Oide

Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim
Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí
Scoile agus Múinteoirí

Supporting the Professional
Learning of School Leaders
and Teachers

Droichead Classroom Observation Toolkit Primary

Contents

1. Introduction to Observation and Discussion	1
2. Key Principles of Observation and Discussion	2
3. Observation and the Droichead Process	3
4. The Coaching Cycle	4
5. Observation by the Newly Qualified Teacher	5
6. Observation <i>of</i> the Newly Qualified Teacher	6
7. Key Reminders	14
8. Appendices	15
Appendix 1: Observation by the NQT Record	15
Appendix 2: Pre-Observation Framework with Discussion Prompts	16
Appendix 3: Pre-Observation Framework and Specific Lesson Plan	17
Appendix 4: Post-Observation <i>of</i> the NQT Record (template)	18
Appendix 5: Post-Observation <i>of</i> the NQT (sample)	19



1. Introduction to Observation and Discussion

Observations are part of a multi-faceted process of induction as they provide opportunities to learn from fellow professionals. The observation model in the Droichead process is based on a peer observation model.

Key points about peer observation:

- Serves as a vehicle for professional growth rather than performance evaluation.
- Promotes job-embedded professional development.
- Teachers observing teachers improves teaching practices and pupil learning.
- If done well, it is carried out in a real, practical, immediately relevant situation.
- The teacher can improve their skills by observing a peer in a safe and inclusive learning environment
- Teacher observation is most successful when the teacher and observer work together and reflect.
- It provides focused classroom support.
- Support from an 'expert' (peer) who understands the daily demands of the classroom.
- Increases trust and collegiality among staff.
- Lessen job stress for the teacher, knowing that a colleague is available to help, explain and assist.

The Teaching Council in its policy advises that,

"...the focus should be on observation of both pupil learning and teaching. After that, the focus should be determined by the Council's standards ... and, in particular, the areas where most support is needed" (Droichead: The Integrated Induction Policy Teaching Council, 2017, p. 5).

The purpose of every observation is to enhance the teaching and learning in the NQT's classroom.

2. Key Principles of Observation and Discussion

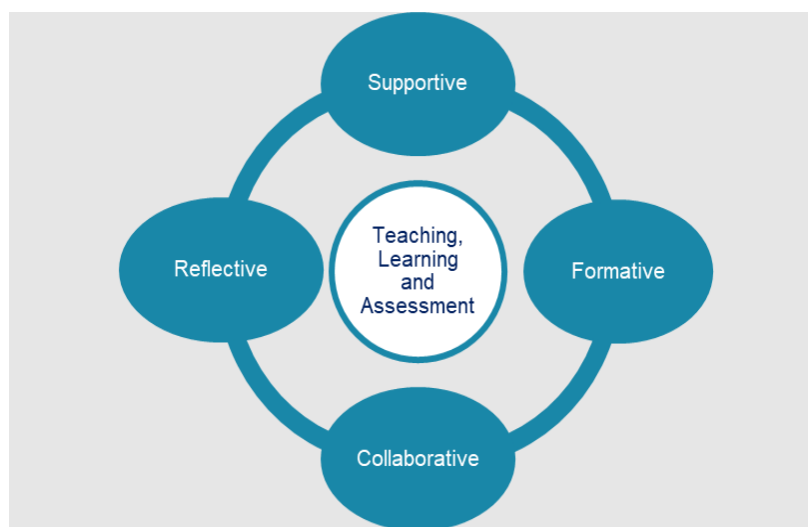


Figure 1: Key principles of observation and discussion

Supportive: Observations are conducted in a spirit of support and not evaluation.

How best can I support this newly qualified teacher (NQT) to enhance the teaching and learning? A whole-school approach to observations is important. It is not just the Professional Support Team (PST) and NQT who are involved. NQTs may also observe other host teachers (non-PST members). Observations *by* the NQT and *of* the NQT are a constructive and integral part of teaching, learning and pupil assessment.

Formative: Observations are a key tool to enable support and professional growth - observation *as* learning and *for* learning. Observations undertaken as part of the Droichead process:

- a. involve learners in the learning process
- b. help individuals to diagnose their own needs
- c. use learners' own experience while learning
- d. build learning experiences around real-life problems
- e. provide immediate opportunities to practise new learning
- f. treat mistakes as occasions for learning.

Collaborative: The process of being observed by others and of observing experienced teachers, benefits all involved. This process promotes collaboration within agreed protocols and structures. The observer and the NQT collaborate to refine and agree the lesson plan at the pre-observation stage and the post-observation stage involves a collaborative discussion when, for example, identifying the strengths of the lesson.

Reflective: Reflective practice is promoted throughout the observation process, but particularly as part of the pre-observation and post-observation discussions.

3. Observation and the Droichead Process

Observation of other teachers teaching is a key element of the Droichead process. It is recommended that there would be at least two observations *by* the NQT of experienced teachers, and at least two observations *of* the NQT by members of the PST.

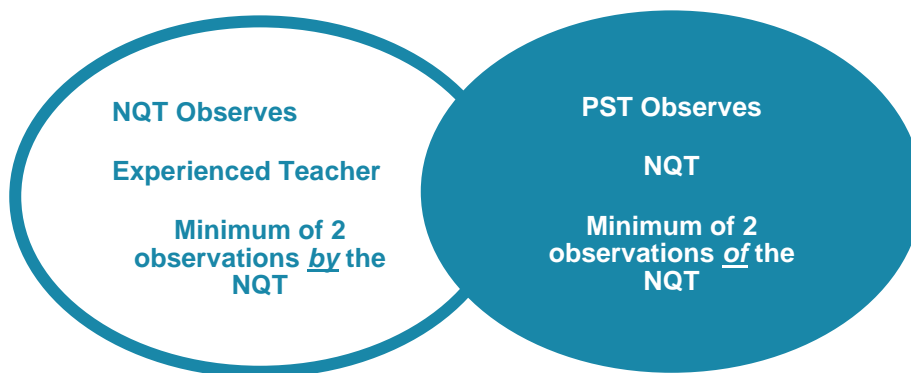


Figure 2: Droichead Observation Model

In its policy, (*Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework*), the Teaching Council advises that, “*Observations by the PST of the NQT’s practice should focus on areas where the NQT feels that they need particular advice, help and support. The NQT should therefore be encouraged to teach in an area where they feel their learning need is greatest. This can then provide the basis for a subsequent professional conversation*” (Teaching Council, 2017, p.5).

The exact number of observations, and the lessons observed, should be based on the emerging needs of the NQT and agreed through professional conversations between the NQT and PST members. All observations are arranged in advance, and provide NQTs with opportunities to learn from their fellow professionals.

To maximise the support the PST can offer the NQT and to facilitate the progression of teaching and learning, it is strongly recommended that observations begin to take place as early as possible in the NQT's process. Observations should be tentatively scheduled in the **Droichead Outline Plan** from the outset.

4. The Coaching Cycle

Teaching involves constant decision-making driven by the feedback loop of plan, action, result and adjustment. Observing includes, not only noting and improving classroom behaviours, but also looking at and fine-tuning the reflection, problem-solving, and decision-making processes that take place before and after that class. This process (Pre-observation Preparation, Classroom Observation, and Post-observation Discussion) is often referred to as the coaching cycle.

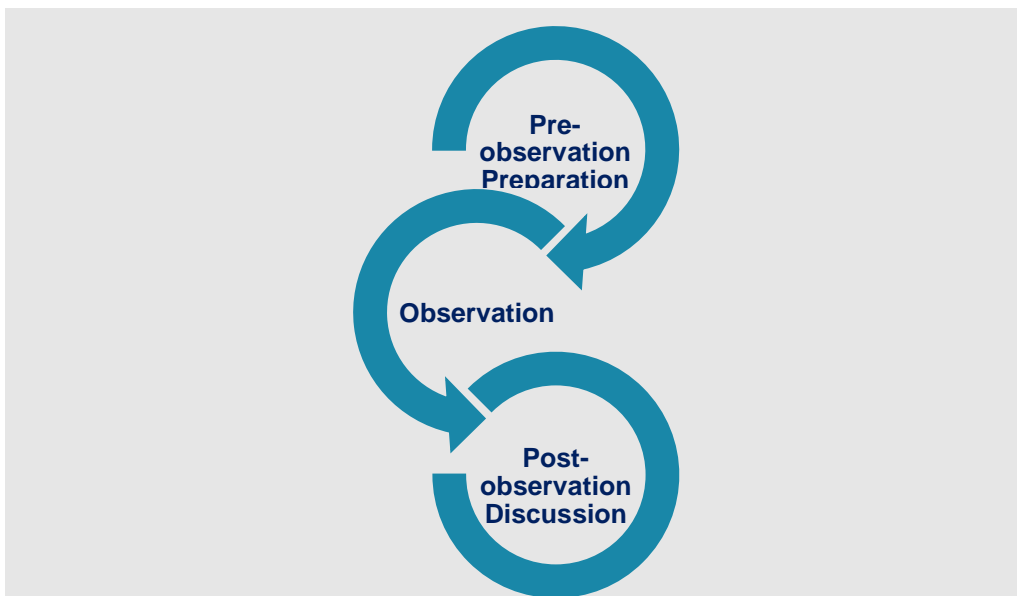


Figure 3: Three-Stage Process and The Coaching Cycle

Throughout the Droichead process, a three-stage process is used in every observation, whether the NQT is observing an experienced fellow professional or being observed. Each element of the process requires attention and time. However, there is a clear distinction between observation *by* the NQT and observation *of* the NQT. **It is only when the NQT is to be observed that the ‘coaching’ element is introduced** - asking probing questions in ways that will encourage the NQT to come up with ideas to enrich the lesson plan and provide them with the opportunity to gain confidence as a reflective practitioner who thinks through the consequences of their plans and actions and makes modifications based on thoughtful consideration of outcomes.

5.Observation by the Newly Qualified Teacher

NQTs should have the opportunity to observe an experienced colleague before being observed by a PST member. Ideally, the NQT observes a member of the PST at least once and/or the NQT may observe other experienced teachers (non-PST members). This may include a teacher teaching the NQT’s class or a teacher teaching their own class.

The Focus of the Observation

Like all observations in the Droichead process, observations *by* the NQT should address a need as identified by the NQT in collaboration with the PST.

The Three-Stage Process (No Coaching Involved)

1) Pre-observation Preparation

The NQT should meet with the host teacher in advance of the observation to discuss the focus of the observation and observation protocols. The NQT is observing with a view to implementing aspects in their own teaching.

2) Observation

Observation protocols including logistics, confidentiality etc. which are shared and agreed between the NQT and PST at the initial meeting (at the start of the NQT’s Droichead process) are also applicable to observations by the NQT. Using the

suggested template in Appendix 1 below, the NQT may identify two aspects they may find interesting and use in their own class.

3) Post-observation Discussion

The post-observation discussion with the host teacher offers the NQT an opportunity to reflect on their learning and explore in greater detail aspects they found interesting. The template in Appendix 1 may be used by the NQT when having the post-observation discussion with the host teacher. The NQT might like to explore one aspect of the lesson they observed in greater detail. The discussion is based on what the NQT observed and how they can apply and utilise the learning in their own practice - they are learning with a view to doing. Through these discussions, NQTs are deepening their learning. NQTs may choose to capture their learning in their Taisce. The NQT might also share their learning with the PST but should refrain from commenting on teachers' individual practice (confidentiality).

6. Observation of the Newly Qualified Teacher

It is recommended that there would be **at least two observations** carried out by the PST. The PST, in collaboration with the NQT, will be best placed to determine, on a case-by-case basis, how many observations might be necessary.

The Focus of the Observation

To maximise the benefit from this induction activity, observation should be informed by an NQT's emerging needs, *“Observations by the PST of the NQT's practice should focus on areas where the NQT feels that they need particular advice, help and support. The NQT should therefore be encouraged to teach in an area **where they feel their learning need is greatest**”* (Teaching Council, 2017, p.1).

The PST and the NQT agree on the focus (one or two specific areas) in advance of the pre-observation meeting. The aim of this focused observation is to enhance the teaching, learning and pupil assessment in the NQT's classroom, in tandem with the Teaching Council's Standards.

Focus of the Observation: Examples (Based on Identified Need(s) of the NQT)		
Lesson Planning	Learning Activities	Structure of the Lesson
<p>Are the outcomes (or intentions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear • specific • achievable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability • Organisation • Pair/Group work • Pupil engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Development • Conclusion • Pacing
Teaching Methodologies	Use of Resources	Differentiation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to learning experiences • Suitability • Variety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability • Distribution • Usage • Storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability to pupil/group and lesson • Challenging for all • Variety of strategies
Classroom Management	Assessment	Communication skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom layout • Rules and routines • Consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability to pupil and lesson • Variety of strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships and interactions between teacher and pupils and pupils with each other. • Questioning • Explaining • Feedback to pupils • Use of voice
Transitions	Other	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Efficient • Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Figure 4: Focus of Observation

The Coaching Cycle

The three-stage process is used with a distinct coaching element in the observations of the NQT. While using the same basic structure, the PST member thoroughly explores the pre- and post-observation stages with the NQT. This support structure enables the PST to set up the NQT for success and maintains the focus on enhancing quality teaching and learning.

1) Pre-observation Preparation

Having identified a focus and a suitable lesson to address the need/focus, the PST member and the NQT meet to discuss the lesson. It is envisaged that the NQT will have done preliminary work on this specific lesson in advance of the meeting and will be prepared to discuss specific outcome(s); learning activities; differentiation; assessment, etc. To that end, the NQT may find the **Pre-observation Framework and Specific Lesson Preparation** (Appendix 3) useful. This template is editable and it is aligned with the weekly Short-term Recorded Preparation. The NQT would use the document(s) to support the professional conversation.

The PST member begins coaching at this stage - asking probing questions to firm-up and refine the lesson. The PST member will support the NQT to think through the consequences of their preparation (e.g. the proposed assessment strategy) and make any adjustments based on the collaborative reflection. The NQT makes those adjustments to their preliminary preparation.

The PST member may find the **Pre-observation Framework with Discussion Prompts** (Appendix 2) useful to scaffold the discussion. (This document may also be shared with the NQT in advance of the meeting to support their preliminary preparation.) This collaboration between the PST member who will conduct the observation and the NQT ensures that the preparation (invisible, visible and recorded) is now **classroom ready**.

Portner (2008) lays out the purpose and importance of the pre-observation discussion:

“Within a few days prior to the scheduled classroom observation, ...meet privately for about 20 to 30 minutes to discuss...Your objective here is to get your mentee to express and clarify learning objectives, fine-tune strategies, anticipate student behaviours, firm up plans for monitoring student learning, and consider ways to adjust instruction... your function ... is to ask probing questions in ways that will not only encourage your mentee to come up with ideas to enrich the lesson plan, but will also provide him or her with the opportunity to gain confidence as a reflective practitioner who thinks through the consequences of his or her plans and actions and makes modifications based on thoughtful consideration of outcomes” (Teacher Mentoring and Induction, Hal Portner, 2008).

To conclude the pre-observation discussion, the NQT and the PST member need to agree on the protocols and relevant logistics. It is important to address these practical aspects so that there is a clear, mutual understanding which should help ease the process for both teachers. The following instances may be useful:

- Time and duration of lesson: arrange the date and time of the lesson and agree the length of the observation.
- Lesson venue: e.g., classroom, gym, library.
- Role of PST member: will the PST member participate (e.g engage with a group of pupils; co-teach) or observe? Agree whether or not the PST member will intervene if a situation arises.
- Observation post: location in classroom where PST member will sit during the lesson.
- Note-taking by PST member: if the PST member intends to make notes during the observation (purely as an aide-memoir), it is important that this is signalled and agreed in advance with the NQT. The notes would subsequently be shared with the NQT to support the discussion and once the Post-observation Record is agreed, those notes are no longer required.
- Time for post-observation discussion: agree a time, ensuring adequate time for the focused discussion. Identify a quiet place to meet with the NQT so that interruptions are minimised and confidentiality is maintained. The staff room

might not be the most suitable venue! Allow some thinking-time or reflection (for both NQT and PST member) after the observation to enrich the post-observation discussion. Ideally, this discussion would happen on the same day as the observation or as soon as possible after that.

2) **Observation of Lesson**

Adhering to the agreed protocols and logistics, the observer's focus is to determine:

1. What extent are pupils learning?
2. What evidence is there of pupil learning?
3. What is contributing to or obstructing the learning process?

3) **Post-observation Discussion**

The post-observation discussion is the final phase of the Coaching Cycle. Once again, we see the PST member's skills in action e.g. questioning, listening, empathising, summarising, reflecting back, providing feedback, goal-setting, action-planning.

Portner (2008) captures the essence of the post-observation discussion:

“Your goal ... is to encourage your mentee to assess the effectiveness of the lesson, to identify factors that contributed to and interfered with student learning, and to consider why he or she may have used alternative instructional strategies at times. Any feedback you give will be in the form of what you saw or heard. Stick to objective facts. Keep your opinions of what went on during the class to yourself. Avoid telling your mentee what you think should have been done. Your methodology during the post-observation conference, as it was during the pre-observation conference, is to probe with open-ended questions” (Teacher Mentoring and Induction, Hal Portner, 2008).

Using a facilitative stance, probing with open-ended questions, helps NQTs delve into their own thinking, builds reflective practice, and develops solution-focused skills. PST members may find the following examples of question prompts and or reflective stems useful at this point. Over time, you will extend your repertoire of questions and stems.

Sample Question Prompts and Stems to Support Discussion:

- How do you think the lesson went?
- Why do you think it went the way it did?
- How do you know that was the reason?
- When you ... the pupils reacted by ... Why do you think that happened?
- What did you expect would happen when ...?
- Were there any surprises?
- What were you most pleased with? Why?
- Help me understand what you considered when planning this activity?
- If you could teach this lesson again, what, if anything, would you do differently? Why?
- When we looked at the preparation for teaching and learning both agreed on X (e.g. the assessment or differentiation strategies or the learning activities). Having taught the lesson, do you still think they were the most suitable?

Providing feedback (if necessary):

Initially, some NQTs may find it difficult or feel awkward identifying and naming aloud their strengths to a colleague. While we are **working towards a peer-discussion or dialogue**, at the outset the PST member may need to model the expectation by offering feedback, progressing to some feedback plus some discussion and finally towards peer-to-peer discussion.

Where an NQT needs support in analysing their practice, the PST member offers feedback, affirming and building the confidence of the NQT, acknowledging strengths and identifying areas for the NQT to work on:

- Start with the positive.
- Ask questions rather than make statements.
- Be specific.
- Be descriptive rather than evaluative.
- Focus on actions that can be changed.
- Prioritise aspects that would have the most impact on pupil learning.

Action Planning:

Concluding the discussion, next steps/actions are agreed with the NQT and specific support identified, where necessary. In some instances, the support of a PST member or experienced colleague may be required and these are included in the NQT's induction activities. Where, for example specific professional development is identified in the form of a workshop, webinar, etc., this may be considered an Additional Professional Learning Activity (Strand B). The Droichead Outline Plan should be updated as appropriate.

Key considerations when action planning include dialogue with a solution-focused approach and setting clear goals. **SMARTER** is an acronym that is useful to guide action planning/goal setting as it clarifies ideas, focuses efforts, uses time and resources productively, and increases the chances of achieving the desired outcomes.

SMARTER:

- specific
- measurable
- achievable
- relevant
- time-bound
- efficacy
- reviewed.

To record the key elements of the post-observation discussion, please see Appendix 4 for the Post-observation Record which includes action planning. The NQT is invited and encouraged to record the agreed outcomes (and not the detail) of the discussion. Begin with the strengths and move on to area(s) for development, prioritising aspects that would have the most impact on pupil learning.

When both the NQT and the PST member have signed the Post-observation Record, a copy is made available to the NQT and the PST for their records. NQTs may choose to include the Post-observation Record in their Taisce and the PST retain a copy, not only for their records but to follow up on the strategies or actions agreed at the next scheduled meeting (e.g. was an opportunity provided for the NQT to observe teacher B



managing an Art lesson?). This enables continuity and consistency of support by the whole PST and it provides for appropriate challenge with aligned support for the NQT.

The Droichead process advocates openness and transparency. The only records of the observations that are kept are the signed Post-observation Records. Once the agreed Post-observation Record has been completed, notes made by the PST member (during the observation) should be shredded.



7.Key Reminders

Key Reminders

- Observation is just **one** induction activity.
- The NQT observes another teacher or PST member before being observed.
- NQTs are to be observed teaching in an area where they feel their learning need is greatest.
- Number of observations is determined by the needs of the NQT
 - minimum of two observations *by* the NQT
 - minimum of two observations *of* the NQT
- Observations *of* the NQT: the Coaching Cycle applies to the pre- and post-observation stages.
- Peer-observation and developmental - not an inspection; not evaluative.
- No final observation.
- NQT to be observed in the eligible setting in which they are employed.
- NQT to be observed by one PST member at each observation.
- NQT to be observed by different PST members throughout the Droichead process.


8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Observation by the NQT Record

<h1 style="margin: 0;">Observation Record</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">NQT observing another teacher (may be a PST member)</p>	
Experienced Teacher:	NQT Observing:
<p>Date:</p> <p>Time:</p> <p>Class:</p>	<p>Subject:</p> <p>Focus:</p>
<p>Two aspects which I found interesting and might use or adapt for my own class</p>	
<p>(i)</p>	<p>(ii)</p>
<p>One aspect that I would like to find out more about</p>	



Appendix 2: Pre-observation Framework with Discussion Prompts

Pre-observation Framework with Discussion Prompts	
<p>1. Need & Focus: The PST, in collaboration with the NQT, agree on the need and focus of the observation in advance of the pre-observation discussion [Droichead - Standards and Induction Plan – emerging needs].</p> <p>2. Plan: The NQT brings their weekly recorded preparation to the pre-observation discussion. The PST member who will conduct the observation should work with the NQT to ensure that the lesson is classroom-ready.</p> <p>The purpose and importance of the pre-observation discussion: “<i>Within a few days prior to the scheduled classroom observation, ...meet privately for about 20 to 30 minutes to discuss...Your objective here is to get your mentee to express and clarify learning objectives [sic], fine-tune strategies, anticipate student behaviours, firm up plans for monitoring student learning, and consider ways to adjust instruction... your function ... is to ask probing questions in ways that will not only encourage your mentee to come up with ideas to enrich the lesson plan, but will also provide him or her with the opportunity to gain confidence as a reflective practitioner who thinks through the consequences of his or her [sic] plans and actions and makes modifications based on thoughtful consideration of outcomes</i>”(Portner, 2008).</p>	
	
<p>3. Logistics: To be agreed</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scaffolding the Conversation</u></p> <p>The shaded areas parallel the Short-Term Recorded Preparation</p> <p>Each area should be discussed with the NQT and support given where required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need or Focus: Already Agreed • Lesson most suitable for the focus: Already Agreed
<p>Learning Objectives/Outcomes/ Focus:</p> <p><i>What are the pupils expected to know and be able to do by the end of the lesson?</i></p> <p><i>Will all pupils be able to do this?</i></p>	<p>Learning Activities, Strategies, Methodologies & Management:</p> <p><i>How am I going to achieve the learning outcomes? What will the teacher do?</i></p> <p><i>What will the SNA do (if appropriate)? What will the pupils do?</i></p> <p><i>What might prove challenging here?</i></p>
<p>Differentiation:</p> <p><i>For whom? What? How?</i></p>	<p>Assessment:</p> <p><i>How will you know learning has taken place?</i></p>
<p>Resources:</p> <p><i>What resources will be used to support the learning?</i></p> <p><i>Will all pupils use the same resources? How will the pupils access the resources?</i></p>	
<p>Having talked through each of the above aspects with the NQT and having worked together to refine the original preparation where necessary, is the co-constructed lesson now classroom-ready?</p>	<p>Lastly the Logistics:</p> <p>Timing/Duration of lesson?</p> <p>Lesson venue (e.g classroom, gym, library)?</p> <p>Role of PST Member (e.g.co-teach, observer)?</p> <p>Observation post (e.g. table at back of room)?</p> <p>Note-taking by the PST member?</p> <p>Agreed time and location for post-observation discussion:</p>

Appendix 3: Pre-Observation Framework and Specific Lesson Plan

Pre-observation Framework and Specific Lesson Preparation <i>This template is editable and can be tailored by the NQT.</i> <i>It is aligned with the weekly Short-term Preparation.</i>	
NQT: Class/Group/Pupil: PST Member: Date:	Need/Focus: Lesson most suitable for the focus:
Learning Objectives, Outcomes, Focus:	Learning Activities, Strategies, Methodologies & Management:
Differentiation:	Assessment:
Resources:	
<i>Having walked and talked through each of the above aspects with the PST member and having worked together to refine the original lesson where necessary, is the co-constructed lesson now classroom-ready?</i>	Lastly the Logistics: Timing/Duration of lesson? Lesson venue (e.g classroom-or gym or library)? Role of PST Member (e.g co-teach-or observer)? Observation post (e.g table at back of room)? Note-taking by the PST member? Agreed time and location for post-observation discussion:

Appendix 4: Post-observation of the NQT Record (template)

Post-observation Record NQT being observed by PST member					
NQT: Class: PST Member:	Date: Venue:				
Focus of this observation:					
Strengths (from the following 4 perspectives): <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching: <input type="checkbox"/> Learning: <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment: <input type="checkbox"/> Management:	Area(s) for development:				
Key Priorities at this time:	Actions to be taken, by whom:				
Support required:	Review, by whom and when:				
<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Signatures:</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Date:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> NQT: PST Member: </td> </tr> </table>		Signatures:	Date:	NQT: PST Member:	
Signatures:	Date:				
NQT: PST Member:					



Appendix 5: Post-observation of the NQT (sample)

Please note: This sample post-observation record was completed following the observation of the Shape and Space lesson, a video of which is shown on day three of PST training.

Post-observation Record NQT being observed by Professional Support Team member	
<p>NQT: S O'M</p> <p>Class: Junior Infants</p> <p>PST Member: GH</p>	<p>Date: 1st February</p> <p>Venue: NQT's classroom</p>
<p>Focus of this observation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How effective is the questioning in supporting the inclusion of all learners or differentiation and assessment? ● To what extent are the pupils learning? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is contributing to the learning? ○ What is obstructing the learning? 	
<p>Strengths (from the following 4 perspectives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teaching - clear learning objectives, good questioning techniques, activated prior knowledge and made links with prior learning (sorting and 3D shapes), modelled thinking aloud, use of Gaeilge ● Learning - the children were actively engaged, use of the classroom environment, group work activities, hands-on learning with manipulatives, opportunities to use related and new vocabulary ● Assessment - good questioning, use of thumbs up strategy ● Management - lots of evidence of classroom management strategies, e.g. appointing leaders, hands on laps, 3,2,1, good rapport, safe space 	<p>Area(s) for development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Timing and pacing of lesson ● Modelling and explanation of activities - establish that children fully understand activity (turn-taking) ● Thinking through the use of materials fully from the perspective of the children, e.g. use of <i>Blu Tack</i> versus shape magnets and using a bigger display chart.

<p>to make mistakes, positive reinforcement of good behaviours distribution of resources, verbal and non-verbal praise, prior preparation of materials.</p>	
<p>Key Priorities at this time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing and pacing of lessons • Clear explanation of activities to the pupils. 	<p>Actions to be taken, by whom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NQT to consider the amount of content in her lessons to enable her to address all elements of each lesson • Consideration to be also given to allowing adequate time for the explanation of and engagement in activities and assessment.
<p>Support required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. NQT will put suggestions into practice in the classroom and consult the PST for support as required. 	<p>Review, by whom and when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NQT and PST member week of the 6th of March.
<p>Signatures: _____ Date: _____</p> <p>NQT: _____</p> <p>PST member: _____</p>	

