

## Response from Teaching Council to #edchatie discussion on CPD

Since I took up the job as Director of the Teaching Council in May of last year, I have been struck by the intense level of interest in CPD from all stakeholders, including teachers and current providers. This is a very positive development, and augurs well for the commencement of the Council's functions in this area in the near future. In that context, the level of engagement in the #edchatie discussion on Monday night should not come as a surprise to anybody. Sore thumbs and eyes were complained of at the end. Having reviewed the transcript, I can see why!

This "professional energy" echoes the reaction to our recent announcement on free access to research in the EBSCO collection for all registered teachers. It also resonates with the energy which I had the privilege of witnessing at FÉILTE (Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence), where teachers led each other and enthused each other with the broad canvas of diverse, innovative ideas that they are using in their classrooms every day. In light of the discussion overall, and in particular the comments and tweets that were addressed to the Council, I thought it would be appropriate to set out the Council's response to the discussion, and also sketch out our thinking in this area. I would like to thank Fred Boss for facilitating us in doing that.

A number of statements were made throughout the discussion which amount to a series of clarion calls for CPD. They clearly speak to a belief in lifelong learning as an essential element in enabling teachers to fulfil one of the central tenets of their own sense of professionalism – a commitment to the immeasurable so that others can face the unknowable. Particular examples that struck me included "...one is always becoming a teacher". And in response, one teacher referred to the importance of "continuously growing each day." I heard someone recently describe the career of teaching as akin to that of "progression, not perfection." Such statements remind us of why teaching is the most important, and challenging, profession in society – as Anne Looney said in her lecture to mark World Teachers' Day last year, teachers have to renew themselves every day, indeed, for every lesson at post-primary level! I talked about this concept of being or becoming a teacher in [a paper that I gave on teacher education and curricular reform](#) in UCC earlier this year.

Another participant compared good CPD to the lighting of a fire, rather than the filling of a pail. They also talked of participation in CPD as a clear demonstration of teachers' commitment to be the best teacher that they can be. I think that it is heartening for the future of the profession that there is clearly a strong sense of consensus on the importance of lifelong learning, even if we don't all agree on the possible frameworks and models of quality assurance and delivery. Once we agree on the overall goal, on the next stage in our journey as professionals, and crucially, on the importance of that goal, that is a great start.

One word that was mentioned a few times in the context of CPD, and has certainly been mentioned to me a lot, is that of recognition. Prof. John Coolahan talked of this at the PDA conference last year in Sligo. He spoke in very moving terms of the countless numbers of teachers who had approached him after conferences and workshops through the years, and who craved recognition for the CPD that they were engaging in, in their own time and at their own expense. They were doing it because they wanted to, but they also sought recognition from others for it. Not necessarily financial recognition, but above all else, authentic recognition. It reminds me of what Mary Burke of the NIPT has often said – never underestimate the power of four simple words – *Thank you!* and *Well done!*

Of course, recognition in its fullest sense is about a lot more than that, but it is no harm to remind ourselves of where we want to start in all of this.

This emphasis on recognition, as indicated by Prof. Coolahan, reflects the fact that the vast majority of teachers currently engage in one form of CPD or another. So the work which the Council has to do in preparation for the commencement of our role in CPD is not about reinventing the wheel. It will largely be about recognition of what teachers have been doing for years. But it will also be about looking to the future, and about ensuring that whatever framework we have in place for the accreditation of CPD is sufficiently robust to ensure quality, and at the same time flexible enough to enable teachers to face the unknowable challenges of the future, together. One person said that CPD should not be dictated to teachers. As indicated in our [Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education](#), the framework we develop will account for at least 3 perspectives – teachers' own needs, schools' needs and national priorities e.g. Literacy and Numeracy.

Other comments discussed the possibilities of a blended approach to CPD, incorporating “f2f”, or face to face, with online provision. The latter aspect would include both synchronous and asynchronous delivery. One participant referred to blended learning as a space where people have the opportunity to review material and then discuss it. If we agree that teaching and learning, at their core, are about relationships, connections, and people helping people, then we will have to acknowledge that learning, in the form of CPD, will always involve face to face interaction. But in so far as the best use of technology augments human relationships, such learning will have to strike a balance between face to face and online interaction. The #edchatie forum epitomises this, as evidenced by the queries from time to time as to who is attending a particular conference or seminar.

The suggested mix of synchronous and asynchronous delivery is interesting in this context. This balance is in use by a number of education providers at third level. What I like about this model is that it gives space and time for live interaction with others, including on-site lectures in a college, and also space and time for teachers to interact with the course material at their own pace, in their own time.

What is clear from the dynamic of the #edchatie discussion, as much as its content, is the importance of teachers engaging with each other as a community of learners, to advance their own learning. Philippa Cordingley of CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education), has said that the research is very clear on this. The best CPD occurs on foot of a new learning initiative where teachers approach the learning space in a spirit of reciprocal vulnerability, i.e. no-one claims to have all the answers. All experience is valid and useful as a learning tool.

Central to the concept of a community of learners is the concept of professional conversations, and there was an encouraging emphasis on this throughout the discussion. [The paper that I gave to the national conference on Instructional Leadership](#) may be of interest to some people in this context. This point also speaks to some of the findings from the Chief Inspector's Report which was launched earlier this week. Much of the media attention has focused on the 20% of lessons observed in Gaeilge which were less than satisfactory. The other finding which is overlooked in this focus is the fact that 80% of lessons were satisfactory, or better. Nobody wants to be complacent about the findings, but we do need to maintain a sense of balance and perspective in how we talk about teaching and learning. The relevance of CPD to this is found in the fact that of all the solutions

mooted for improving the teaching in the “20%”, one of the most obvious is to enhance the connections between the 80% and the 20%. As #edchatie shows, there is an immense richness of learning to be found in teachers leading each other in learning. No one person has all the answers. But a community of learners will empower everyone to find ideas worth exploring.

More recent comments on the #edchatie thread have spoken to the question of how we can ensure that CPD is effective; how will quality assurance work? The Teaching Council will play a key role here when section 39 of the 2001 Act is commenced. We agree with one of the comments that the more we integrate our efforts across the system, the greater and better the impact we will have on teaching and learning. More integration is essentially dependent on more collaboration between teachers and between all stakeholders in education. It is important to clarify that once section 39 is commenced, it will enable the Council to require evidence of CPD for the renewal of registration. This is similar to the requirements of other professional bodies. A lot of the details will be worked out through the consultation process that the Council will conduct. The significance of this in light of the signing into law of section 30 was noted by one of the contributors to #edchatie. Above all, the ideas or concepts of the continuum of teacher education, of CPD, of lifelong learning, are grounded in the belief that teachers will always learn so that they can always teach.

I think that it is worth reminding ourselves, in the context of the importance of CPD, that there are two cardinal sins for professionalism - failure to learn, and failure to share that learning. These can be useful guiding principles for us as we develop our thinking on the framework for CPD over the next few years. Our thinking is very much at an early stage – see our [Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education](#). Models in use by other professional bodies range from self-declaration only right across to external verification only. Whatever framework is developed by the Teaching Council will be the result of an extensive consultation process, and will have to acknowledge the Council’s core values of professionally-led regulation, collective professional confidence and shared professional responsibility – or to put it another way, teachers leading each other in learning.

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