

# ESRI Research Reviews New Support Programme for Newly Qualified Teachers

## Press Release

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A new research report, 'Review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme', was published today by the ESRI and the Teaching Council, providing an in-depth examination of a new approach to teacher induction in primary and post-primary schools. Introduced in 2013, Droichead is a structured mentoring programme delivered by experienced teaching staff for newly qualified teachers, combining professional support with performance assessment. Undertaken for the Teaching Council, the report aims to guide policy in this area by drawing on surveys of, and in-depth interviews with, school principals in Droichead and non-Droichead schools, mentors, members of the Professional Support Team and newly qualified teachers.

### What does Droichead involve?

- Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Droichead schools receive support from a Professional Support Team (PST) made up of experienced colleagues in the school (usually the principal, a mentor and one or more other staff members).
- The mentor is the main source of support across schools, meeting frequently with the NQT. Discussions between the mentors and NQTs mainly focus on teaching methods, classroom management and how the NQT is coping.
- Across all schools, principals play a crucial role in the choice to join Droichead and in facilitating staff buy-in to that decision. However, their direct involvement varies across schools.
- NQTs have the opportunity to observe and be observed by other teachers, and receive feedback on their teaching. They are usually observed teaching on two to four occasions, with observations taking place more frequently in primary schools.
- Droichead gives schools themselves ownership over the induction of newly qualified teachers. At the end of the process, a recommendation is made to the Teaching Council in relation to the NQT's readiness to progress. There was some tension about reconciling support and assessment but in practice staff were generally positive about this process.

### **Who has taken part in Droichead?**

- Schools taking part in the Droichead pilot programme did so on a voluntary basis.
- Those that took part were more likely to have a background in mentoring and teacher induction. Over half (56 per cent) had a formal teacher induction programme in place before joining Droichead compared with just a third of non-Droichead schools. A significant minority, four-in-ten, of Droichead principals had themselves received mentor training prior to joining Droichead. Furthermore, the majority of Droichead schools had staff who had already taken part in mentoring professional development.

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### **Research findings**

- Principals, mentors and other PST members were very satisfied with Droichead. They felt it provided a structured support for NQTs. A very significant minority of principals also felt that involvement had contributed to a more collaborative culture and greater openness within the school as a whole. Staff were also very satisfied with the training they had received.
- NQTs were very positive about the support provided by the Professional Support Team. Principals in Droichead schools reported greater levels of improvement among their NQTs than those in similar non-Droichead schools, and NQTs in Droichead schools reported lower levels of stress than those in non-participating schools.
- School staff reported a number of challenges in implementing Droichead, mainly time for meetings and observations. Meetings were regularly scheduled outside school hours and only half of principals drew down the full allocation of release time available under the programme. This reflected both the perceived inflexibility of the method of allocating release time and a reluctance among teachers to miss class time.
- Other challenges centred on the additional workload, especially for the mentor, without commensurate rewards and the difficulty for NQTs in securing enough teaching hours to complete the process in an uncertain labour market climate.

### **Implications of the findings**

The Teaching Council indicated in October 2015 that it was envisaged that, with the appropriate resources and support, Droichead would be confirmed as the route of induction for all NQTs within a three-year timeframe. The study findings highlight a number of implications for the future development of this model, principally:

- The importance of information and support in securing buy-in from principals and staff and addressing their concerns about workload and assessing new teachers, especially in schools without a strong

- tradition of mentoring and staff collaboration;
- The need to consider cross-school cooperation in Droichead provision in extending the programme to smaller schools with teaching principals;
  - Greater flexibility in the allocation of time to cover meetings and observations;
  - A need to examine how best to facilitate new graduates completing the Droichead process in a timely manner given their difficulties in accessing employment.

Prof. Emer Smyth from the ESRI commented, 'The findings in this report demonstrate the value of a structured programme such as Droichead, not only in accelerating the professional development of new teachers, but in providing a space in participating schools for all members of the teaching profession to have conversations about professional practice.'

Dr. Aisling Leavy, from Mary Immaculate College, added: 'The research provides insights into the importance of quality mentoring in the first years of teaching in terms of influencing the professional competence and well-being of newly qualified teachers'.

Prof. Paul Conway from the University of Limerick noted: 'The report shows how the Droichead programme design, resources and network form an essential support for schools as they support the work of newly qualified teachers. The Droichead programme design reflects a trend internationally whereby induction programmes for newly qualified teachers are becoming more structured and integrated'.

Mr Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director of the Teaching Council, welcomed the report and paid particular tribute to all the schools who had participated in the pilot, and whose voices are captured in the report: 'All the teachers who have participated in the pilot have had a significant impact on the future of induction through this policy. They have demonstrated how the profession can be trusted to not only maintain, but also enhance, the quality of learning for themselves and their students. The Council wishes to thank the National Induction Programme for Teachers and all teachers who have contributed to this achievement'.