



Droichead

Position Paper

June 2018

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Context.....	1
3. Where We Are Now	1
4. What IPPN has heard from School Leaders	2
5. IPPN’s Position	3
6. Proposals.....	3
7. In Conclusion.....	4

1. Introduction

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the Department of Education and Skills, the National Parents' Council, management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of over 6,300 Principals and Deputy Principals.

2. Context

In May 2015, IPPN published a Position Paper on what was then known as the 'Droichead Pilot Programme – Induction and Probation of Newly Qualified Teachers'. At that time, IPPN:

- ❖ recognised that the Teaching Council had a statutory responsibility for establishing procedures and criteria for the induction and probation of Newly-Qualified Teachers (NQTs)
- ❖ acknowledged the significant importance of the induction and probation period for NQTs
- ❖ concurred with the stated aim of the Teaching Council of establishing 'a system for the profession that meets the highest standard, addresses the needs of both pupils and teachers and reflects the realities of the daily life of schools'
- ❖ Stated clearly that 'one size does not fit all'
- ❖ Supported the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) view of mentoring
- ❖ Outlined concerns in relation to workload and the possibility of a high level of 'opt out' from Droichead
- ❖ Proposed alternatives to the model outlined under the pilot programme.

Since May 2015, Droichead has undergone significant policy changes, including the following:

- ❖ It is now known as 'Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework'
- ❖ It no longer includes an evaluative element (what was known as Probation)
- ❖ It recognises induction as a significant phase in the teacher education continuum and it is seen by the Teaching Council as 'a socialisation process into the teaching profession'
- ❖ The Principal may choose not to be a member of the Professional Support Team (PST) and an external panel is available
- ❖ The NQT declares that he/she is ready to move to the next phase on the continuum.

3. Where We Are Now

From the time that it was first mooted as a means of inducting and probating NQTs, Droichead has divided opinion among school leaders. IPPN surveys conducted in 2015 and in 2017 suggest that those opinions have hardened over time, and that a majority of members do not wish to engage in a process about which they have expressed serious professional concerns. (In both surveys, 75% of respondents said they would not participate in Droichead). There are also IPPN members who have engaged with Droichead from the beginning and who believe it is the way forward for inducting NQTs and for further professionalising the role of the school leader.

IPPN commits to engaging with members before the 2019 review of Droichead. The outcomes of that engagement will inform IPPN's submission to the Droichead review.

4. What IPPN has heard from School Leaders

IPPN engages with its members through its County Networks, online surveys, CPD events and National Council. This section reflects the views and opinions of school leaders around the country.

Participation in Droichead is not compulsory for schools, however, there is no other means of induction for NQTs in SEN settings or in schools where there are 24+ Mainstream Class teachers. (The planned five-year growth phase will see all schools in this position by 2020.) Schools in these categories that do not wish to participate in Droichead have been left in an untenable position. Do they make the choice not to engage in Droichead, thereby removing the opportunity for their NQTs to be inducted, or do they participate in a process about which they have serious concerns so that NQTs may be inducted? To say that Droichead is not compulsory for these schools is disingenuous.

It is evident from IPPN's engagement with students during their Initial Teacher Education, and from IPPN's engagement with members through County Networks, that NQTs are choosing schools that are participating in Droichead over schools that are not. The apparent perception among NQTs that non-Droichead schools are anti-NQT is concerning.

The NIPT will no longer train mentors in schools that choose not to participate in Droichead. School leaders have always shared the view that mentoring less experienced colleagues through their first year of teaching is the professional and collegial approach and that this should and will continue. There is disappointment that the NIPT can no longer work with schools outside the Droichead process in the training of mentors. However, it should be pointed out that approximately 64% of schools never engaged with the NIPT when that opportunity was available to them.

The evaluative element has been completely removed from the Droichead process. As professionals who are committed to maintaining and raising standards, school leaders believe that this is a retrograde step and that it compromises the integrity of the profession. At no time did school leaders ask that the evaluative element of induction and probation be removed entirely. The concern was not around evaluation, rather who should evaluate.

School leaders who have engaged with Droichead in its pilot phase have described it as worthwhile for the whole staff. While acknowledging that participation resulted in an increased workload for the Principal and members of the PST, those school leaders also say that the investment in NQTs paid dividends in the long run, for both NQTs and the schools concerned.

Workload continues to be a determining factor for school leaders in relation to their participation in Droichead. Almost 60% of primary school principals have full-time teaching duties. Principals cannot consider participating in Droichead until such time as they have sufficient leadership and management ('release') time and adequate substitute cover to do so. In the case of Teaching Principals, this would need to be in addition to IPPN's main priority of one leadership and management ('release') day per week.

School leaders have also suggested that induction should be an integral part of Initial Teacher Education.

5. IPPN's Position

As a professional body advocating for school leaders, IPPN is very concerned that the debate around Droichead has become so divisive. IPPN believes that there is a way to accommodate and to support both those schools that wish to participate in Droichead and those who do not. It was IPPN's position in 2015 that one size does not fit all and that is still the case.

As reflective professionals, we should embrace change and be flexible in our approach. We should maintain the highest standards for our profession and provide quality leadership in our schools, because without quality leadership we cannot have quality learning (Fullan, 2006). However, Fullan also contends that successful system change requires the engagement of a critical mass of leadership. The concern around a possible high level of 'opt out' from Droichead was highlighted by IPPN in 2015. While acknowledging the challenges it brings, for the majority of school leaders not to be engaged in the induction process for NQTs is not good for the profession, nor is it responsible for school leaders to stand over a system that has no element of evaluation.

System change also requires accountability and capacity. It is time to look seriously at the capacity of school leaders. Capacity is defined as 'the maximum amount that something can contain or produce'. How is it possible for school leaders to continue 'producing' more, when nothing else has been taken away? *Workload continues to be a barrier to participation in Droichead for all Principals, and particularly for Teaching Principals.

6. Proposals

IPPN proposes the following as a way forward.

1. One size does not fit all and this should be reflected in a system that is designed to cater at primary level for anything from a one-teacher to a 40-teacher school. IPPN proposes that schools that are willing to participate in Droichead should continue to be supported and that there should be an alternative model available to NQTs in schools that are not willing to participate, no matter what the size of the school. As an alternative model, IPPN recommends that the Teaching Council recruits a group of 60 Lead Professionals as an induction and probation team, by seconding working Principals and/or recommended, experienced teachers who have a proven track record as NQT mentors within their own schools. The Teaching Council would have direct quality control of a team of professionals to manage the recruitment, training and assessment of its induction and probation team. The profession would remain self-regulating but on a more professional and quality-assured basis.
2. Allocate sufficient leadership and management ('release') time and provide adequate substitute cover to Principals to enable them to engage meaningfully in the induction of NQTs. This should be in addition to IPPN's priority of one leadership and management ('release') day per week for Teaching Principals.

3. To continue building capacity for induction, NIPT should offer mentor training to all schools.
4. If Droichead is to remain as the induction stage on the teacher education continuum, the Teaching Council should define the next significant step and include an external, evaluative element at that stage.

7. In Conclusion

IPPN recognises the reality that the Teaching Council has a statutory responsibility for establishing procedures and criteria for the induction *and* probation of Newly Qualified Teachers. IPPN also recognises the reality that without 'opt-in' from a critical mass of schools, the system will not work effectively and more importantly, the teaching profession may be severely impacted by division and a lost opportunity to build capacity.

*Note: As IPPN cannot involve itself in Industrial Relations issues, the following feedback from its members has been passed to the INTO.

The huge changes to conditions of employment brought about by participation in the Droichead process need to be recognised. Workload has increased dramatically and it is unsustainable to expect Principals, Deputy Principals and teachers to repeatedly volunteer their time to PSTs without remuneration.