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2017

Sectoral Update on the National Professional Development Framework for Teachers in HE: The Initial Implementation Strategy

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Sectoral Update on the National Professional Development Framework for Teachers in HE: The Initial Implementation Strategy

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National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Abstract

The National Forum (NF) for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning is currently in the early stage of implementation of the National Professional Development Framework (PDF) for all who teach in higher education. Prior to the publication of the PD Framework in 2016, there was no mechanism or route in place nationally to give structure, focus and support to individual staff to avail of relevant professional development and utilise it to realise their full potential in their teaching role. This important work is deepening sectoral understanding of the PDF itself and leading towards national recognition of an individual's commitment to their professional development across the universities, institutes of technology and private colleges. This article highlights what is unique about this PD Framework, its underpinning values and distinctive domains, as well as complementary PD initiatives in open access digital badge development and implementation.

Introduction

A national PDF is important for teaching and learning across the higher education (HE) sector in Ireland. At the forefront of this work by the National Forum is an aim to drive and maintain engagement in professional development initiatives for those who teach in order to support their career-long growth. With competing forces and priorities in HE today, initiatives related to professional development sometimes

become side-lined or relegated to an exercise in compliance. Against a scene of increasingly demanding requirements within the teaching role, the PDF is about promoting a culture of sustainable engagement for teachers to take ownership of their personal and professional development.

The rapidly changing environment of HE, increasing student diversity, the pervasiveness of technology and its potential to enhance teaching and learning and provide more access for student engagement requires all those who teach to have a personal commitment to their own professional development. The National Forum responded to this need and an extensive consultation process with the HE Sector across 2014-15 (NF, 2015) highlighted a range of (often contradictory) views about a national PD Framework. What emerged was the need for a values-based framework, underpinned by scholarship that was flexible enough to be inclusive of all those who teach in HE, one that included all types of professional development, and encourages those who teach to engage in a continuous cycle of evidence-based reflection on their practice over the lifelong learning process. There was a need for flexibility for institutions to interpret the framework for their own context. There was less agreement about whether the need to develop personal and professional digital capacity should be included explicitly or to be integrated across the framework. The diversity of opinion about what the national framework would look like (the form it took and its content) means that the framework as developed may not be considered perfect, but importantly it is accepted by all those who teach in the sector as usable for their practice.

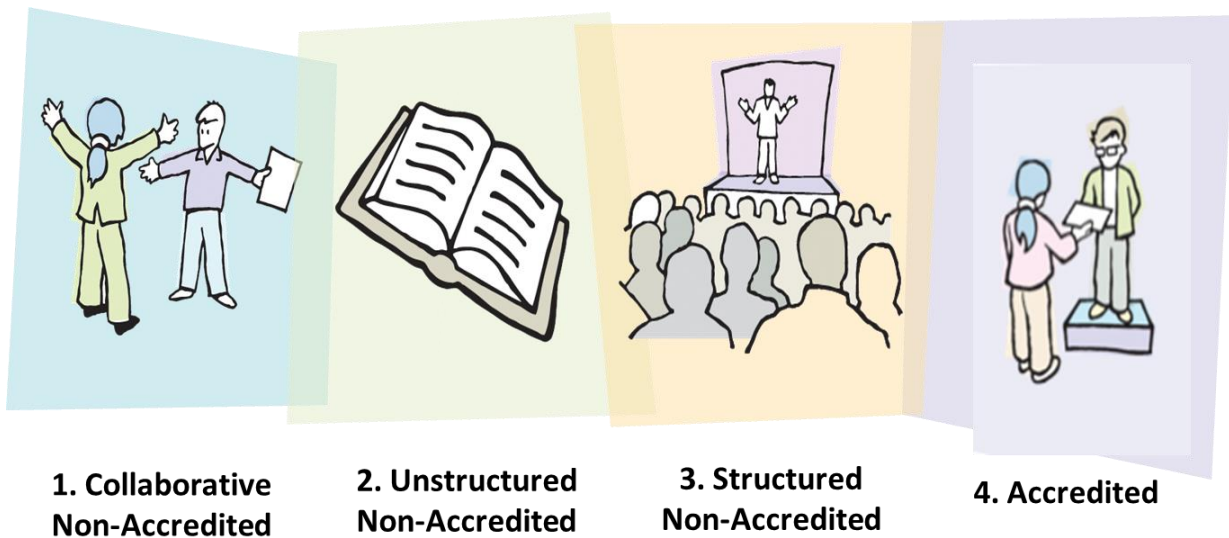The PD Framework was published by the National Forum in mid-2016 [http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PD-Framework-FINAL.pdf] to provide guidance for the professional development of individuals and gives direction to other stakeholders (e.g. institutions, HE networks, educational developers, policy makers and student body representatives) for planning, developing and engaging in professional development activities. As requested by the sector, the PDF provides descriptions of the domains of PD activity, elements and professional values associated with the performance of teaching, and associated leadership roles. The term 'teacher' as used in this framework is inclusive of all the activities involved in the teaching and the facilitation of student learning in the higher education context, and incorporates the principles of student engagement in the learning process.

Sectoral Understanding of Professional Development: A Typology

The consultation process identified a shared typology (Figure 1 overleaf) for the range of professional development opportunities incorporated in the framework which include activities which are non-accredited (including collaborative, unstructured and structured) and those which are accredited.

Staff who teach develop their knowledge, skills and competencies in their teaching through a range of learning activities. Each learning activity can be described by different types of learning, singly or in combination. The framework identifies and recognises four types of learning associated with any professional development learning activity ('new learning', 'consolidating learning', 'mentoring' and 'leading').

1. Collaborative Non-Accredited	2. Unstructured Non-Accredited	3. Structured Non-Accredited	4. Accredited
Examples Conversations with colleagues, peer networking & observations, blogs/discussion forums, mentoring, critical friends engaging in informal dialogue on how to improve teaching	**Examples** Reading articles, following social media, self-study, watching video tutorials, keeping a reflective teaching journal/portfolio, preparing an article for publication	**Examples** Workshops, seminars, MOOCs, conferences, summer schools, structured collaborative projects, research project on a topic of professional interest	**Examples** Professional Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, PhD, EdD in: Teaching and Learning, eLearning, Leadership in Education; Education Policy

Figure 1: Typology of PD opportunities incorporated in the PD Framework

The National Professional Development Framework

The uniqueness of the PDF is in reframing the PD conversation through a shift in discourse to one of advocacy, and it repositions professional development in Irish HE so that it places priority soundly on the individual's needs. The PDF (illustrated in Figure 2) presents a holistic approach to professional development, incorporating the five domains with the individuality of the staff member at its core.

A key feature of the framework is its flexibility in how it uses a domain-based approach to professional standards in teaching and learning. Each of the five PDF

domains are applicable to a wide number of staff roles and to different career stages of those engaged in teaching and supporting learning. The domains and elements are underpinned by professional values, all of which emerged from the extensive and concentrated sectoral consultation. By setting objectives and charting progress towards their achievement, identifying strengths and development needs and enabling discussion of career aspirations, the PDF can support individuals to be responsible for determining what they need to learn, for managing and undertaking their own PD activity, and to consider how best to incorporate innovations to their professional practice.

Individuals can interpret the framework in their own unique way, depending on disciplinary background, and can showcase their engagement with relevant domains of the PDF.
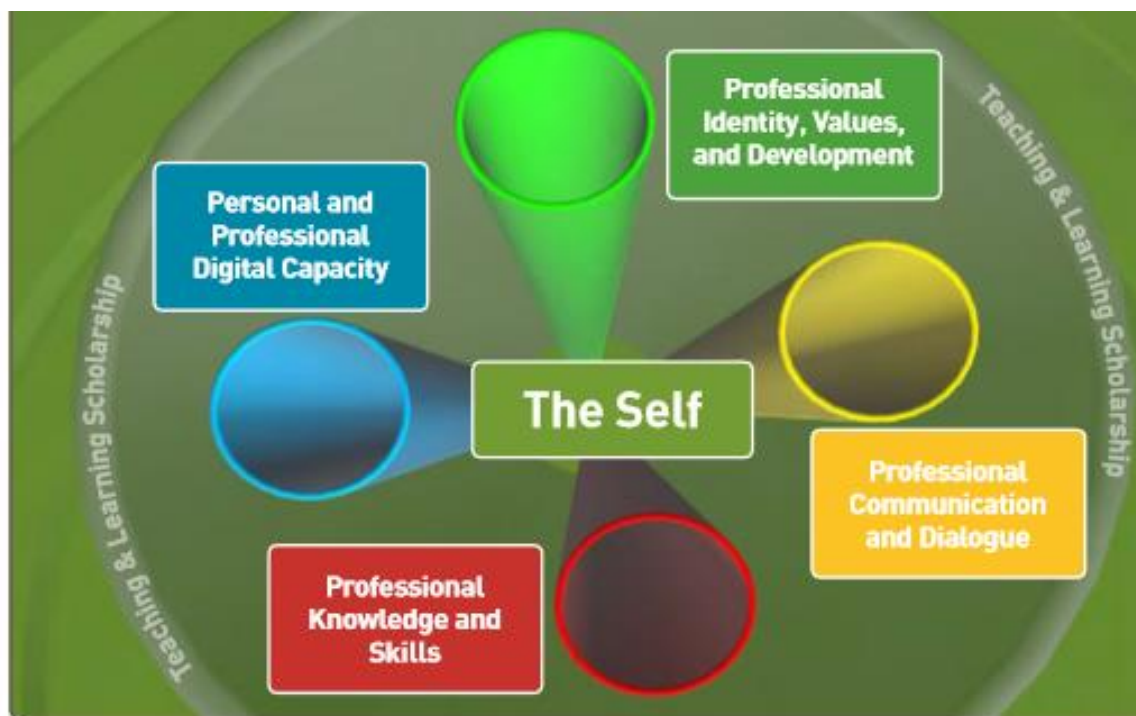

Figure 2: The five domains of the national PDF

- At the core of the domains is the centrality of <u>'the Self'</u> recognising that the professional and personal values that the individual brings to their teaching are pivotal in their development as a teacher.

- <u>Professional Identity and Development</u> captures the development and self-evaluation of professional identity and recognises that an individual's professional identity can change at different stages of their career.

- The <u>Professional Communication and Dialogue</u> domain emphasises the need for those who teach to be able to communicate, and collaborate through a range of media.

- <u>Professional Knowledge and Skills</u> ensures the individual remains current in terms of their professional/disciplinary knowledge and can implement teaching, learning and assessment approaches which are reflective and underpinned by a strong evidence base.

- The explicit inclusion of the domain <u>Personal and Professional Digital Capacity</u> recognises that we live and work in a digital world, and that teachers must develop digital skills to have the self-assurance to harness the potential of technology for learning impact. This domain has made explicit the need to develop skills and confidence for those that teach in Irish higher education.

The development of an individual's engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning is an integral component of each of the five domains.

The PDF is underpinned by five key professional values [Inclusivity; Authenticity; Collaboration; Scholarship; Learner Centeredness] which act as a guide for individual staff, academic departments and institutions to recognise, inform, enhance and sustain PD in Irish Higher Education (Figure 3):
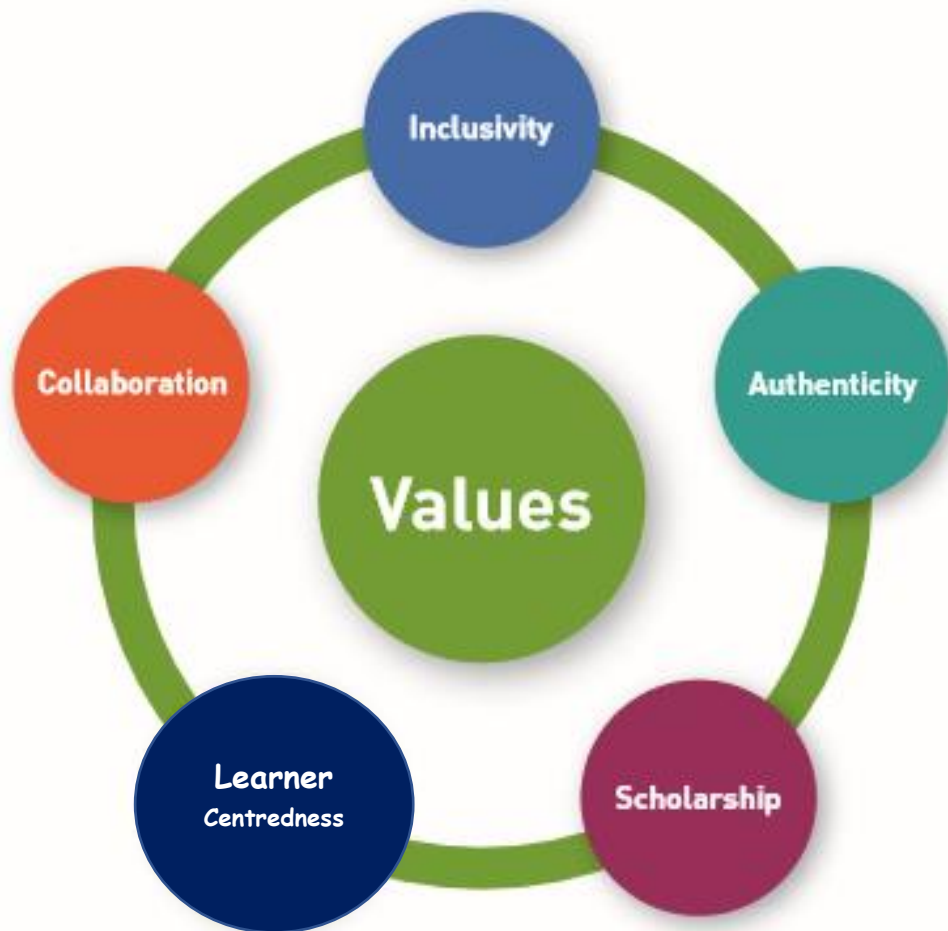
Figure 3: The underpinning professional values of the national PDF

Implementing the PD Framework across the sector

Once the PDF was developed, considerable thought went into planning its early implementation, and we feel that the connections formed through each stage contributes to the uniqueness of the work. One of the first steps taken earlier this year was the formation of an independent PD Expert Advisory Group with 10 academics and education experts to develop sectoral capacity to support the PDF in the HEIs. The work of this group was crucial for guiding sustainable engagement with the PDF throughout the sector, as they facilitated a number of pilot studies nationally. The pilot studies were designed to capture how individuals (from a range

of individual professional identities) navigate the PDF with a view to informing support material and resources to guide others using the framework in the future. There were 22 pilot groups formed in the HE sector from universities, institutes of technology and the private colleges. These groups incorporated a range of professional identities: new and experienced academic staff from a wide range of disciplines; Heads of Department; Part-time lecturers from industry; Teaching staff from the Health Professions; Academic Writing Tutors; Maths Learning Support Tutors; Learning Technologists; Nurse Educators; Educational Developers; Careers Advisors; Disability Liaison Officers; Teacher Educators; New Teachers in the HECA Colleges; Librarians; Work Placement Co-ordinators; Art & Design Practitioner-Educators; PhD Supervisors; Teachers who research; Researchers who teach.

Each of the pilot study groups gave the participants an opportunity to begin a professional development portfolio (PDP) to explore the domains of the framework, using it to think about how they can develop as teaching professionals. Those involved were encouraged to develop their PDP in any format and media that enabled them to collect their evidence in a way that suited their needs and context, and allowed them the space to undertake the continuing process of assessment, analysis, action, and review of their practice, at a time and pace that suits them. Compiling the PDP reinforces professional learning by directing the teacher's attention to strengths and gaps in their knowledge and skills and enables them to set clear goals for their own development. It is also evidence of the teacher's development and commitment to PD and to keeping up-to-date with rapidly changing knowledge, and the need to maintain and develop skills. Arguably, such a PD record is something that can support national professional mobility.

The evaluation phase of this work is currently taking place, and early insights come directly from the 210 participants who engaged with the pilot studies. Clear benefits are emerging in terms of collaboration, authenticity and learner-centeredness which is a resounding endorsement of the underpinning professional values of the PDF. A range of short-term and potential long-term impacts have been identified (Table 1):

Table 1: Short-term and potential long-term impacts of engaging with the PDF

Strongly agreed/Agreed	Short-term impact: engaging with the PDF…
93%	increased my confidence in my professional role
87%	supported the development of my T&L skills
88%	increased my engagement with PD activities
78%	enhanced dialogue and discourse about T&L in my institution
85%	enhanced my T&L practices
	Long-term impact: the PDF has the potential to impact positively on…
93%	student learning
78%	organisational practices and systems in my institution
72%	the culture of enhancement at my institution
79%	discipline and professional groups nationally

National Digital Badge System and ongoing PD Initiatives

Complementing the work taking place on the PDF through the pilot studies, an innovative initiative that has captured the collective imagination of the sector is the design, development and delivery of a series of fifteen open access professional development programmes. Subject expert development teams from across the sector collaborated to design and develop these PD programmes (each requiring 25 student effort hours) against nationally agreed criteria. Programmes cover a range of

key topics, shown in the matrix below (Figure 4). Participants who complete these programmes are awarded a National Forum digital badge matched to the domain it relates to on the PD Framework. Although these badges do not have any associated ECTS, the badges can improve the mobility and recognition of non-accredited professional development of staff across the sector. The programmes and associated resources are available to download by all institutions through the National Forum PD Resource Portal. These include workshop-based and independent learning materials, presentations, activity sheets, facilitator guides and PD videos to attract prospective participants.

Figure 4: Pathways for open-access PD Programmes

Staff who want to begin their professional development journey using the PDF as their guide are encouraged to take the following two programmes:

PD Reflective Practice	PACT: Commitment to professional development
	Reflective practice in teaching

Lecturers new to teaching or staff who want to develop their teaching skills can select from a range under the 'Teaching Skills' cluster:

Teaching Skills	Teaching and learning strategies for new lecturers
	Getting started with online teaching
	Postgraduate research supervision
	Mentoring essentials in teaching and learning

For more experienced teaching staff who may wish to explore professional areas of interest, an alternative pathway offers the choice of three clusters (Specialist Expertise; Curriculum Design; Student Focused):

Specialist Expertise	Digital policy development for T&L
	Entrepreneurship education
	Academic writing in higher education
	Developing intercultural awareness
Curriculum Design	Programme design
	Universal design in teaching and learning
	Programme-focussed assessment
Student Focused	Enabling student volunteering
	Student engagement

An important step in recognising structured non-accredited professional development for the sector, these national badges were designed and developed following a

rigorous process captured as a model of open-access digital badge development outlined in Figure 5.
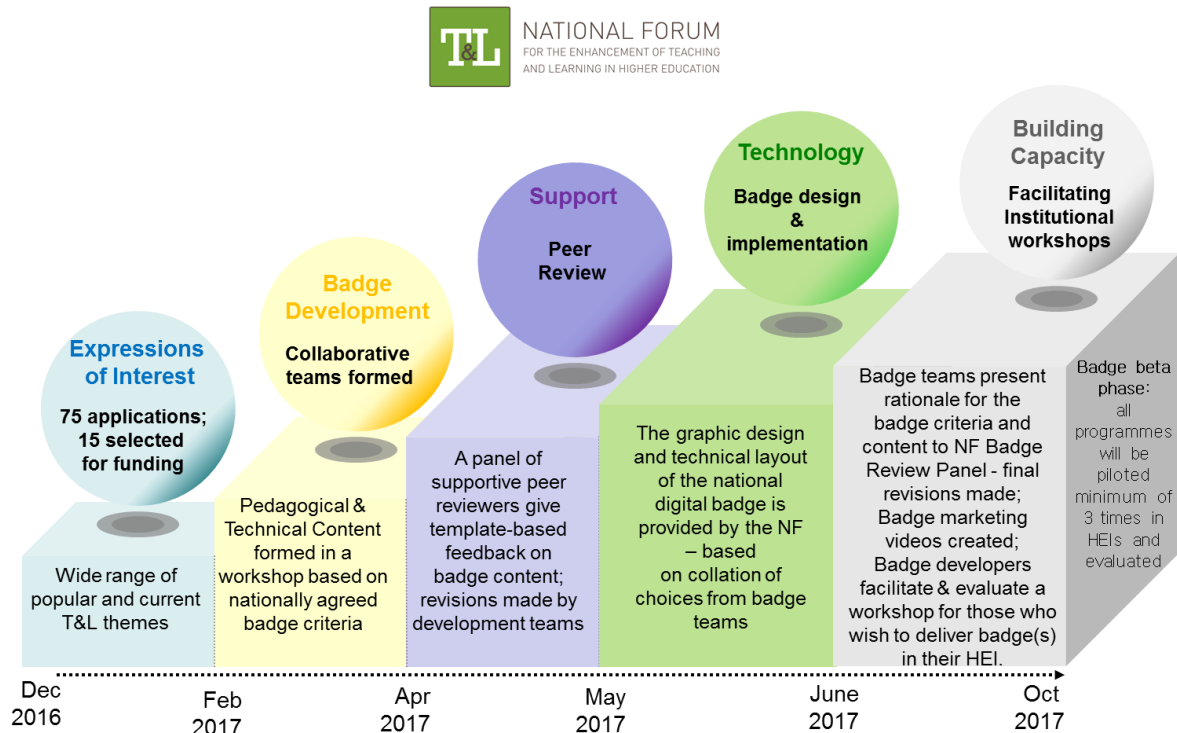

Figure 5: Evolving Model of National Digital Badge Development Aligned to the PDF

Two further PDF initiatives have gained significant traction and supported the embedding of the framework across the sector. Institutions are being financed through the T&L Enhancement Fund 2016 to map their existing professional development provision onto the PD framework, to develop specific resources for those in a leadership role as well as entry programmes for graduate assistants. Ten collaborative projects are underway involving 22 HEIs. Full details of these projects are available at http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/digital-enhancement-funding/2016-tl-fund-proposals/

Professional development has also been included as a funding stream the 2017-18 national funded seminar series and will enable institutions to run introductory workshops for their staff or to run some of the 15 open-access programmes discussed earlier. These funded initiatives help to keep up momentum around the implementation of the PDF, and will continue to give more and more teachers the chance to engage with the framework.

Emergence of a National PD Recognition Framework

In summary, the PD Framework provides an opportunity for all who teach to progress, enrich, develop and enhance their practice, expertise, knowledge, skills and professional values. It supports teachers as they develop as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who are able to engage with the complexities of teaching and learning and the changing contemporary world of their learners. In the next phase of development, our aim is to develop a PD Recognition Framework informed by the PDF pilot implementation and complementary PD initiatives. The PD Recognition Framework will support a national professional development community of those who teach in Irish higher education, and will acknowledge an individual's commitment to continuous professional development. As a membership organisation, it will recognise the professional knowledge and pedagogical expertise, accomplishment and enhanced, sustained reflective enquiry that members will have undertaken in the development of their professional learning. Registered members will develop and maintain their standing in the community-centred organisation as they continue to progress in their teaching role and across the profession of education.

The incorporation of a peer triad support mechanism will allow teachers from different disciplines to work together in bringing their PD further into their practice and bridge the theory-practice gap. The PD Recognition Framework will nurture and accelerate good ideas, showcase innovative practice, and encourage collaborative networks and partnerships among HE teaching staff. It will enable a sector-wide learning community to form that will enrich the practice of the immediate three individuals involved, but also the profession as a whole. Through the triads, teacher success stories, as well as the challenges and how they overcome them, can be shared for the benefit of all involved.

Conclusion

Implementing the PDF in the HE sector is undoubtedly challenging; but the unparalleled enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers who have embraced the challenges and engaged in all stages of the PDF pilot implementation has reinforced belief that this is the way forward for the sector.

Findings from the PDF initial implementation show that policymakers and institutional leaders must take a leadership role to encourage and enable the sector wide implementation of the framework. They must support all educators within their institutions to engage in continuous professional development and enable them to apply that learning to improve student learning. Interviews with senior staff were held in 2017 across the HE Sector indicated their commitment to increased availability and uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching, learning and assessment within their institutions (NF, In Press).

Learning Communities at discipline, programme or department/faculty level, together with communities of practice are the major engines of change, and such learning communities can support those involved in PD development and recognition.

There is an emerging theme of professionalisation of teaching in higher education which has been positive and visible in the period 2014-2017, and there is strong support for retaining this theme in the foreground of activities at institutional, regional and national levels. A more nuanced understanding of PD needs is now evident, with an emphasis on support for specific areas and on the development of academic teams. There is openness to mapping existing and future PD provision to the Framework. The national PDF offers a clear definition and roadmap for engaging with professional development within Irish HEIs for the future.

The take-away message about the PDF, the recent pilot study implementation, and the range of ongoing PD projects and seminars funded by the National Forum are that it can encourage those who teach in HE across all disciplines and professional roles in teaching and learning to grow, and to develop their careers. The significance of this work **i**s the continuous improvement of teaching staff, students, institutions, and the Irish higher education community. We firmly believe that this national PDF is essential for driving future improvement in, and continuing to raise the profile of T&L across the Irish HE sector.

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