

MAPPING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS  
FOR THOSE WHO TEACH IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION:  
WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?



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

SUMMARY

**Mapping Professional Development Pathways for those who Teach  
in Irish Higher Education: Where are we now and where do we want  
to go?**

**SUMMARY**



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## Contents

Preface

<b>Section 1: Purpose and context</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 What is professional development?	3
1.2 What is a professional development framework?	3
1.3 Policy context: a national response to an issue of global concern	4
1.4 Quality assurance and quality enhancement	5
<b>Section 2: Key issues in current Irish practice</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Key issues related to accredited professional development in Ireland	6
2.2 Key issues related to non-accredited professional development in Ireland	7
2.3 Key issues related to disciplinary professional development in Ireland	7
<b>Section 3: Learning from existing approaches to professional development</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Key issues arising from international approaches	8
3.2 Key issues arising from professional bodies' approaches	9
3.3 Key issues arising from disciplinary bodies' approaches	9
<b>Section 4: Possible objectives for a national framework</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 Towards a National Consultation	11
4.2 Possible models of a professional development framework	12
4.3 Guiding questions for the consultation	16
4.4 Stakeholder perspectives	17
References and select bibliography	18

## Chair and Director's Preface

The creation of an Irish professional development framework for teaching in higher education (HE) has been a core strand of the National Forum's work since its inception. This process has been, and will continue to be, informed by the Forum's parallel research findings from the national roadmap for building digital capacity *Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: A Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015-2017 (February 2015)*, findings from the National Seminar Series on 'Teaching for Transitions', and findings from the Learning Impact Awards. While each are separate initiatives with their own unique purpose, when we talk about continuing professional development (CPD) in teaching we are also talking about staff's digital literacies, and when we talk about supporting excellent teaching we must listen to what students value. If you have participated in a Sectoral Dialogue, voiced your opinion in the Digital Capacity consultations, or nominated someone as a Teaching Hero, you have already begun to participate in the creation of an Irish professional development framework for teachers in higher education.

There is a wealth of sectoral activity around professional development. We start from a foundation of commitment and a history of hard work across the sector and we build on what has already been achieved by our colleagues. Many institutions and institutional consortia throughout the sector have made significant contributions to the development, enhancement and accreditation of higher education teaching skills. NAIRTL<sup>1</sup> initiated prestigious National Teaching Awards, LIN<sup>2</sup> focused on a cross-sectoral approach to accredited modules, EDIN<sup>3</sup> prioritised the enhancement of the skills of educational developers, ILTA<sup>4</sup> and NDLR<sup>5</sup> made a huge contribution to the enhancement of IT skills across the sector. It is upon these initiatives, amongst others, that the Forum's work begins.

The overarching purpose of this report is to inform a sectoral consultation on an emerging framework. In addition it is a resource which brings together information on professional development within higher education. The research undertaken reflects the Forum's commitment to evidence-based and evidence-informed policy and practice. We now have a snapshot of professional development activity across universities, institutes of technology and the private sector in Irish higher education. With that snapshot in hand, we can see what we have focused on in the professional development of those who teach, and we can identify any potential gaps in professional development offerings. We also have drawn from international expertise to generate an overview on what countries and higher education institutions around the world are doing to support professional development in teaching. In addition to accessing publicly available reports we have spoken to key stakeholders who were involved in critical processes of change in their national contexts. From those narratives we are able to learn from and build upon the experiences of our international counterparts.

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1 National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning  
2 Learning Innovation Network  
3 Educational Developers in Ireland Network  
4 Irish Learning Technology Association  
5 National Digital Learning Resources

Briefly then, this document

1. Provides a general foundation for the Forum's national sectoral consultation phase for creating a professional development framework for teaching roles in Irish higher education.
2. Provides a strong evidence base and overview of professional development frameworks internationally and of professional development activity nationally.

This report shares the Forum's significant primary and secondary research driven by the single question: 'What national professional development structures can be created to recognise, enhance, inform and sustain excellent teaching practice that supports/enhances student learning in a diversity of contexts?' Within this document we will raise key issues to inform the national consultation for the emerging professional development framework. A full version of this report is also available.

We would like to recognise the excellent work that has given rise to this consultation document, led by Dr Eloise Tan in partnership with Dr Niamh Rushe and Dr Catherine O'Mahony and supported by Elizabeth Noonan and the National Forum Board.

The evidence and questions it presents provide a strong springboard for the sectoral discussions to follow.

Again none of this work would have been possible without the committed participation from so many colleagues across the sector.

**Prof. Sarah Moore (Chair), Dr Terry Maguire (Director)**

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

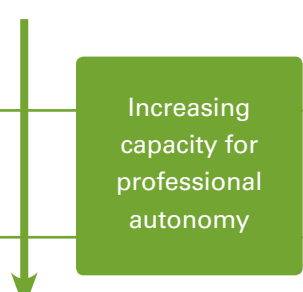
## Section 1: Purpose and context

### 1.1 What is professional development?

- '[F]ormal courses and programs in professional education and ... the formal and informal development of professional skill that occurs in the work-place' (Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006, p.384).
- It can refer to engagement with accredited modules or programmes, participating in a workshop, presenting at a conference, or undertaking pedagogical research, to name a few common professional development activities teachers undertake.
- Kennedy (2005) sets out nine models of professional development across a spectrum moving towards what she refers to as 'increased capacity for professional autonomy'.

**Table 1. Kennedy's (2005, p. 248) spectrum of CPD models**

Model of CPD	Purpose of model
The training model The award-bearing model The deficit model The cascade model	Transmission
The standards-based model The coaching/mentoring model The community of practice model	Transitional
The action research model The transformative model	Transformative



These nine models are not mutually exclusive and a professional development framework might recognise a range of activities across these models. What is key in the table above is that professional development activities are designed with different purposes; some aim to transmit knowledge to practitioners, others to scaffold and support transitions, and others to transform practice. Just as we use varying combinations of transmission/transitional/transformative methods when teaching our students, professional development activities combine to do the same for teachers. Central to the Forum's vision for a national professional development framework for teachers in higher education is a framework built upon an understanding that CPD 'nurtures the expert within' rather than filling 'empty vessels' by transmitting knowledge about teaching (Dadds, 1997).

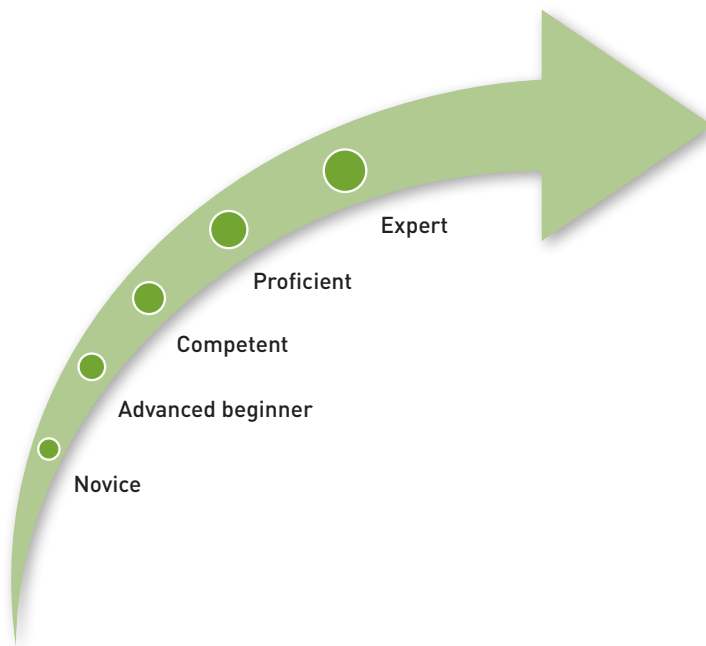
### 1.2 What is a professional development framework?

- It is a system that provides individuals with potential routes for their continuous professional development in specific domains and usually involves some form of professional recognition for an individual's assessed achievements.
- The domains addressed in a professional development framework might be technical, theoretical and/or practical.

**Table 2. Possible domains for a professional development framework for teaching in higher education**

Domain	Professional practice/ skills	Professional knowledge	Professional values/ attributes
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflective practice</li> <li>- Integration of research, teaching and learning</li> <li>- Online pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theories of education</li> <li>- Scholarship of teaching and learning</li> <li>- Digital literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusive pedagogy</li> <li>- Commitment to civic engagement</li> <li>- Leadership</li> </ul>

- The Forum proposes that these routes and domains be established and agreed upon through national consultation with all stakeholders in higher education teaching: students, lecturers, administrators, policy bodies, disciplinary groups, teaching and learning networks.
- Teaching is more than the acquisition of skills and that engagement with teaching over time is more complex than a linear progression from novice to expert.
- Professional development frameworks can take a variety of formats, a linear model from novice to expert is the most familiar, its focus on skill acquisition/development falls short of encompassing the reflective and iterative nature of teaching



**Figure 1. Example of linear progression**

### 1.3 Policy context: a national response to an issue of global concern

- International and European bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Commission, and European Science Foundation are asking what higher education institutions are doing to ensure quality teaching, and how they are actively and strategically preparing staff for teaching in higher education.



- The 2013 European Commission report on *Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institution* made clear recommendations:

Public authorities responsible for higher education should ensure the existence of a sustainable, well-funded framework to support higher education institutions' efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning... All staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training. Continuous professional education as teachers should become a requirement for teachers in the higher education sector.

(European Commission, 2013, p.64)

- Ireland was highlighted alongside the UK, Belgium, and the Netherlands as a leading example of a country taking steps towards implementing national policy initiatives in the area of professionalising teaching (European Science Foundation, 2012).
- The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* recommends that 'All higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support ongoing development and improvement of their skills' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.62).

## 1.4 Quality assurance and quality enhancement

- Figure 2 depicts how a framework could strive to operate in both discourses of assurance and enhancement.

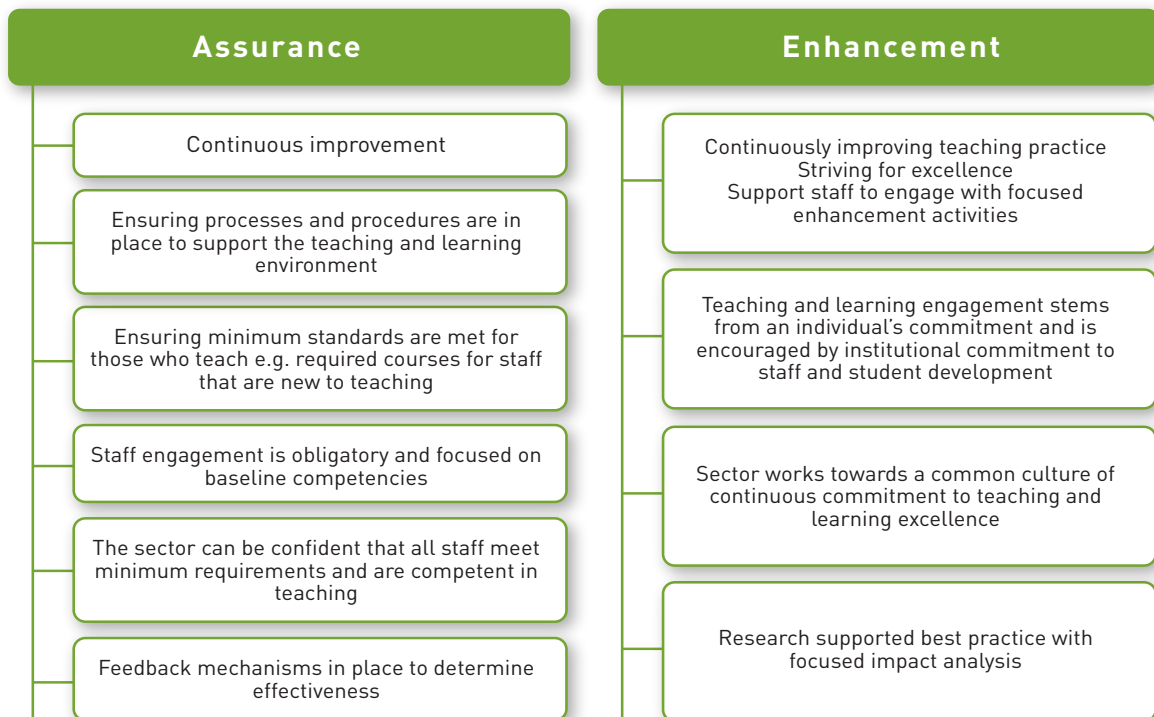
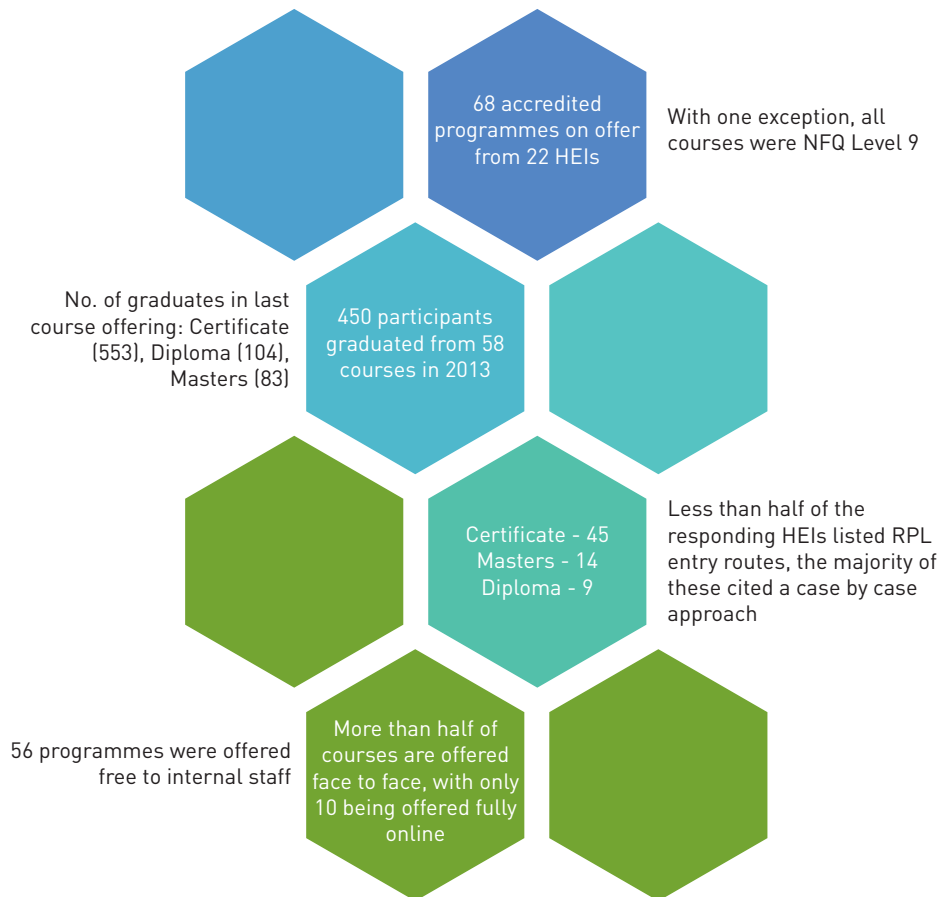


Figure 2. Approaches to quality in teaching

## Section 2: Key issues in current Irish practice

The National Forum completed a review of the current accredited CPD offerings in universities, institutes of technology and private colleges nationally (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Summary of the national offerings in accredited professional development (APD)**

From this brief summary of accredited professional development modules and programmes in Ireland it is possible to highlight key issues which may inform the emerging framework

### 2.1 Key issues related to accredited professional development in Ireland

- There is robust activity in the area of accredited professional development throughout Ireland; however smaller institutions might not have the capacity/ongoing demand to sustain programmes year to year.
- While programmes are increasingly being offered on a blended basis, there may be scope for fully online modules to offer participants flexibility from a geographic and time perspective
- There may be scope for modules at levels besides NFQ Level 9 to cater to a diverse participant cohort with varying needs coming to these modules.

- Most programmes have a general teaching, learning, and assessment focus. There may be scope for more modules/programmes catering to those who wish to pursue professional development in specialist areas such as digital pedagogy, leadership, administration.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms (incl. Entry routes) and recognition of learning do not appear to be explicitly designed into most of these programmes as they cite a case by case approach. There is scope for institutional or sectoral approaches to RPL for professional development activities.
- Clear RPL mechanisms must be designed into the framework.
- There is wide variation in credits and duration of programmes/modules offering the same award. This raises the question of national coherency in CPD accredited programmes.

## **2.2 Key issues related to non-accredited professional development in Ireland**

- Participation in non-accredited CPD is not always recognised or evidenced currently.
- The range and flexible nature of some non-accredited CPD provides a variety of learning outcomes from acquiring technical skills and competence for example in relation to specialist software to, engaging in reflective or developmental activities.
- Non-accredited CPD does not currently have a recognition or measurement process to represent the learning achieved.
- Some CPD activities can be collaborative in nature, which presents challenges in terms of recognising individual learning.
- If informal CPD is to be given some credit-status it will require innovative approaches to its assessment and recognition.

## **2.3 Key issues related to disciplinary professional development in Ireland**

- Disciplinary groups should be stakeholders in the national consultation as they are core to the identity of many teachers and key sources for open educational resources.
- Staff are resourceful in seeking out resources on teaching and learning and will search beyond institutional and national boundaries for relevant, high quality material.
- Disciplinary groups focus on a wide range of issues and teaching and learning is not always central to their mission.
- Teaching and learning approaches cited by disciplinary groups as central to their pedagogy are not exclusive to any discipline – in other words, people may prefer to talk with disciplinary colleagues about teaching, even though colleagues in other disciplines have similar issues.

## Section 3. Learning from existing approaches to professional development

Countries and professional bodies which are currently developing their own frameworks can provide useful insight into their national drivers, challenges, and consultation process. They can shed light on what they might have done differently, what unforeseen challenges arose along the way, and any helpful data and insights that have come out of evaluation and monitoring. Following a comprehensive review of international approaches to professional development, including professional and disciplinary bodies, a typology emerged of approaches to continuous professional development, this is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Typology of approaches to CPD**

Within this typology six factors can combine to create various approaches. The goal of *transformation of practice* across the sector is a shared mission. In developing a national framework for the Irish context, stakeholders should consider which characteristics will result in a system that meets the various objectives such as sustainability, inclusiveness, flexibility.

### 3.1 Key issues arising from international approaches

- Whether the approach taken is nationally or institutionally coordinated, it is clear that collaboration from key stakeholder groups is necessary.
- Consultation processes ensure buy-in from senior management from the outset. Buy in from all levels of stakeholder organisations is vital.

- From all examples we can see there is an important balance to be struck in the relationship between national bodies and institutions when supporting professional development, identifying professional development needs and goals.
- Given their quality assurance mandate the process for establishing the framework should maintain strong links and communication with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).
- RPL processes must be considered from the outset.
- Flexibility and freedom to move between institutions must be considered from the outset.
- Public regard and credibility of the framework can be strong motivators for engagement, as seen with the HEA Fellowships that correspond to the UK PSF.
- Once-off approaches such as mandatory induction programmes are effective as part of a larger strategy for CPD over the course of an individual's career.
- Planned monitoring and evaluation are key in ensuring the sustainability, relevance and clarity of national frameworks as evidenced by the UK experience.
- There should be a mechanism to ensure that those who assess others' CPD activities are well placed to do so.
- Linear or staged models offer a range of entry points into a framework, however by their nature once you have reached the apex there is no further pathway, as evidenced in the Fellowship format of the HEA.
- None of the approaches explicitly mentioned a means for individuals to specialise in topics of interest to their particular teaching practice.

### **3.2 Key issues arising from professional bodies' approaches**

- Frameworks that only recognise accredited professional development can be seen as cost-prohibitive, especially for part-time lecturers.
- A specialist approach offers greater flexibility to individuals and allows them to pursue tailored career paths.
- Assigning 'credits' to non-accredited activities might be a way to incorporate these activities; however this may lead to box-ticking behaviour. Also it might reward participation without reflection or transformation.
- Flexibility should be built into the framework so that there is scope for the development of new types of CPD activities as the need arises.

### **3.3 Key issues arising from disciplinary bodies' approaches**

- The emerging framework should take into account how it will be relevant to disciplinary needs by being flexible in its understanding that teaching excellence may look different in different contexts.
- The framework should also recognise that there are generic and transferrable principles associated with good teaching that are common to all disciplines and can last with a singular discipline focus.

## Section 4: Possible objectives for a national framework

The following objectives might serve to guide the creation of a professional development framework. These objectives and recommendations derive not just from the material presented in this document but also from initial views expressed during the Sectoral Dialogues and the digital roadmap consultations. The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should:

- Recognise teaching excellence and not just competence.
- Provide accreditation to individuals committed to teaching and learning through a transparent system of recognition and assessment.
- Enable and assist departments, schools, and institutions to develop a strategic approach to professional development and to build their reputation as internationally regarded leaders in the area of teaching in higher education.
- Reflect the higher education sector's public commitment to teaching excellence in all areas of Irish higher education.
- Support and guide those teaching and their institutions to ensure that teaching and learning within their contexts are characterised by internationally recognised excellence and rigour and impact.

### Be inclusive

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should be inclusive of diversity by:

- Recognising all roles that contribute to teaching, such as librarians, administrators, educational developers, technicians, access officers, international officers, and many more.
- Incorporating all stages of higher education careers and roles, from entry level roles to more senior roles encompassing leadership, management or institutional policy roles.
- Being accessible to the full range of institutional types and mission orientations in the higher education landscape: vocationally focused; employability focused; teaching focused; research focused and specialist discipline focused.
- Accommodating disciplinary statutory and professional bodies;
- Recognising the diversity of teaching approaches and methods such as online, face to face, blended, peer-led, enquiry and problem-based learning.

### Be clear in its aims, objectives, and mechanisms

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should be clear in terms of:

- Communicating its implications for students, those who teach, the department, and the institution.
- The transparency of its recognition and assessment process.
- The pathways available for individuals, departments, and institutions to create individualised professional development plans.

### **Be sustainable**

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should take account of its sustainability by:

- Considering how it can be properly resourced and continue to support its participants over time.
- Ensuring that evaluation processes are built into the development of a framework.

### **Be flexible**

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should demonstrate its flexibility by:

- Changing the face of teaching and learning, new practice, new approaches, new teaching and learning contexts.
- Recognising staff mobility across disciplines, roles, higher education institutions, and countries.
- Recognising that many staff are already participating in disciplinary professional development frameworks such as nursing, engineers, lawyers.

### **Be research-informed**

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should:

- Be developed in a way that reflects a deep understanding of the scholarly research in the domain of teaching and learning.
- Be informed by existing national surveys such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement.

### **Be connected to practice**

The Irish professional development framework for higher education teaching should:

- Enhance practice and have a demonstratable impact on the practitioner experience.

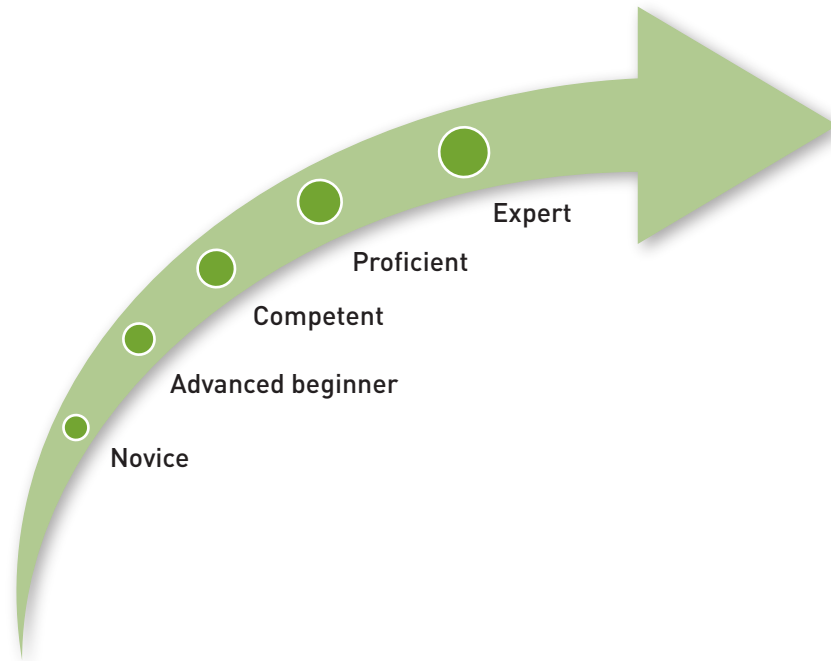
## **4.1 Towards a National Consultation**

This section presents a range of models of professional development derived from current national and international practice. The National Forum at this time is not putting forward a recommendation for adopting any particular model for the Irish context. The best model of professional development to meet the needs of those teaching in higher education in Ireland will be identified through the consultation process.

This section also outlines possible objectives for the framework and suggests some guiding questions to inform the National Consultation process. These questions are not meant to be prescriptive and we anticipate, that the consultation process will extend beyond the questions mentioned here. First, we offer some general questions that might arise after reading this document, then we adopt a stakeholder perspective and suggest questions specific to interest groups.

## 4.2 Possible models of a professional development framework

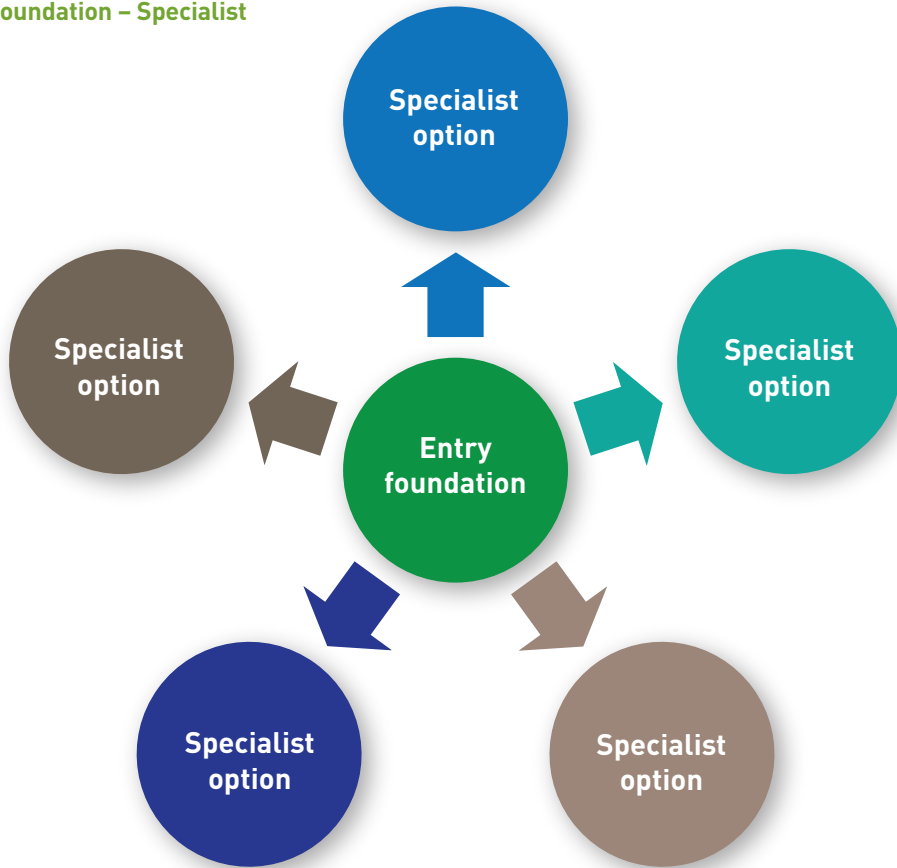
### Model 1. Linear – Staged



Opportunities	Challenges
Clear progression could make it easy to interpret for those engaged, those assessing, and those developing relevant CPD activities	One pathway for all; lack of flexibility could be a challenge for those with diverse interests or diverse career paths
'Expert' level brings level of prestige; could motivate engagement	Process to remain in good standing would need to be built in
Accredited and non-accredited activities could be incorporated	Linear format suggests that there is a set number of skills required at each stage
	Assumes that there are stages of 'excellence' in teaching
	Once 'expert' is achieved, where is the CPD pathway?

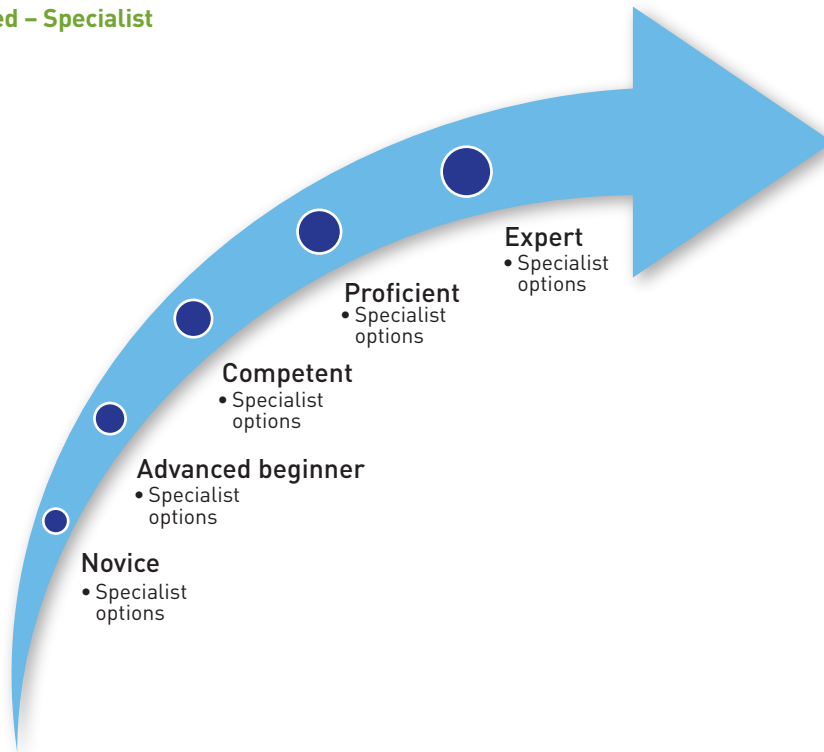


**Model 2. Foundation – Specialist**



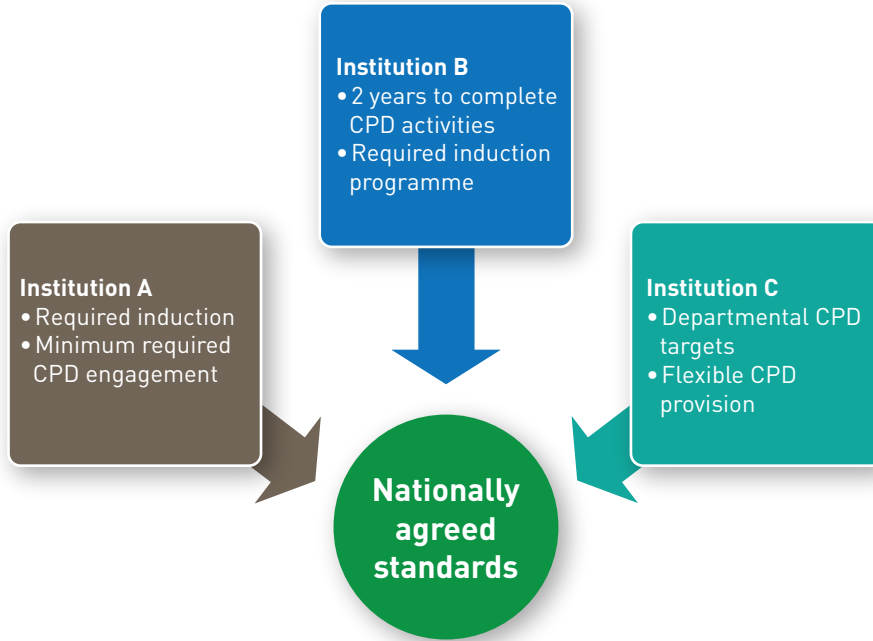
Opportunities	Challenges
A single 'entry foundation' point means that the sector could work towards guaranteeing a level of teaching expertise	Pathways are not clear, and could be confusing for those looking to engage, develop CPD, and assess CPD
Specialist options could appeal to those with diverse interests and career paths	Lack of hierarchy might be not be appealing for senior level staff
Specialist options could be created as the need arises	Administrative load associated with developing and assessing new specialist options could be heavy
Specialist options allow for individuals to follow/ showcase their individual interests	Senior staff might not see it as appropriate that they would have to demonstrate 'foundation' competence before pursuing specialist areas
Accredited and non-accredited could be incorporated	RPL routes must be developed

**Model 3. Staged – Specialist**



Opportunities	Challenges
Combination of a linear and specialist model could appeal to those who seek flexibility and those who value a clear hierarchy	Remaining in good standing needs to be built in
After 'expert' level is achieved, one could pursue various additional supplementary options/awards	Deciding which levels need to be achieved before pursuing particular specialist outcomes
Specialist options could be developed as the need arises	RPL routes must be developed

**Model 4. Central requirement – Institutional implementation**



Opportunities	Challenges
Allows for institutional flexibility/freedom to decide how to meet national standards	Focus is on assurance, not enhancement
Minimises the need for central resources to monitor, evaluate the process	One set of standards for the diversity of teaching roles
	Focus is on institutional quality, rather than individual CPD
	Career pathways not evident, more akin to monitoring

## 4.3 Guiding questions for the consultation

### **Q1 What kind of professional development framework is needed to meet the needs of those teaching in higher education in Ireland?**

- What does teaching excellence look like?
- What underlying values should inform the framework?
- How can a focus on digital aspects of teaching and learning be incorporated into a framework?
- How can a framework account for the evolving nature of learning in an increasing digital world?
- Who is the framework for?

### **Q2 How can the framework integrate and recognise existing accredited and non-accredited provision?**

- Should participation in non-accredited CPD be recognised under the framework?
- Should participation be accompanied by evidence of reflection or transformation of practice?
- Given the unstructured nature of some non-accredited CPD, how can the framework ensure the quality and learning outcomes of these activities?
- Could a credit system be considered to measure non-accredited CPD be rolled out across the sector?
- Given the collaborative nature of teaching, how will the framework recognise the contribution of individuals in a collaborative environment?

### **Q3 What approaches should be leveraged to recognise the professional work-based learning of those teaching in higher education?**

- How might standards be achieved/demonstrated and how are they maintained (initial vs 'good standing')?
- What opportunities might exist for clearer pathways, articulation between and across existing programmes, embedding and sustainability?
- Who will be responsible for assessing applications related to the framework?
- What RPL processes can be put into place to acknowledge previous activities?

### **Q4 What management structure would help to make the professional development framework sustainable and give it ongoing credibility nationally and internationally?**

- How can we reach students and ensure their voice is heard in this process?
- How will institutions and central bodies work together to promote and manage the framework?
- How will evaluation and monitoring be built into the framework?
- How could a professional development framework empower staff to flourish in the complex, challenging context of contemporary HE, i.e. given the time and resource constraints?
- How do we reach those who do not currently engage in professional development?
- How can we achieve buy-in from all levels (top-down and bottom-up)?
- How can we develop this framework in partnership with disciplinary professional bodies who have existing professional development frameworks?

### **Q5 Based on the models of professional development presented, is there any particular model either whole or in part which you think might be relevant to an Irish professional development framework?**

## 4.4 Stakeholder perspectives

### Students

How can a framework prepare teachers for the existing diversity in the classroom (mature, international, access, students with disabilities, part-time students, online students)?

How can a framework have a positive effect on not only those teachers who are new to teaching but also those who have been teaching for many years?

### Lecturers

How will a framework be accessible to part-time teachers, Ph.D. students, those new to teaching, and those who have been teaching for many years?

How will my senior administrators support my participation in the framework?

How will my previous CPD activities be recognised?

I teach in a specific discipline, how will this be relevant to my teaching context?

### Senior administration

What can I do within my department/institution to demonstrate my commitment to teaching?

How can I ask staff to engage with more CPD given their time constraints?

I am in a discipline and institution that is research-intensive, how can I motivate staff buy-in for a teaching related initiative?

Where will I send my staff to get support/CPD?

### Support staff

I teach in contexts different from lecturers, how will the framework recognise this?

I have no background in teaching, though I find myself doing it now – how can I start my journey on this framework?

### Professional bodies

We have a strong membership base of lecturers across Irish HEIs. How will our existing framework relate to the emerging framework?

### Policy bodies

How will the emerging framework dovetail with current EU and international policy contexts in relation to quality assurance and teaching excellence in higher education?

How will the emerging framework dovetail with existing Irish frameworks in the secondary and further education sector?

## Next steps

**This consultation document will underpin a National Consultation process with the higher education sector in Ireland during 2015.**

**Full details of the consultation process is available at [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie)**

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