



# NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR ALL STAFF WHO TEACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION



**NATIONAL FORUM**  
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING  
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## **National Professional Development Framework for All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education**



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## Introduction and Aims

This document describes the newly articulated *National Professional Development Framework* for all staff who teach<sup>1</sup> in Irish higher education. The framework provides guidance for the professional development (PD) of individuals and gives direction to other stakeholders (e.g. institutions, higher education networks, educational/academic developers, policy makers and student body representatives) for planning, developing and engaging in professional development activities.

This PD framework aims to:

- Empower staff to create, discover and engage in meaningful personal and professional development in a variety of ways
- Encourage staff to engage in peer dialogue and support in their professional development activities
- Enhance and develop the pedagogy of individual disciplines<sup>2</sup> for relevance and authenticity and enable learning from other disciplines
- Assist staff to reflect on, plan and contribute to the evidence-based<sup>3</sup> enhancement and transformation of their teaching and learning approaches
- Contribute to the quality assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience

The PD framework is flexible, inclusive and can be interpreted and adapted for: academic staff across disciplines; educational/learning technologists; educational/academic developers; research staff; library staff; support staff and students who teach others e.g., graduate teaching assistants and those who engage in peer assisted learning.

The importance of the local context within which teaching takes place is also fully recognised. This framework is designed to be interpreted in a way that reflects the local priorities within which each individual operates. Although the focus is on individual staff, the framework does not preclude its use by teams or groups of staff for group-based professional development.

The framework is underpinned by a number of identified values i.e. *inclusivity, authenticity, scholarship, learner-centredness and collaboration* (Appendix 1). These values act as a guide for individual staff, academic departments and institutions to recognise, inform, enhance and sustain professional development.

## Typology of Professional Development Activities

The typology of the professional development opportunities incorporated in the framework includes activities which are non-accredited (including collaborative, unstructured and structured) and those which are accredited (Table 1).

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1 'Teach' used in this document is inclusive of all the activities involved in the teaching and the facilitation of student learning. The term incorporates the principles of student engagement in the learning process.

2 Discipline is used in this framework to encompass the individual's discipline or subject, however it is also used to include other professional groups (i.e. educational developers, educational/learning technologists).

3 'Evidence-based' refers to any concept or strategy that is derived from or informed by trustworthy evidence—most commonly, educational research or metrics of school, teacher, and student performance.

**Table 1: Typology of Professional Development Activities**

Non-Accredited			4. Accredited (formal) <sup>4</sup>
1. Collaborative Non-accredited (informal) <sup>4</sup>	2. Unstructured Non-accredited (non-formal) <sup>4</sup>	3. Structured Non-accredited (non-formal)	
Learning from these activities comes from their collaborative nature	These activities are independently led by the individual. Engagement is driven by the individual's needs/interests. Individuals source the material themselves	Organised activities (by an institution, network or disciplinary membership body). They are typically facilitated and have identified learning objectives	Accredited programmes of study (ECTS or similar credits)
Examples – Conversations with colleagues, peer networking, peer observations, online blogs/discussion forums	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	Examples - Professional Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, PhD, EdD in: Teaching and Learning, eLearning, Leadership in Education; Education Policy

## Types of Learning

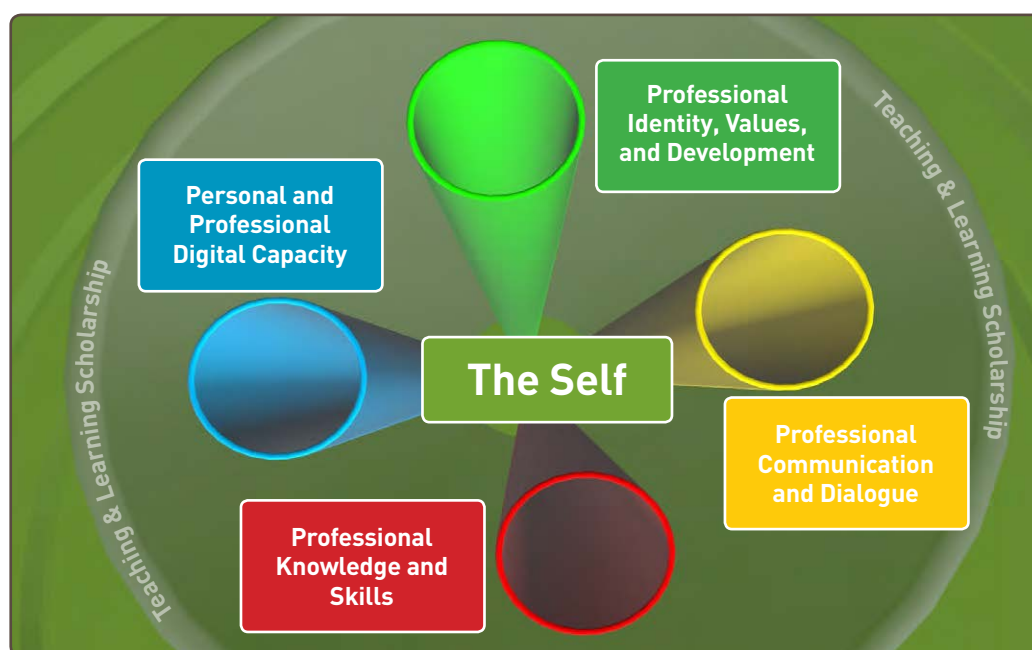
Staff who teach develop their knowledge, skills and competencies in their teaching through a range of learning activities. Each learning activity can be described by different types of learning, singly or in combination. The framework identifies and recognises four types of learning associated with any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


**Figure 1: Types of learning**

4 Informal learning is defined as non-conscious learning, it is not measured against a construct, and there are no criteria for progression. There may be a learning objective but there is no judgement or evaluation. Non-formal learning is always organised, structured and engaged in consciously. There may be a learning objective but there is no judgement or evaluation. Formal learning is always organised, structured and engaged in consciously, it has clear learning objectives and is judged and evaluated for recognised credit.

## The Domains of the Framework

The framework incorporates five overarching domains, each expanded through a series of elements. The uniqueness that each individual brings to their teaching is acknowledged by placing ‘the self’ (Domain 1: Personal Development) at the centre of all professional development activity (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: The domains, underpinned by the framework's values.**

The domains and their elements provide a framework to guide staff to review their current knowledge, skills and competencies, regardless of how, where or when these dimensions of professional learning have been developed. There is also a focus on supporting people to plan for their future professional development needs with these domains in mind. These can also be used by institutions nationally to support the provision of professional development opportunities for those who teach in higher education.

All five domains refer to the activities that staff engage in as part of their teaching (including assessment and feedback activity) and the impact that these have on their students' learning. The development of an individual's engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning<sup>5</sup> is an integral component of each domain.

<sup>5</sup> In the context of the professional development framework, the scholarship of teaching and learning entails a process of enquiry where staff reflect on their own teaching practice, gather evidence of learning impact and share their experiences with peers and/or public, so they and others may learn from the findings.

## Domain 1: Personal Development: The ‘Self’ in Teaching and Learning

### Description

This domain emphasises the personal values, perspectives and emotions that individuals bring to their teaching, including self-awareness, confidence, life experience and the affective aspects associated with teaching. It makes transparent the importance of the personal values that underpin any human interaction, especially those needed for authentic, engaged teaching and how these values are impacted by the work context. In addition, this domain encourages the exploration of the positive and negative emotions and personal characteristics that impact on teaching, e.g. confidence, enthusiasm, commitment, anxiety and frustration. This domain plays an important role in helping staff to understand and declare their teaching philosophy and approach. It recognises the importance of personal wellbeing and the significant impact this has on individual teaching and learning roles.

### Domain 1: Elements

- 1.1 Identification of and reflection on the key personal characteristics (values, perspectives and emotions) that motivate and challenge teaching, and their impact on student learning and the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- 1.2 Reflection on prior learning and life experiences that contribute, or are barriers, to teaching, i.e. prior experience and knowledge: as a student, as a teacher, as a researcher and in life.
- 1.3 Articulation of a personal philosophy of and approach to teaching.
- 1.4 Reflection on the impact of current working context on self.
- 1.5 Awareness of the extent to which personal philosophy aligns with or confronts current institutional, national and international context and associated values.

## Domain 2: Professional Identity, Values and Development in Teaching and Learning

### Description

This domain emphasises the importance of the development and self-evaluation of professional/disciplinary identity and its associated roles, responsibilities and action plans. It encourages staff to consider their professional and/or disciplinary identity in their context (for example, an academic staff member, an educational technologist, learning support staff who teach, etc.) at a particular point in time. This domain supports the development of staff’s critical reflection skills and the evaluation of their teaching. In particular, it emphasises the importance of the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Some key professional values are identified. The importance of planning for professional development activities in institutional or other contexts is also highlighted as part of this domain.

## Domain 2: Elements

- 2.1 Articulation of a professional/disciplinary identity, including current roles and responsibilities, and identification of unique features of current roles and responsibilities that potentially impact on teaching and learning practices, e.g. external examining, industry liaison, outreach activities, technological competence, information literacy development.
- 2.2 Evaluation of teaching and impact on student learning, based on self/peer review/peer observation, student feedback and/or other evidence.
- 2.3 Awareness of and contribution to the scholarship of teaching and learning, through sharing of practice, developing evidence-based approaches, research into, dissemination and/or application of research on teaching and learning.
- 2.4 Enactment of the values underpinning professional development and consideration of; respect for individuals and groups of diverse learners and staff; awareness of and promotion of ethical values and behaviour; promotion of participation of student learners; advancement and advocacy of discipline; sharing of resources; developing collegiality; identifying unconscious gender bias; commitment to reflective and evidence-based practice and citizenship (contributing to the institution/society's ethical and civic purpose).
- 2.5 Development and monitoring of an evidence-based, reflective professional development learning plan for their context.

## Domain 3: Professional Communication and Dialogue in Teaching and Learning

### Description

At the core of this domain is the importance of the excellent, clear and coherent communication skills required for the changing learning environment. It emphasises the key skills of written/verbal/visual communication, listening, dialogue and collaboration with others in the professional learning process. It recognises the importance of teaching and learning in a community to enhance student learning. The social dimension of professional learning is emphasised, and it recognises the role that communities of practice and networks play in supporting this locally, nationally and internationally; and within and across disciplines.

### Domain 3: Elements

- 3.1 Commitment to ensuring excellence, clarity, coherence and precision in all forms of communication.
- 3.2 Development of academic and other forms of writing and enquiry skills to enhance both one's own and students' learning, i.e. academic writing (journal articles, written feedback on student assignments and performance, reports, policy/procedures); general professional communication skills (email, social media) and technical communication skills (curriculum/module descriptions, exam/assessment instructions, reports and proposals).



- 3.3 Development of engaging verbal and non-verbal communication (formal and informal) and listening skills required for different situations and environments (with/to students, with teams, across institutions, with peers and with media, industry and the public).
- 3.4 Development of peer, group and team-working skills for the enhancement of teaching, learning and scholarship, e.g. curriculum team discussion, on-line forums/communities on teaching and learning, constructive peer review of teaching/research, team-teaching.
- 3.5 Commitment to the development of communicative learning communities with peers/colleagues (disciplinary and interdisciplinary).
- 3.6 Exploration of and engagement in dialogue with international and national communities/partners to enhance teaching.

## Domain 4: Professional Knowledge and Skills in Teaching and Learning

### Description

This domain emphasises the importance of both disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary approaches to teaching (disciplinary pedagogies), while also drawing on inter-disciplinary experiences and approaches. It supports an active student role in the learning process, moving toward a partnership in the teaching and learning process, essential in the higher education environment. It incorporates staff's capacity to design and implement innovative and creative teaching and learning approaches at different levels of curriculum. The importance of assessment and feedback is emphasised, in particular the move to a more learner-oriented and dialogic feedback approach for students and balance in the assessment of/for/as learning. The role of underpinning theories of learning and staff's knowledge and contribution to teaching and learning policies, procedures and scholarship is also highlighted.

### Domain 4: Elements

- 4.1 Relevance and currency of disciplinary/subject knowledge, e.g. through research, literature searches, dialogue with peers, industry/placement experiences, industry projects, professional body memberships, etc.
- 4.2 Supportive of active student-centred approaches to learning that engage students and build towards students as partners in their learning.
- 4.3 Design and management of sessions, modules and/or curricula (programmes) appropriate to the learning environment.
- 4.4 Development and application of appropriate teaching and learning approaches and specialist skills from one's own discipline and other disciplines that support the development of students' knowledge, their skills of enquiry and other stated institutional/professional body graduate attributes (e.g. critical thinking, creative, entrepreneurial, responsible, collaborative, etc.).

- 4.5 Application of appropriately aligned assessment and learner-oriented feedback approaches from one's own discipline and, where relevant, from other disciplines.
- 4.6 Knowledge of and application of the theories of how students learn within and across disciplines, and a responsiveness to the needs of diverse cohorts of students.
- 4.7 Exploration and application of inclusive, innovative, enquiry-based, problem-based and creative approaches to student learning.
- 4.8 Knowledge of and contribution to relevant teaching and learning policies and procedures in local, national and international higher education contexts.

## **Domain 5:**

### **Personal and Professional Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning**

#### **Description**

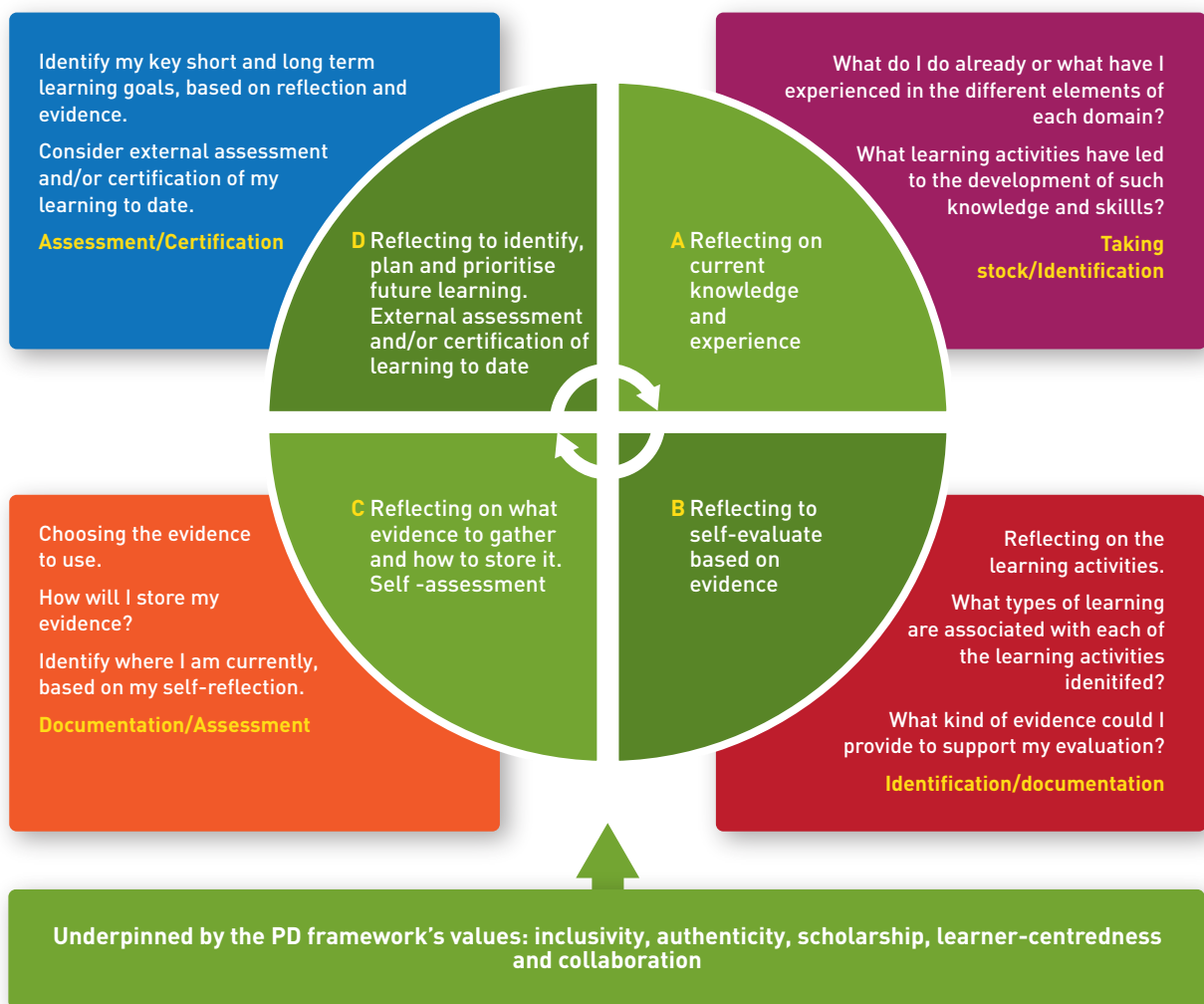
This domain emphasises the importance of personal and professional digital capacity and the application of digital skills and knowledge to professional practice. The domain focuses on the development of personal confidence in digital skills to develop professional competence and the identification of opportunities for technology to support and enhance student learning. This domain is underpinned by the National Digital Skills Framework for Education.

#### **Domain 5: Elements**

- 5.1 Awareness of the key digital aspects and opportunities on the higher education landscape and adoption of an evidenced-based approach to the application of technology in the design of learning for students (Teach and Learn)
- 5.2 Application of educational and day-to-day tools and resources to support personal learning, teaching and scholarship (Tools and Technologies)
- 5.3 Application of technologies for effective communication and collaboration with student, professional and social communities (Communication and Collaboration)
- 5.4 Use of digital tools to create and develop new learning materials, embedding a range of media and interactive resources (Create and Innovate)
- 5.5 Application of digital search strategies, skills and knowledge of the issues around the sharing and copyrights of digital resources (Find and Use)
- 5.6 Consideration of personal and other's wellbeing and awareness of the nature of online identity, data and information, and privacy and protection in ways that are ethical and respectful (Identity & Wellbeing).

## Evidence-based Reflection

At its core, the framework is underpinned by both a reflective and an evidence-based approach. Guided by its values, types of learning and the domains (listed), the framework assumes a cyclical, reflective process. The framework supports individuals in (a) reflecting on current knowledge and experience; (b) recognising the importance of self-evaluation informed by data and evidence; (c) identifying and developing a personal strategy for effective use of relevant evidence; (d) developing their own capacity to shape and plan their future learning (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Cycle of Evidence-based Reflection and Planning for Individual Staff**

This document has articulated a professional development framework that is relevant to all those who teach in Irish higher education. The framework brings together a range of disparate types of activity (many of which are already long-established in the sector) and offers a single, coherent structure against which individual professional development can be mapped.

For further information on the consultation process and the ongoing implementation of the professional development framework across the higher education sector please visit [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie).

## Appendix 1: The Values<sup>6</sup> underpinning the Professional Development Framework



### Values underpinning the framework

#### Inclusivity

The approach is inclusive to all who teach in this sector, i.e. academic staff, education technologists/ developers, teaching assistants, librarians who have a teaching role as part of their remit. It supports the large group of part-time teachers who are key contributors to the student learning experience and who may be linked with more than one institution. It should allow for flexible pathways for different staff specialisms and changing work contexts. It should be sensitive to changes in staff roles and responsibilities, including research, at all levels and stages of their careers.

#### Authenticity

Professional development should be authentic, in that it must allow for genuine and personally relevant engagement by participants. It should also be relevant to the individual within their discipline and to the institution(s) involved in their professional development. Approaches to teaching and learning in the discipline are recognised and valued (the discipline pedagogy). The academic department has a strong role to play in the enhancement and impact of meaningful personal and professional development of staff. The approach should allow for substantial and impactful engagement. It should be authentic and should be manageable in the time available.

6 These values emerged from the consultation process. Please see [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie)

### Scholarship

The approach is evidence-based and encourages staff to be informed on, knowledgeable about, and have the capacity to contribute to the evidence base of their teaching. It encourages staff to link with established best practices in professional development while also fostering innovation on the basis of evidence. It emphasises the importance of teaching having an evidence base and supporting the scholarship of teaching and learning.

### Learner-centredness

The approach supports both the staff member as a learner and the student as a learner, driven by their values, needs and motivations. It emphasises the importance of the 'self' in learning. Professional development should strongly align with an individual's teaching practice and attempt to be transformative of staff knowledge and skills. Reflective practice is a key lever for interrogating and transforming individual teaching practices over time and across contexts. An extension of this concept of (staff) learner-centredness was that of a student-centred approach to teaching. The approach should support innovative and creative teaching and learning, which aims to improve student engagement and empowerment in their learning. It should support teaching, learning and assessment approaches that have the highest impact on students.

### Collaboration

Although focused around the individual staff learner, the approach aims to emphasise the social learning that is key to learning in the workplace context and supported by many learning theories. It should encourage staff peer dialogue and support the mentoring of other staff. Although the approach emphasises the role of individual institutions, it is important to build on existing inter-institutional activity for a more efficient and collaborative approach to professional development. The approach strongly supports the development and recognition of communities of practice that enhance professional learning in local, disciplinary or cross-disciplinary contexts.



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