



Stakeholder Response to the Consultation Document

A Professional Learning Continuum for School Leadership in the Irish Context

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1. Observations on the Continuum

To what extent is the continuum as illustrated, likely to meet the professional learning needs of aspiring, newly appointed and established school leaders?

“High quality leadership is crucial in establishing a central purpose and vision for a school and the achievement of high quality educational outcomes for pupils.” (Circular 0063/2017). However, high quality leadership does not happen overnight. It must be fostered and developed over a number of years. The Continuum as outlined provides a well thought-out, comprehensive structure and a clear pathway to do this for all school leaders, from Teacher Leadership, Middle leadership, Aspiring Senior Leadership, Established Leadership Support, up to System Leadership.

Provided development and delivery of the proposed programmes in the Continuum are adequately funded, adoption of the expanded framework will bring Ireland into line with international best practice, as indicated in the consultation document in relation to Singapore, Ontario and Scotland. It draws from the experience of other countries in their development and implementation of similar frameworks, which will strengthen its impact.

In line with the thinking in the Teaching Council’s framework for teachers’ learning – Cosán - it is vital that investment in lifelong professional learning, via the proposed ‘Professional Learning Continuum for School Leadership’, becomes an intrinsic and essential part of all teachers’ professional lives. Indeed, IPPN would go so far as to say that there should be an expectation of engagement among teachers, and particularly those aspiring to middle, senior and system leadership roles. Otherwise, it is unlikely that the anticipated outcomes for teachers and learners outlined in the proposed framework will be achieved.

2. What are the strengths and gaps in current provision?

The strength of the current provision is that Newly Appointed Principals are offered a good range of CPD. There are also a number of weaknesses in the current provision:

1. No clear framework for CPD provision for school leaders, not based on a continuum of support
2. Teacher leadership, middle leadership and system leadership development are not formally (fully?) developed or implemented
3. Lack of integration or co-ordination of support – it can be very piecemeal with a good deal of duplication and it can be challenging for aspiring and serving school leaders to determine which supports to avail of.
4. There is little Quality Control - many offerings are of an excellent standard but there is no overall control of this.
5. It is optional to engage with CPD. It should be mandatory for newly-appointed principals to undertake CPD to ensure they are as prepared as they can be to undertake the challenging leadership role.
6. Not all provision is aligned with the Quality Framework for Schools (Leadership and Management), the national priorities from the Action Plan for Education (2016-2019) and the recommended elements of Approaches to Learning and Teaching - reflective practice, engagement with professional learning communities, the development of ideas to challenge assumptions and deepen understanding of practice, and demonstration and reflection on effective practices in schools.
7. There are particular gaps in pre-appointment provision and in teacher leadership provision.

3. What are the strengths and gaps in the proposed continuum?

IPPN firmly believes that continuous professional learning is a fundamental requirement for all school leaders. There are a number of key strengths of the proposed Continuum:

1. The greatest strength in the Continuum is that, in line with best international practice, it provides a structure for teachers to up-skill before taking on a leadership role in school and then provides a structure for those school leaders to critically reflect on their practice as they move along their leadership journey. IPPN has a strong track record of pushing for a Continuum of leadership development such as the one proposed and is wholeheartedly supportive of the process, and the outcome of the work that has led to it.
2. The fact that the Continuum is clearly aligned with the Quality Framework from the 'Looking at our Schools' publication is a key strength, as this is a comprehensive, clear and very well received framework that has been accepted as a best practice approach to managing change and continuous improvement in our schools.
3. Collaboration among providers is crucial to ensure that the continuum meets the varying needs across the education sector, and to ensure that the key strengths of each provider are recognised and acknowledged.
4. We agree that 'leading learning should be central' to leadership development. This is an aspect that is often omitted from CPD programmes for school leaders.

There are a number of potential gaps in the proposed continuum also, indeed some of these were identified in the consultation document itself. They relate more to system policy gaps rather than continuum gaps, but are worth mentioning nonetheless, as the vision for leadership development for the future could and should include these elements:

1. A key omission is that it does not include identification and selection of potential leaders, at middle, senior, and system leadership levels, although this is suggested for established leaders.
2. There is no mention of whether engagement with professional development as outlined in the Continuum should be optional or mandatory. The latter is the case in many jurisdictions with high-performing education systems and should be explored here.
3. It is crucial that one-to-one and group mentoring for recently-appointed principals developed by IPPN and NAPD in 2017 becomes part of the proposed framework.
4. The professional engagement and learning of the mentors, as well as the mentees, should be acknowledged, and recognised as a valuable contribution to the leadership practice of the practitioners, who fed back that it enhanced their skills in mentoring their own staff, facilitating staff and other meetings as well as managing the team in their schools.

4. Challenges for Providers of Professional Learning for School Leaders

Taking into account the quality assurance requirements in the document referenced below, to what extent is the illustrated continuum likely to meet challenges for individual organisations and the system as a whole?

www.csfireland.ie CSL Quality Assurance Pilot Process for Professional Learning in School Leadership – Handbook for Providers

The Continuum as set out provides a structure. CSL are not providers of this CPD but very definitely have a role in Quality Assurance (QA). Such Quality Control would need to be attached to any funding provided to any organisation to deliver CPD.

However, it should not be limited to this. The DES should stress the importance of all leadership provision being quality assured and receiving the CSL ‘stamp of approval’.

CSL, in applying Quality Control to programmes, should be in a position to indicate to the DES if there is duplication of provision and to take steps to eliminate this through the development of the continuum. Tendering by providers to deliver elements of this continuum could be considered in future, in line with QA requirements.

Other challenges may manifest themselves in relation to the QA process itself.

5. Any other observations which you would like to bring to the attention of CSL?

IPPN very much welcomes the Continuum of Professional Learning for School Leadership. IPPN also welcomes that leadership in schools is seen as a priority with the DES and that it is acknowledged that funding invested in this leadership has a major impact on pupil outcomes. IPPN's long-term vision is a comprehensive, quality-assured provision for school leaders to access at every point along their learning journey.

It is hugely important also that the Professional Learning Continuum offers a range of academic and practitioner support to school leaders. Theory and practice should be seen as two-sides of the same coin – one without the other will not be as effective. The valuable experience of effective school leaders should underpin many elements of the Continuum.

In embarking on this comprehensive continuum of professional learning, it may be worth considering a model of personalised professional development such as that outlined by Dr Margy Jones-Carey, Assistant Professor and Programme Director for the Educational Leadership Programme at St Bonaventure University, who makes the following point

“We know the research around learning tells us that “one shot professional development” where, for the most part, you sit in a workshop, hope you understand what is being presented, take it back to your school or classroom and MAKE IT HAPPEN – does NOT change instructional or leadership practices.” She also notes that adult learning theory “tells us that adults want to have professional development opportunities that work for their individual learning styles, delivered in a timely fashion, fully supported in the implementation of the learning and not in a “one shot approach”.

Such an approach could facilitate school leaders in defining their own professional learning/leadership plan, participate in work that makes sense along the way, and avail of support in their learning by coaches/mentors and a strong professional learning community of like-minded school leaders.