



*PUBLIC CONSULTATION  
DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS*

*DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & SKILLS*

*December 2013*

The Department of Education & Skills wish to seek the views on interested parties on the role of ICT in teaching and learning in primary and post primary schools. These views will be taken into account in the development of a digital strategy for schools. Please note that submissions received may be published

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In responding you may wish amongst others to consider the following

- Strategic Development at national and/or school level
- Continuing Professional Development
- ICT Infrastructure – to include hardware, software, networks, security, backups etc.
- Digital content e.g. online reference material which can be used and adapted to support learning and teaching objectives, development/software tools
- Broadband connectivity
- Teacher support
- Planning
- New Technologies/New ICT solutions etc.
- ICT Procurement
- Junior Cycle Reform
- Assessment

*What is your vision or expectation for the use of ICT in supporting teaching and learning in schools for the coming 5 years?*

The Council's vision would be that ICT would be used by all teachers, in all schools, across all sectors, to enhance and transform the teaching and learning experience of pupils and students, in preparation for life and work in a digital society. Such use of ICT would be supported by the creative use of existing resources and, where necessary, by enhanced digital learning facilities. It would also be supported by research and collaborative learning among teachers, and by innovative, integrated and improved teacher education at all stages of the teaching career.

That vision for the use of ICT has to be situated in the context of a broader vision for education. Children and young people must be enabled to access the technology, in the broadest possible meaning of that phrase. A digital learning strategy and all the investment in ICT infrastructure will not be as effective as it could be if children and young people continue to come to school hungry, or experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. Equally, a digital learning strategy will not be effective if it is developed in isolation from curricular reform. There is a need for real alignment of thinking whereby the learning outcomes for each subject/lesson, as appropriate, would require the integration of ICT so that its use can be taught, modelled and encouraged by all teachers. There is also a need for the digital strategy to comprehend the voice and real-life experiences of our young people, for whom technology is central to how they interact with the world.

***What opportunities do you feel ICT in primary and post primary education can offer?***

The Council believes that the effective use of ICT in the classroom, particularly when combined with constructivist and collaborative approaches, can transform the teaching and learning experience for teachers and students alike. It is noteworthy that the transformative potential of digital learning applies in the context of all learners, regardless of their learning needs, and it has been shown to be of particular benefit when used as an active learning tool by those with special educational needs.

We saw much evidence of the innovative use of ICT in teaching and learning in the [Research Alive!](#) initiative<sup>1</sup>, as well as [FÉILTE](#), the event which we hosted to mark World Teachers' Day in 2013, where practising teachers provided ample evidence of use of ICT in the classroom. Video highlights of the day are available [here](#).

That being said, we acknowledge that not all teachers have embraced the use of ICT to the same extent. While we know that many teachers use ICT on a daily basis in preparing for lessons, its use with students during lessons as an active learning methodology, may not be widespread, and the Council believes there are valuable opportunities to be explored in this area. After all, it is in interaction between the learner and the technology that the richest and most authentic learning takes place.

There are also opportunities to be explored in relation to greater use of ICT: in assessment, (particularly where such assessment relates to 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills); in supporting the development of professional learning communities; and in supporting the maintenance by teachers of professional portfolios throughout the continuum of teacher education.

In availing or each of the opportunities highlighted above, regard should be had to the real-life experiences of learners and of teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> A collaborative initiative between the NCCA, the Teaching Council and the Centre for Effective Services

***What do you think the priorities for schools in relation to ICT should be?***

The priorities for schools should be:

1. To agree a whole school policy on digital learning, within the framework of the agreed national strategy, and of key national policies including those relating to Literacy and Numeracy (and in particular, digital literacy), Junior Cycle reform, School-Self-evaluation, the Integrated Language Curriculum, etc.
2. To use existing resources creatively in implementing the whole school policy on digital learning and, where appropriate, identify, and seek to fill, gaps in existing provision.
3. To support the ongoing development and enhancement of teachers' technical and pedagogical competence in the use of ICT.

***What do you see as the challenges for ICT implementation in schools?***

There are many challenges for ICT implementation in schools, and these can best be grouped under the following headings:

- 1. Strategic challenges***
- 2. Infrastructural challenges***
- 3. Competence challenges***
- 4. Internet safety challenges***

***1. Strategic challenges***

In recent years, many school communities have invested heavily in technology and, insofar as this promotes greater use of ICT in teaching and learning, this is to be welcomed. However, there is a need to ensure that the purchase of technology is based on sound educational purposes and supported by a coherent national vision and policy framework. It is recognised that the policy framework must be a dynamic one, given the pace of technological change, but it is crucial that the implementation of same is afforded ongoing priority, so that the national vision can be achieved and sustained over time.

***2. Infrastructural challenges***

Ensuring all schools have access to hardware and software, data and networks, information resources, and technical support remains a challenge. Similarly, ensuring that learning spaces are designed (and adapted on an ongoing basis) so as to facilitate high-quality digital learning opportunities will likely prove challenging and will require innovative thinking and perhaps a fundamental reconceptualisation of existing provision. In this context, the Council believes that the issue of the funding of reading material through book grants should not be seen in isolation from the funding of ICT hardware and software.

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*What do you see as the challenges for ICT implementation in schools?*

### **3. Competence challenges**

As noted in the consultation paper, “while digital technologies can make things possible it is people that make things happen”. For that reason, ensuring teachers’ competence in using ICT and in integrating it effectively into their teaching will be an ongoing challenge. Recent developments in initial teacher education will greatly improve newly qualified teachers’ technical and pedagogical competence in the effective use of ICT. The work of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (which incorporates the former National Centre for Technology in Education) should also be acknowledged. Ensuring all teachers’ knowledge and skills in this area remain current will require the adoption of a coherent national framework on CPD. It is the Council’s intention to have such a framework in place by March 2016.

### **4. Internet safety challenges**

Ensuring internet safety for all users is an ongoing challenge for society as a whole, and one that will need to be addressed by schools in implementing whole-school ICT policies. In doing so, schools are advised to consult the relevant standards in the Code of Professional Conduct which has been developed by the Teaching Council.

<p><i>What strategies should be deployed to improve the impact of ICT in teaching and learning?</i></p>	<p>The following represents the Council’s response to these three questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Council believes that the agreement of a Digital Strategy for Schools is a vital first step which will provide the framework for schools’ integration of ICT in teaching and learning. Critically, it should comprehend the voice and real-life experiences of our young people, for whom technology is central to how they interact with the world.</li> <li>2. The development of a coherent national framework for teachers’ CPD.</li> <li>3. Access by all schools to the necessary hardware and software, data and networks, information resources, and technical support.</li> <li>4. The availability of evidence, generated by school communities, as to which learning environments best facilitate high-quality digital learning opportunities. This can be supported through the development of a research culture in schools, whereby teachers’ engagement with research can inform and develop their own perception of best practice along the continuum towards “next practice”.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>5. Greater collaboration between all teachers within schools and across schools so that they can teach each other, and learn together from other, about the myriad possibilities that creative use of ICT offers them. Again, <a href="#">FÉILTE</a>, the event which the Teaching Council hosted to mark World Teachers’ Day in 2013, is a clear case in point here. The Council is planning a similar event to mark World Teachers’ Day in 2014.</li> </ol>
<p><i>What do you see as the critical success factors in the integration of ICT in teaching and learning i.e. the elements that are vital for the integration to be successful?</i></p>	
<p><i>What key actions do you think should be undertaken to ensure ICT integration is achieved in schools?</i></p>	

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<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy here is the Teaching Council’s EBSCO facility whereby all teachers are provided with free access to the Education Source collection of academic journals and ebooks.

*Other Comments/Suggestions*

1. We welcome the emphasis on a learning society in the title of the discussion paper. This, rather than the knowledge economy, has to be at the core of our vision for society. Many societies down the ages have failed to learn – and paid the price. If we want to survive and thrive, we must work relentlessly at being and becoming a learning society. ICT makes this both a virtue and a necessity. It makes the old yardstick, which viewed the key to academic success in terms of knowledge acquisition and retention, practically redundant. Almost infinite volumes of knowledge are no more than two or three finger taps away from any individual – once they have access to the right technology. What really matters now is their ability to navigate the tsunami of knowledge that awaits them when they seek it – how to discern what is reliable from what is not; how to identify what is relevant to their query now from what is not; how to organise what is relevant for easy retrieval in the future. This raises the need for the fundamentally human skills of discernment, judgement, comprehension, analysis, summary, synthesis – all in timescales which are a fraction of those which were available to recent generations. This is noted on page 5 of the discussion paper.
2. Connections, connectedness and connectivity are mentioned frequently throughout the discussion document. If all learning is understanding relationships, then all teaching is about forming connections to enable others to enhance that understanding. Connections and relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning. These concepts offer great potential for ensuring that an ICT strategy is rooted in fertile educational soil.
3. The Council acknowledges and welcomes the nuanced understanding that is demonstrated around teaching, learning and the use of ICT on page 7 of the discussion document. In particular, the emphasis on the importance of the pedagogical orientation of the teacher is critical. As stated in the National Digital Strategy, ICT is a priority area in the Council’s Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education.

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*Other Comments/Suggestions*

4. In terms of how teachers' professional learning is conceptualised, designed and sustained, it is important to note the significant amount of work that the Teaching Council has already done in these areas. All of this work has been grounded in the Council's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011), which crucially sees teacher professional learning as a life-long process, rooted in the concept of a learning community, and based on the values of collective professional confidence and shared professional responsibility. Initiatives in this area to date include:
- Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education
  - Criteria and Guidelines for Programmes of Initial Teacher Education
  - Free access to EBSCO Education collection of academic journals and ebooks for all registered teachers.
  - Establishment of a panel of HEI staff members and registered teachers to support and encourage teachers' engagement with research.
  - FÉILTE (see above)
  - Research Alive! – see above
  - Piloting of a new model of induction and probation for newly qualified teachers – *Droichead*.

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