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Ireland's Higher Education Teachers have a National Professional Development Framework, now what?

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Abstract. Momentum has been building for professional development (PD) for all staff who teach in Irish higher education - they now have the national Professional Development Framework (PDF) to support them in planning and engaging with authentic, inclusive, scholarly, learner-centred and collaborative PD across their career. In mid-2016, the PD Framework was published by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. In 2017, the PDF was piloted with 215 individuals from 22 professional identity groups from across the sector, working with the framework to reflect on their professional practice and set goals for their future professional development.

This initial implementation phase has now been fully evaluated and a robust evidence-base of 'what works, and why' in relation to staff engagement with the PDF is in place. Disseminating findings and continuing to engage with the sector through relevant platforms such as HEIT is key to advancing this work. Early 2018 witnessed the HEA publishing the HE System Performance Framework 2018-2020 with two recommendations which are key to the momentum of the PDF:

- Implementation of the Continuous Professional Development Framework
- Number of staff with "Digital Badges" for completed CPD by academic year

Given these significant developments over a relatively short period, we are now asking the sector, what needs to happen next for the PDF to continue to drive progress for individual's careers and support them in dealing with change and transformation in their professional practice?

Keywords. Digital Badges, Professional Development Framework, Recognition, Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

Prior to 2016, Ireland's educators in higher education institutions did not have a mechanism or route in place nationally to give structure, focus, guidance and support them to avail of relevant professional development and utilise it to realise their full potential in their teaching role. Equally, other stakeholders (e.g. the institutions themselves, HE networks, educational developers, policy-makers and student body representatives) did not have a means to give direction to staff for planning, developing and engaging in professional development activities. The paper begins with an outline of the background to the publication of the PD Framework in 2016 [1] by the National Forum [<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/pdf>], and the subsequent work on the initial implementation with the sector. It then discusses plans for the next phase of the work, which will involve a further round of consultation and implementation planning.

1.1 Background

Since its initial implementation across the sector in 2017 - with 22 professional identity groups, all who have a teaching role as part of their professional practice - this pioneering work in Irish higher education 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. It is clear that 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 can sometimes become side-lined or relegated to an exercise in compliance. Against a scene of increasingly demanding requirements within the

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teaching role, the PDF is about promoting a culture of sustainable engagement for teachers to take ownership of their personal and professional development.

2. Context

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 – all requires 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 highlighted a range of (often contradictory) views about a national PD Framework [2]. 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.

As requested by the sector, the PDF provides descriptions of the domains of professional development 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.

3. Sectoral Understanding of Professional Development: A Typology

The consultation process identified a shared typology (Figure 1) 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’).

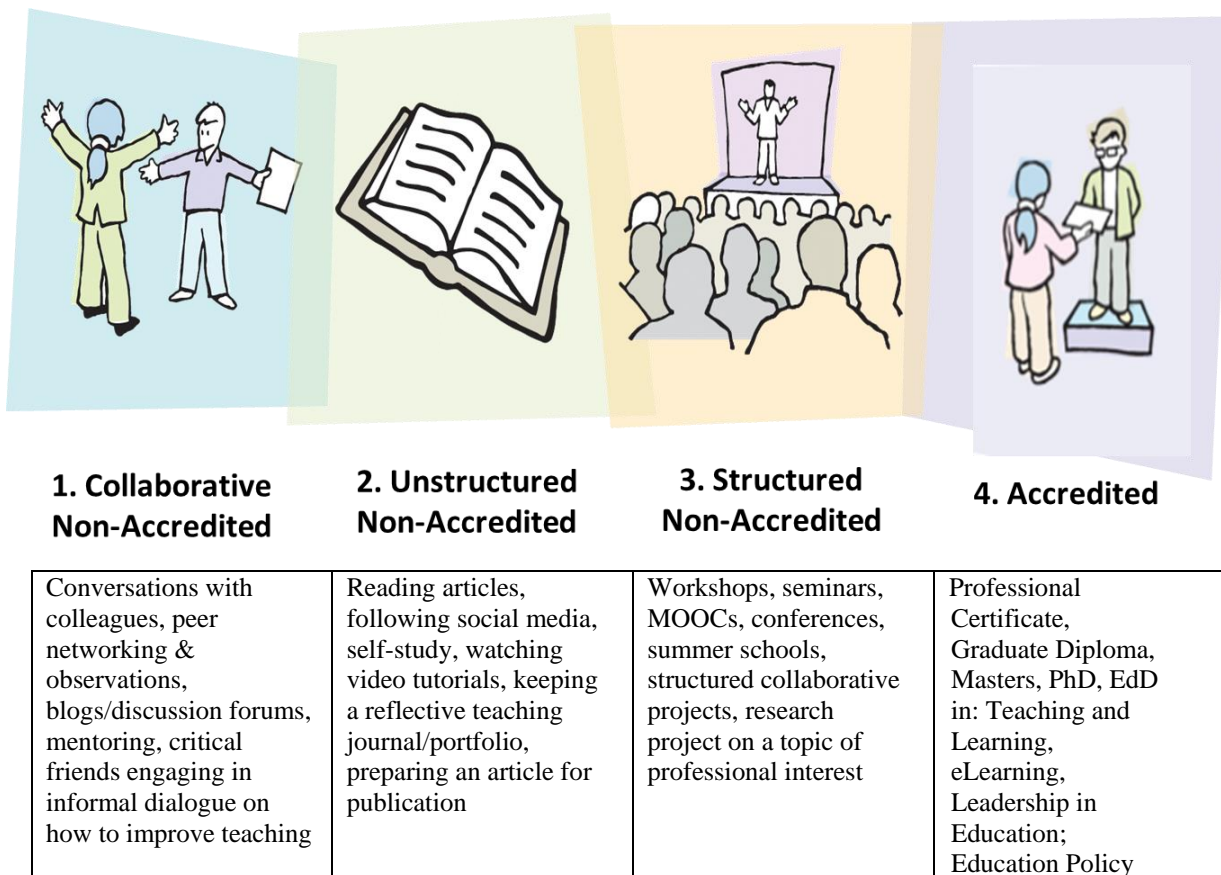


Figure 1. Typology of PD opportunities incorporated in the PD Framework

4. 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 'the Self' recognising that the professional and personal values that the individual brings to their teaching are pivotal in their development as a teacher.
- Professional Identity and Development 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 Professional Communication and Dialogue domain emphasises the need for those who teach to be able to communicate and collaborate through a range of media.
- Professional Knowledge and Skills 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 Personal and Professional Digital Capacity 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

5. 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 from across 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 and experienced Teachers in the HECA Colleges; Librarians; Work Placement Co-ordinators; Art & Design Practitioner-Educators; Business Lecturers; PhD Supervisors; Teachers who research; Researchers who teach.

Participating in one 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 has now been completed, and insights come directly from the 215 participants who engaged with the pilot studies. Clear benefits have emerged 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

A National Forum report and briefing paper are forthcoming in 2018, detailing the full set of findings and recommendations of the initial implementation of the PDF with the sector.

6. 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 in Teaching and Learning. 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, they can improve the mobility and recognition of non-accredited professional development of staff across the sector. The open-access programmes provide manageable access points to beginning engagement with the PDF. 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 learners.



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 indeed experienced staff who want to further develop or expand 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 programmes with associated national digital badges were designed and developed following a rigorous process captured as a model of open-access digital badge development outlined in Figure 5.

Model of open-access digital badge development

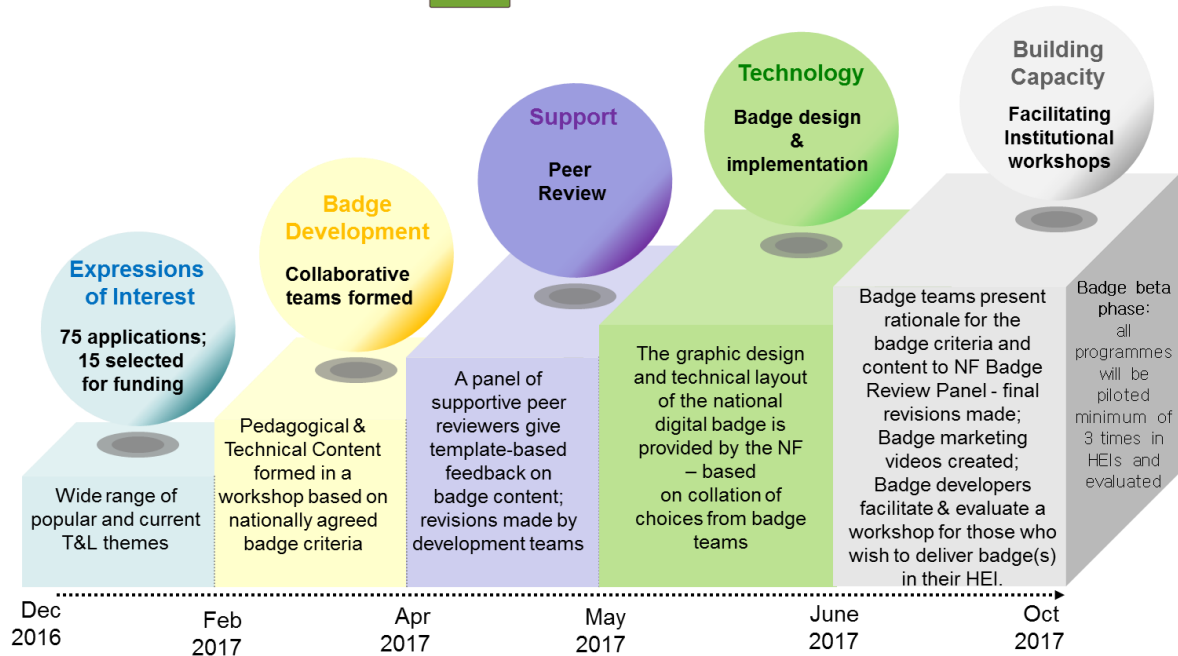


Figure 5. Evolving Model of National Digital Badge Development Aligned to the PDF

Two further PDF initiatives have gained significant traction and supported the embedding of the PD 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 in the 2017-18 national funded seminar series and will enable institutions to run introductory workshops for their staff or to implement any of the 15 open-access professional development programmes discussed earlier. These funded initiatives help to build momentum around the implementation of the PDF and will continue to give increasingly more teachers the chance to engage with the framework and consider its merits for their professional practice.

7. Emergence of a National PD Recognition Framework (PDRF)

In summary, the PD Framework provides an opportunity for all who teach in Irish higher education 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 students.

In the next phase of implementation, our aim is to develop a PD Recognition Framework informed by the PDF initial implementation and complementary PD initiatives. Although the way in which this framework would be structured and work in practice will have to be negotiated with the sector through an extensive consultation process, an initial consultation with the participants on the pilot programmes and the PD expert group has already identified possible models and support strategies that would work in an Irish context.

Initial indications are that 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. Members will develop and maintain their standing in the community-centred organisation as they continue to develop as teachers in higher education.

The suggested use of peer review through 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. Initial consultation has indicated that a PD Recognition Framework would nurture and accelerate good ideas, showcase innovative practice, and encourage collaborative networks and partnerships among higher education teaching staff. Further, it will enable a sector-wide learning community to form that will enrich the practice of the immediate three individuals involved in the triad, but also the profession as a whole. Through the triads, teacher success stories, as well as the challenges that can arise and how they overcome them, can be shared and discussed for the benefit and learning of all involved.

Despite the potential benefits of a PDRF, there is concern that having such a system in place would be used at a system level as a compliance tool that would, in the future, require mandatory registration of all those who teach - similar to the National Teaching Council at second level. Such a development would be completely at odds with the underpinning ethos of the Professional Development Framework which centered on the individual teacher and their personal priorities for their professional learning journey.

8. Next phase of the implementation: Further Discussions with the Sector

The form, function and experience of the PD Expert Advisory Group in the initial implementation was important as a means of supporting this national initiative and building capacity for the sector. Integral to future implementation of the PD framework itself across HE institutions will be continuing to build up a network of PD experts to co-ordinate the work of the emerging community of practice of teachers in each participating institution.

Institutions and these co-ordinators will need support strategies in place to enable them to effectively and efficiently roll-out the PDF with all staff who teach. It is planned that the National Forum online resource centre will be a readily accessible repository for a range of resources with multiple benefits: guide those who are new to the framework on its implementation; showcase good practice and implementation initiatives across different professional identities; examples will include resources on reflective practice, gathering evidence for professional development, and different approaches for storing and showcasing one's PD journey.

The next stage in the implementation of the Professional Development Recognition Framework is one of consultation to discuss what type of recognition framework, if any, would meet the needs of the Irish higher education sector. This consultation requires input from all key stakeholders: those who teach, senior management, human resource managers, students and sectoral representatives. The findings from the initial implementation report highlight the importance of having senior management involved from the outset in the planning process for sector-wide implementation and to have their commitment and support in place. Questions for Senior Managers include:

- What provision can be made for staff to engage in their professional development?

- How can a commitment to professional development be integrated into the promotion pathways that are sometimes dominated by an individual's commitment and/or requirement to research?
- What steps need to be taken to enable staff to engage in a meaningful way in their own professional development?

9. Conclusion

Implementing the PDF in the higher education sector is undoubtedly challenging; but the unparalleled enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers who have embraced and actively 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 policy-makers and institutional leaders must take a leadership role to encourage and enable the sector wide implementation of the framework. They need to support all educators within their institutions to engage in continuous professional development and enable them to apply that learning to improve the student learning experience. Interviews with senior staff 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 [3].

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 [4].

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 sectoral initial 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 is 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 teaching and learning across the Irish HE sector.

That said, it is currently not clear whether or not the sector considers a National PDRF will enhance what has already been developed. If a PDRF is to be developed, there are many as yet unanswered questions about what form it should take. The planned forthcoming consultative phase will shed light on the further development of any such professional recognition framework for Ireland.

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