CIDREE YEARBOOK 2026

CIDREE

In-Service Teacher Professional Development

Current Practices, Challenges, Trends, and Opportunities

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– Current Practices, Challenges, Trends, and Opportunities

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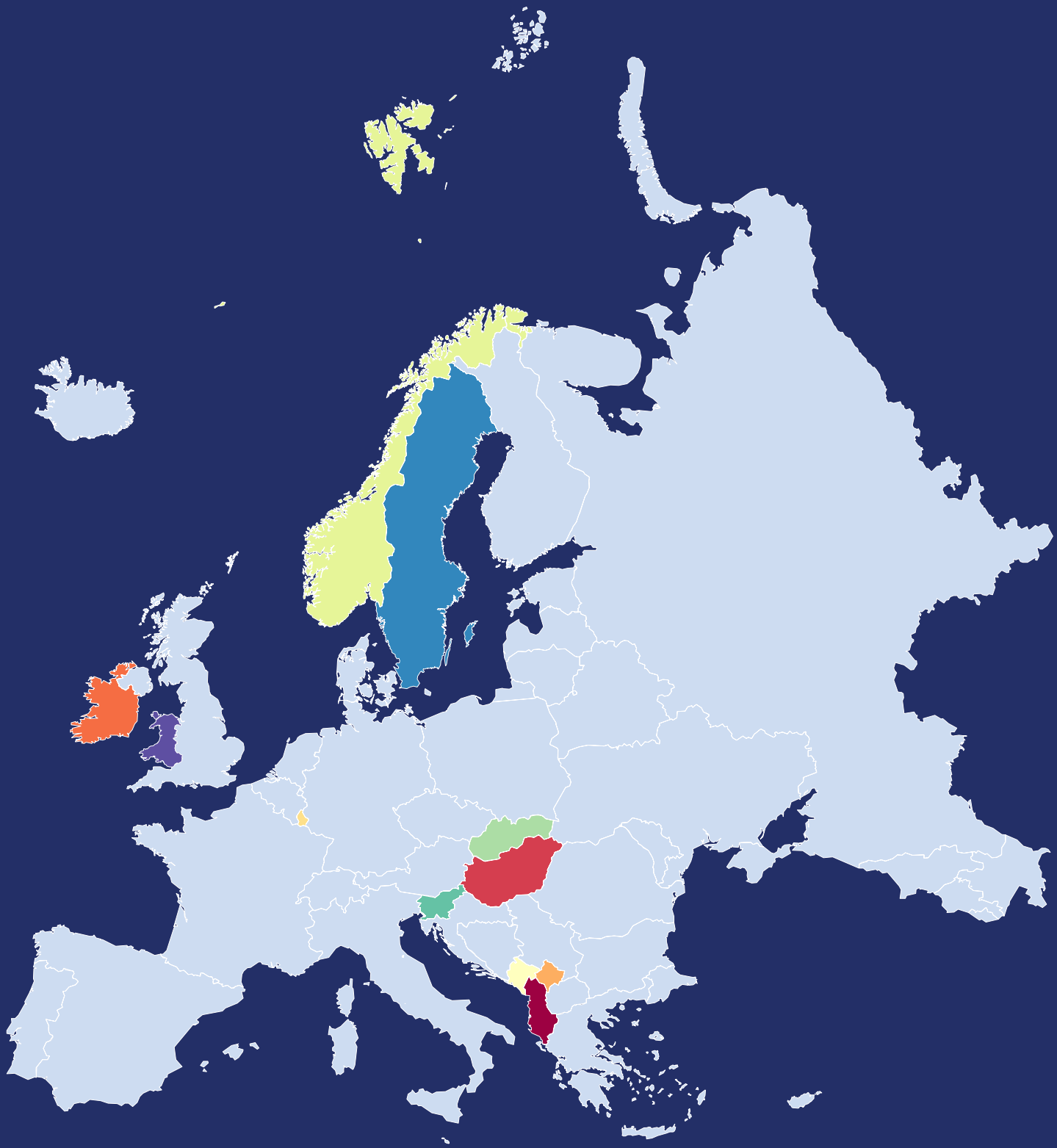
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CIDREE: CIDREE is the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe. It is a network of educational organisations involved in curriculum development and/or educational research, set up in 1991 to establish closer working relationship at a European level.

KPI: Kosovo Pedagogical Institute is an independent public, research and development institution, established in September 2007 by the Ministry of Education and Science. The Institute operates in the field of education and is oriented toward the development of the education system through research, analysis, comparisons, evaluations, and professional support for educational institutions. The core mission of the KPI is to conduct research and studies related to the development of education policies, the improvement of teaching practices, the professional development of in-service teachers, and the implementation of education reforms in Kosovo.

In addition to research, the KPI is specialised in offering training in the areas of curriculum development, teaching and assessment methodologies, textbooks, and educational leadership. It also provides support to the Ministry of Education and Municipal Directorates of Education in the field of teachers' professional development and education policies. Furthermore, the Institute prepares, presents, and publishes research findings, special publications, didactic materials, and manuals for teachers and education leaders. The scientific work of the Institute's staff is published in international journals in the field of education, in the CIDREE publications, and in the KPI's journal **Kërkime Pedagogjike.**

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SLOVENIA, SWEDEN, WALES

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President's Foreword



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NCCA, Ireland

Arlene is Chief Executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Dublin, Ireland. She started her career as a teacher and worked in a number of primary schools. During this time, she was part of the middle leadership team and held curriculum responsibilities for mathematics, music and science. Arlene joined the NCCA in 2001. Since late 2020, she has led the Council's work in advising the Minister for Education and Youth on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, and for primary and post-primary schools. Arlene is the current CIDREE President.

Foreword for 2026 Yearbook

In-Service teacher professional development: Current practices, challenges, trends, and opportunities

Our changing world is impacting significantly on what education needs to do for young people and on what it means to be a teacher. Through the theme, **'In-Service teacher professional development: Current practices, challenges, trends, and opportunities',** this yearbook highlights the enduring importance of investing in teachers throughout their professional lives. Few matters are more significant for the future of education than how we attract, prepare, support and sustain teachers throughout their professional journeys.

The 2026 Yearbook explores five dimensions of teacher development: induction and mentoring, standards and career development, school-based professional learning, appraisal for growth, and strategies for addressing teacher shortages. Drawing on the experiences of eleven countries, the yearbook signals a shift in thinking whereby teacher development and professional learning is now increasingly understood as a continuous process anchored in practice, collaboration, reflection, enquiry and leadership.

While the countries use different approaches, they share a vision of teachers as agentic, active learners throughout their careers, and of schools as learning organisations. Effective professional learning is supported by strong leadership, dedicated time for collaboration, meaningful opportunities for feedback and reflection, and structures that recognise and value professional expertise. The articles also point to the importance of connecting with the realities of school life.

This yearbook arrives at an important time for the CIDREE network. Education systems across Europe are working hard to respond to curriculum reform, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, increasing diversity, expectations of inclusion and well-being, and workforce challenges. The articles show that high-quality initial teacher education, effective induction and mentoring, meaningful professional learning, and opportunities for career-long development are essential foundations for equitable and high-performing education systems. The yearbook offers practical examples and points for reflection as member organisations continue their work to improve educational outcomes for young people and strengthen the professional experience of teachers.

On behalf of all CIDREE members, I want to thank our colleagues in the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI) for leading this work. The breadth and quality of the articles evidence the relevance of the theme and the strong commitment of CIDREE members to share knowledge and learn from one another. Thank you too to the authors and the editors who gave their time so generously to share their expertise and insights. This enriches our collective understanding and demonstrates the value of international collaboration.

I look forward to the conversations this publication will stimulate at the conference in Prishtina, and I hope it will inspire and inform thinking and action across the CIDREE community. In doing so, I am reminded of a quote from Prof Hargreaves (2003)[1] : 'What we want for our students we should want for our teachers: learning, challenge, support, and respect.' The 2026 Yearbook reflects that aspiration of building education systems in which both young people and teachers can flourish.

1 Hargreaves, A. (2003). Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Editors



Dr. OSMAN BULESHKAJ

Osman Buleshkaj pursued graduate studies in Canada and Slovenia focusing on educational leadership and knowledge management. Osman has been a high school teacher, university professor and leadership trainer. He has been a consultant for teaching, leadership and education policy with various national and international organizations supporting education reforms in Kosovo in the last 16 years. He is a Research Associate with the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute.

Editors Introduction

From professional development to professional learning: How to build coherent systems for teacher growth, quality and sustainability?

Context and editorial purpose

Teachers pursue enduring educational purposes while responding to curriculum reform, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, classroom diversity, inclusion, well-being and changing accountability expectations. Initial teacher education remains essential, but contemporary teaching requires continued learning throughout a career. Schools and education systems must create the conditions that make this learning meaningful and applicable to professional practice.

The CIDREE Yearbook 2026 examines In-Service Teacher Professional Development: Current Practices, Challenges, Trends, and Opportunities through contributions from eleven education systems: Albania, Hungary, Ireland, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Wales. Their different governance arrangements and professional traditions offer a comparative basis for understanding shared directions and context-specific challenges.

The national chapters constitute the primary evidence base for this introduction. The purpose is to synthesise their experiences and reflections, rather than present a separate research study, rank systems or identify a universally transferable model.

Five shared subtopics organise the comparison:

1. National policies and programs for teacher induction,
2. Standards and strategies for teacher career development,
3. School-based professional development,
4. Teacher performance appraisal, and
5. Addressing the teacher shortage through innovative professional approaches.



PhDc. SELIM MEHMETI

Selim Mehmeti is a PhD Candidate in Educational Management and Leadership at SEEU, North Macedonia. He holds degrees in Management and Pedagogy from the University of Prishtina and works as an independent educational researcher at the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo. His research focuses on school leadership, quality assurance, curriculum development, and educational reform. He published many professional articles for the research and analysis in fields and issues of interest to education in general.

The central shift in professional learning

Across the contributions, professional development is increasingly understood as a continuous, collaborative and practice-oriented process. Courses and seminars remain useful, but they form only part of professional learning that also includes mentoring, enquiry, reflection, peer feedback and leadership responsibilities. The focus moves towards teachers as active learners and schools as learning organisations.

Slovakia describes a transition towards needs-based and school-embedded learning. Albania seeks to connect competencies, induction, appraisal and professional roles through its emerging Teacher Career Framework. Luxembourg emphasises learning across the professional biography, while Ireland's Oide support service aims to connect professional learning with curriculum and leadership development. Wales positions learning as both an entitlement and a professional responsibility, with greater emphasis on agency and enquiry.

Factors driving this shift vary across countries. Curriculum reform is evident in several contributions. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are increasingly visible. Inclusion, student well-being, changing societal expectations, accountability reforms and teacher shortages also influence professional learning priorities. However, the common trajectory clearly shows that professional development is increasingly connected to a broader conception of teachers as learners and schools as learning organisations.

Five interconnected priorities

1. Induction and mentoring

Induction is the beginning of career-long professional learning. Structured support can strengthen professional identity, classroom competence, confidence and belonging, and may contribute to retention by reducing isolation. Luxembourg combines general, subject-specific and practical learning with portfolios and school-based accompaniment. Albania's emerging arrangements combine mentors, external advisers, observation and reflection. Hungary links mentoring with later professional development and qualification.

Contributions from Norway, Sweden and Wales suggest variance in access or provision. Montenegro points to hazards of formalistic mentoring and inadequate attention to mentor competency. Effective induction involves effective mentors, defined roles, time and resources, and a link to the day-to-day teaching.

2. Standards and career development

Professional standards and career structures can give direction to learning and recognise growing expertise. Hungary connects career stages, qualification, mentoring and evaluation. Albania's framework recognises horizontal progression through mentoring, curriculum leadership and support for colleagues. Sweden's National Professional Programme seeks more equitable access to development and recognition of advanced teaching competence.

Professional opportunities can strengthen the attractiveness of teaching, but their value depends on wider working conditions. Salary, workload, autonomy, status and leadership matter alongside access to learning. Professional development therefore needs to be part of coherent workforce policy.

3. School based professional learning

School-based learning connects teachers' needs with classroom practice and school improvement. Montenegro describes mentoring, demonstration lessons, observation, action research and professional forums. Luxembourg emphasises collective capacity and shared responsibility. Ireland and Slovakia highlight collaboration, professional learning communities and peer feedback.

The quality of these approaches depends on leadership, protected time, relevant needs, opportunities to test practices and sustained follow-up. Delivering a course inside a school does not itself establish a learning culture. Slovenia's contribution also highlights the need to evaluate changes in practice and student learning rather than infer effectiveness from participation.

4. Appraisal for professional growth

Appraisal approaches range from Hungary's formal qualification and evaluation structures to Luxembourg's emphasis on autonomy, portfolios and formative reflection. Albania connects evaluation to induction and progression, while Wales promotes professional dialogue through Professional Development Review. Slovakia cautions against administrative formalism. Across these approaches, appraisal is more likely to support improvement when feedback leads to reflection and further learning.

5. Teacher shortages and sustainability

Shortages differ by subject, location and educational phase. Their causes include remuneration, workload, demographic change, alternative employment and professional status. Norway broadens recruitment policy towards the whole professional lifecycle; Hungary combines salary and career reforms; Montenegro considers targeted incentives; and Sweden links development with recognition of expertise. Recruitment, induction, career opportunities and retention need to be addressed together.

Comparative overview of the eleven systems

The following table summarizes selected emphases in the supplied introduction. It does not classify entire national systems or measure their effectiveness.

System	Main emphasis	Selected mechanisms or challenges	Key terms
Albania	Integrated career framework	Competencies, induction, portfolios and horizontal progression	Career coherence
Hungary	Structured career pathway	Qualification, mentoring, appraisal and salary reform	Recognition and progression
Ireland	Integrated national support	Oide, curriculum reform, leadership and collaborative learning	System coherence
Kosovo	Implementation and continuity	Certificate accumulation, limited school-based learning and fragmented initiatives	Practice and follow-up
Luxembourg	Professional biography	Structured induction, autonomy, reflection and learning organisations	Agency and reflection
Montenegro	School-based development	Mentoring, observation, action research and targeted incentives	Leadership and collaboration
Norway	Local ownership and national support	School–university partnerships, induction and lifecycle recruitment policy	Recruitment and retention
Slovakia	Transition beyond courses	Needs-based learning, peer feedback and school-embedded support	Learning in practice
Slovenia	Evaluation of professional learning	Monitoring impact beyond programme availability and participation	Evidence of impact
Sweden	National professional programme	Equitable access, advanced competence and coordination across governance levels	Equity and recognition
Wales	Learning entitlement	Standards, induction, professional dialogue and enquiry	Entitlement and agency

The recurring issues are coherence between policies, access to meaningful learning, strong school leadership and evidence of application. National frameworks offer direction, while implementation depends on local professional conditions.

Cross system lessons and implications

This year's contributions point to a shared need to connect policy expectations with professional learning in everyday school life. Mandatory requirements may secure participation, but hours, credits and certificates do not establish that learning is continuous or that practice has improved. Kosovo makes this tension particularly visible; it also appears in wider concerns about administrative appraisal and weak follow-up.

Promising arrangements combine clear expectations with equitable access and professional agency. Teachers need opportunities to identify relevant needs, collaborate, apply learning, receive feedback and revisit practice over time. School leadership is central to this process, especially where local autonomy shapes provision. National support remains important for resources, quality and consistency.

Appraisal and evaluation have distinct but connected roles. Appraisal can identify an individual teacher's strengths and development needs. Evaluation of professional learning examines whether programmes and school-level activities produce useful changes. The supplied introduction does not establish causal effects or comparable impact measures across countries; it identifies policy approaches and conditions that deserve further examination.

Workforce sustainability requires attention to the whole career. Recruitment campaigns can increase interest, but teachers' subsequent experiences influence whether they remain. Induction, manageable workload, professional recognition, development opportunities and meaningful progression must therefore operate together. Learning opportunities cannot compensate for inadequate remuneration or poor working conditions.

Priorities for coherent implementation

The following priorities provide a framework for coherent implementation by aligning initial teacher preparation, continuous professional development, appraisal and career advancement within a supportive and sustainable system.

1. Connect initial preparation, induction, professional learning, appraisal and career progression through clear responsibilities and sustained support.
2. Create protected time for collaboration and mentoring, with attention to mentor competence and the capacity of school leaders.
3. Combine professional expectations with equitable access, teacher agency and learning that responds to classroom and school needs.
4. Use portfolios, observation, feedback and enquiry to connect development with professional practice, without reducing learning to certification.
5. Monitor application and outcomes over time, and align professional learning with recruitment, retention and wider working conditions.

Conclusion

The CIDREE Yearbook 2026 offers different perspectives on a commonly identified challenge: how to create education systems in which teachers continue to learn, develop and contribute throughout their professional careers. The central message is that professional learning should be treated as a capacity of the education system. It is most promising when it is continuous, collaborative, responsive to needs and connected to induction, feedback, school improvement and meaningful career opportunities. The eleven contributions offer different routes towards this goal, while reminding readers that national approaches require adaptation to local governance and professional cultures.

Acknowledgement

The Editors thank the contributing authors and institutions for their expertise, careful work, patience and constructive cooperation. Their national perspectives make this volume a shared resource for understanding how education systems can support teachers throughout their careers.

It has been a genuine pleasure to work with colleagues representing such diverse education systems and perspectives.

ALBANIA

The Teacher Career Framework in Albania: Professional Development in Practice, Challenges, and Opportunities



Contents

Introduction: Professional development as a strategic priority
The teacher career framework
Continuous professional development: evolution and current practices
Linking professional development with career advancement
School-based professional development
Addressing the teacher shortage through
Innovative professional development forms
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Institution profile

The Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education in Albania is a public institution responsible for supporting and promoting the quality, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of pre-university education. Its work contributes to the implementation of national education policies and standards and aims to ensure that schools provide equitable, inclusive, and high-quality learning opportunities for all students.

The Agency plays an important role in quality assurance through the development and implementation of evaluation mechanisms, professional standards, guidelines, and instruments for assessing the performance of educational institutions. It supports schools and educational professionals in identifying strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and developing sustainable strategies for enhancing teaching and learning.

ALBANIA

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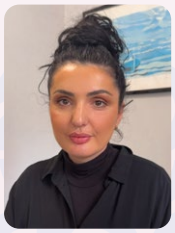
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The Teacher Career Framework in Albania: Professional Development in practice, challenges, and opportunities

Authors: PhD. Gerti Janaqi, PhD. Dorina Rapti, Erida Koleci, Ines Todhe, Marina Topulli

Abstract

The Teacher Career Framework in the Republic of Albania aims to create a structured system for entry into the profession, qualification, advancement, and assessment of teachers. This framework outlines different career pathways within the profession, envisions a three-phase qualification cycle (qualified teacher, specialist teacher, and master teacher) and emphasizes the horizontal and vertical roles teachers can take on during their careers. The article assesses how the framework interacts with the national professional development programme and the new policies of the Ministry of Education, identifying current practices, emerging trends and the main challenges hindering teachers' professional development. The data show that digitalization, orientation towards STEM competences and new roles in schools are opening opportunities, while insufficient infrastructure and limited time remain key challenges. The article offers recommendations for empowering teachers through mentoring, professional collaboration, and strategic investments in training.

Keywords: Career framework, teacher, professional development, qualification, horizontal roles, vertical roles, challenges, trends, digitalization, induction, school-based training, teacher shortage

1. INTRODUCTION: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Education systems around the world are undergoing rapid transformation as societies confront technological change, economic uncertainty, and complex social challenges. In this context, strengthening the capacity of education professionals and institutions to learn, adapt and respond to changing needs is central to building more responsive and resilient education systems (OECD, 2021). Albania, a small country with a young population and a history of reforms in its pre-university sector, has recognized the importance of making teaching a profession defined by continuous learning. Over the past two decades the Ministry of Education has invested in curriculum reform, new standards for in-service teachers and strengthened quality assurance mechanisms. The Teacher Career Framework adopted in 2024 encapsulates this experience by setting out clear pathways for entry, induction, advancement, and support throughout the teaching career. Before examining the specifics of the framework, it is useful to understand how teachers' career development has evolved in Albania.

1.1. Historical context of teachers' career development

In the early 1990s, Albania began a profound transformation from a highly centralized and state-controlled education system towards one increasingly aligned

with European principles and standards. During the first years of transition, initial teacher education was provided mainly by pedagogical institutes and university faculties, while opportunities for structured professional learning after entry into the profession remained limited. In-service training was generally organized in response to immediate needs and focused primarily on communicating changes to curricula, subject programmes and teaching requirements. It was often delivered through short, isolated activities, with limited follow-up regarding the application of acquired knowledge and skills in classroom practice.

Throughout the 2000s, teacher professional development gradually became a more explicit component of national education policy. The Ministry of Education introduced professional standards for teachers, strengthened regional and local education structures, and supported programmes focusing on learner-center methodologies, active learning, inclusive education, assessment for learning and the use of technology. Many of these initiatives were implemented with the support of international organizations and development partners. Although they contributed to the modernization of teaching practices, their implementation also highlighted the need for a more coherent national system connecting teachers' professional needs, training provision, classroom implementation, evaluation, and career progression.

Institutional expertise in curriculum development, pedagogical research and teacher training in Albania has a longer history. Its origins can be traced back to the Institute of Pedagogical Studies, established in 1965, and to the institutions that subsequently assumed responsibilities for curriculum, educational research, and teacher development. In 2010, the Institute for Educational Development was established based on of the former Institute of Curricula and Training. A significant institutional change occurred in 2019 with the establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP), through Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 98, dated 27 February 2019. ASCAP was created on the basis of the former Institute for Educational Development and the State Education Inspectorate, bringing curriculum development, teacher professional development, and quality assurance functions within a more integrated institutional structure.

Today, ASCAP plays the central technical and professional role in supporting the development of teachers, school leaders, and other education professionals across public and private pre-university education. It assesses professional development needs, develops and reviews professional standards, contributes to the design of national professional development policies and programmes, and prepares methodological guidance, training modules, and supporting materials for education professionals. ASCAP also organizes and supports professional development and teacher qualification processes, while promoting school-based professional learning through subject teams, professional networks, quality coordinators, mentors, and school leaders.

The Agency is also responsible for key aspects of the quality assurance of professional development. ASCAP manages the process of evaluating and accrediting training programmes and modules offered to education professionals, based on nationally defined standards and criteria. This process examines the relevance of proposed activities to national education priorities and teachers identified needs, as well as the quality of their content, learning outcomes, methodology, assessment procedures, and supporting materials. Through accreditation, monitoring and evaluation, the Agency contributes to ensuring that professional development activities are coherent, professionally sound and capable of producing meaningful changes in teachers' knowledge, competencies, and classroom practices. Participant feedback, implementation reports, and evidence from monitoring processes are used to identify areas requiring improvement and to inform subsequent professional development provision.

The Teacher Career Framework builds on this institutional and policy development by bringing together induction, mentoring, continuous professional development, performance evaluation, qualification, and advancement within a coherent system. In this framework, ASCAP serves as a key bridge between national education policy and professional practice, ensuring that career development is supported by relevant learning opportunities, reliable quality assurance mechanisms, and clear expectations for professional growth (Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP, 2024). Its role is therefore not limited to organizing training, it contributes to building a sustainable professional learning system in which teachers and school leaders are continuously supported to implement the curriculum effectively, improve teaching quality and respond to the changing needs of learners and schools.

2. THE TEACHER CAREER FRAMEWORK

The quality of an education system depends to a considerable extent on the quality, motivation, and professional growth of its teachers. As expectations of schools have expanded, the teaching profession in Albania has also become increasingly complex. Teachers are expected not only to possess strong subject knowledge and pedagogical competence, but also to respond to learner diversity, apply inclusive and differentiated approaches, integrate digital technologies, support pupils' social and emotional development, collaborate with colleagues and families, and contribute to the improvement of the school as a professional learning organization. These growing responsibilities require a career system that supports teachers throughout their professional lives and recognizes the diverse ways in which they contribute to teaching quality, school development and student learning.

Against this background, the Ministry of Education and Sports, with the technical contribution of the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP), developed and approved the **Teacher Career Framework in the Republic of Albania** in 2024 with order no. 156 date 23.09.2024. The Framework was accompanied by two important regulatory acts: Instruction No. 16, dated 22 July 2024, "On the organization and functioning of the system of continuous professional development of education employees", and Instruction No. 17, dated 22 July 2024, "On the criteria and procedures for the qualification of education employees". Together, these documents provide the policy and regulatory basis for connecting teachers' professional development, qualification, performance evaluation, and career progression within a more coherent national system.

The Teacher Career Framework (Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP, 2024) is designed as a structured and unified "map" that helps teachers understand how they can enter, develop, and advance within the profession. It provides a common point of reference for teachers, school leaders, education authorities, higher education institutions, and professional development providers. Rather than treating a teaching career as a linear progression based on years of service, the Framework places greater emphasis on professional competencies, demonstrated performance, continuous learning, increased responsibility and contribution to school improvement and student outcomes (ASCAP, 2024).

The Framework recognizes that teachers' professional needs and responsibilities evolve throughout their careers. Newly qualified teachers require induction, mentoring and structured support as they move from initial teacher education

into full professional practice. More experienced teachers need opportunities to deepen their subject and pedagogical expertise, reflect on their classroom practice, participate in professional networks, and contribute to curriculum implementation. At more advanced stages, teachers may take on broader responsibilities as mentors, subject-team leaders, professional network leaders, trainers, quality coordinators, or school leaders. In this way, career progression includes both horizontal development—through specialized and professional roles within teaching—and vertical advancement towards leadership and management positions.

At its core, the Framework brings together the main components of the teaching career: the professional competencies expected of teachers; entry into and employment in the profession; induction and mentoring; continuous professional development; qualification and career stages; professional roles and responsibilities; teachers' working time; performance evaluation; professional recognition; and salary-related incentives. By linking these components, it seeks to reduce fragmentation between different policies and procedures and to establish a clearer relationship between what teachers are expected to know and demonstrate, the learning opportunities available to them and the ways in which their professional growth is assessed and recognized (ASCAP, 2024).

The Framework is also intended to strengthen teachers' ownership of their professional development. It encourages teachers to identify their professional needs, establish short- and long-term career goals, maintain evidence of their learning and achievements through a professional portfolio, participate in accredited professional development activities, and reflect systematically on the effect of their practice on student learning. Professional development is therefore understood not simply as attendance at training courses, but as a continuous process that includes mentoring, peer learning, classroom-based inquiry, professional networks, conferences, publications, projects, collaborative planning, and other forms of professional engagement (ASCAP, 2024).

Equality, diversity, and inclusion constitute important principles of the Framework. All teachers should have fair access to professional learning, qualifications, and career advancement opportunities, regardless of gender, geographical location, school context, professional background, or years of experience. Attention is given to create opportunities for teachers to develop their individual strengths, undertake additional responsibilities and contribute to innovation, inclusive education, and improved learning outcomes. The Framework also promotes leadership development by recognizing that educational leadership is not limited to formal management positions; it can be exercised through mentoring, curriculum leadership, professional collaboration, quality assurance, and support for colleagues.

The Framework seeks to improve both the status of the teaching profession and the quality of education provided to learners. By setting out clear expectations, career pathways, and opportunities for advancement, it aims to increase teachers' motivation, strengthen professional accountability, retain experienced and high-performing teachers and encourage continuous improvement. It also provides the foundation for aligning initial teacher education, induction, professional development, qualification, performance evaluation, and professional recognition. In this sense, the Teacher Career Framework is not merely a description of career stages, but a strategic instrument for building a more capable, reflective, collaborative, and future-oriented teaching profession in Albania.

2.1. Purpose and main elements

The main elements of the Teacher Career Framework include the following (ASCAP, 2024):

- Career pathways: Different routes within the profession, including entry, continuous development, leadership, and administrative roles.
- Professional development opportunities: Training sessions, seminars, conferences, collaborative projects, action research, and participation in professional networks designed to enhance skills and knowledge.
- Career phases: Three qualification stages, beginner (qualified teacher), intermediate (specialist teacher) and advanced (master teacher), each with distinct expectations and responsibilities.
- Roles and responsibilities: A description of teaching, leadership, mentoring, and community roles for each phase.
- Professional competences: Standards defining pedagogy, classroom management, communication, cultural competence, and digital skills.
- Performance appraisal and recognition: Criteria and processes for evaluating teachers and mechanisms for recognizing quality and innovation.

2.2. Entry into the profession and initial training

Entry into the profession requires academic preparation aligned with the education level. Bachelor programmes prepare pre-school and primary education teachers, while professional master's programmes prepare secondary teachers and support specialists. Pre-service teachers complete a professional internship and must pass a state exam to obtain a license. During this stage teachers are considered trainees, the focus is on acquiring classroom experience under the guidance of mentors. Social security coverage is provided, but salary increases occur only after licensure. Historically, entry into teaching lacked a structured induction period. The framework now recognizes that successful transition into the profession requires comprehensive support and mentoring. The next section outlines how the induction phase is organized and how it differs from later stages.

2.3. Induction phase: support and mentoring

The first three years after licensing constitute a structured induction phase. New teachers are accompanied by a combination of school-based mentors and external advisors from the Quality Assurance Agency. Mentoring focuses on reflective practice, classroom observation, and personalized support. Teachers assemble a professional portfolio documenting lesson plans, reflections, and feedback. Regular seminars complement school-based support by addressing pedagogical themes, assessment, and classroom management. The induction programme also includes peer-learning groups where novices share experiences and solutions. Unlike later career stages, evaluation during induction is developmental: mentors and school leaders provide formative feedback to help teachers consolidate competences. At the end of the induction period a summative evaluation determines eligibility for promotion to the next qualification level. This emphasis on induction and mentoring is consistent with international evidence highlighting the importance of structured support for novice teachers during the early years of their careers (OECD, 2019).

2.4. Qualification phases and criteria

After induction teachers advance through three qualification levels, each with defined times and criteria:

Qualification phase	Main criteria	Benefits
Qualified teacher	At least 3 years of experience as a teacher; 30 professional development credits (10 credits per year) with 50 % of the credits in methodology and 70 % in direct activities; 1 observed lesson with an assessment ≥ 60 % and positive performance evaluation; a methodologicalpedagogical test.	10 % salary increase; the right to serve as a class tutor, mentor for trainees and head of a subject team in the absence of highercategory teachers.
Specialist teacher	At least 8 years of experience, of which 5 years after qualifying as a qualified teacher; 50 professional development credits within 5 years; an observed lesson with an assessment > 60 % from the committee, an innovative curricular project and performance evaluation “Good” or “Very good”.	20 % salary increase; opportunities to function as a mentor for trainees, head of subject teams, head of professional networks, examiner of exams and textbooks, collaborator in curriculum development documents and trainer at local level.
Master teacher	At least 15 years of experience, of which 7 years after qualifying as a specialist teacher; 70 professional development credits within 7 years; an innovative curricular project with an assessment > 60 % and performance evaluation “Very good”.	20 % salary increase; the right to compete for leadership positions and to lead innovative projects.

Note. Adapted from Teacher Career Framework in the Republic of Albania (ASCAP, 2024).

The framework envisages reducing the time to reach the first qualification level to three years. Evaluation criteria combine classroom observation, portfolio evidence, professional development records, and contributions to the school community.

2.5. Horizontal and vertical career pathways

In addition to qualification levels, the Framework provides horizontal and vertical career pathways (ASCAP, 2024).

- **Horizontal pathways:** Teachers may assume roles such as class tutor, mentor for trainees and new teachers, head of a subject team, coordinator for inclusive education, extracurricular activities or career guidance, leader of a professional network or national trainer. New roles, for example quality assurance coordinator and career guidance coordinator, aim to strengthen internal evaluation and mentoring cultures (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2024).
- **Vertical pathways:** Teachers can progress to leadership positions such as deputy head or head of an educational institution, external evaluator, or specialist within local education units. The n 2026, the Ministry of Education positions involve additional responsibilities and often come with salary incentives or reduced teaching loads.

2.6. New roles

An important innovation of the Teacher Career Framework is the introduction and formal recognition of new professional roles that enable experienced teachers to contribute to school improvement without necessarily leaving classroom teaching. These roles expand the concept of career progression beyond the traditional route from teacher to deputy head or school principal. They create opportunities for horizontal career development, allowing teachers to assume responsibilities in quality assurance, mentoring, professional learning, curriculum leadership, and student career guidance while remaining closely connected to teaching and learning.

Two of the most significant new positions are the **Quality Assurance Coordinator** and the **Career Guidance Coordinator.** The criteria for the designation of these roles in public pre-university schools were established by Order No. 463, dated 30 August 2024, of the Minister of Education and Sports (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2024). Their introduction reflects a broader policy objective: to strengthen schools' internal capacities, distribute leadership responsibilities more effectively and place professional expertise closer to teachers and students. Rather than relying exclusively on school leaders or external authorities, schools are encouraged to develop internal mechanisms for monitoring quality, supporting professional growth and responding systematically to students' educational and career needs.

Quality Assurance Coordinator

The Quality Assurance Coordinator supports the school leadership team in translating the school's vision and development priorities into concrete improvement processes. The coordinator plays a key role in school self-evaluation, professional development, curriculum implementation and the analysis of student achievement. This position is particularly relevant in larger schools, where the complexity of internal evaluation, staff development and data management requires dedicated professional support.

The coordinator contributes to the collection, organization and analysis of evidence related to teaching quality, student outcomes, school climate, inclusion, and the implementation of the school development plan. This evidence may include student assessment results, classroom observation findings, teachers' professional development needs, feedback from students and parents, and information generated through internal monitoring. The purpose is not merely to document performance, but to help the school identify strengths, determine priorities and take evidence-informed decisions for improvement.

The role also strengthens school-based professional development. Based on evidence from self-evaluation, classroom practice and student achievement, the coordinator supports the identification of teachers' professional learning needs and contributes to the preparation and implementation of the school's professional development plan. The coordinator may facilitate peer-learning activities, professional discussions, mentoring arrangements, open lessons, collaborative planning, and the sharing of effective practices. Attention is given to ensuring that professional development responds to real classroom needs and contributes to improvements in teaching and learning.

Career Guidance Coordinator

The Career Guidance Coordinator has a different but complementary function. This role responds to the need for students to receive structured support in understanding their interests, strengths, abilities, and aspirations and in making

informed decisions about further education, vocational education and training, and future employment. Career guidance is therefore understood as an educational process that develops gradually, rather than as a single activity conducted only when students are about to complete a level of schooling.

The coordinator helps plan and implement career education and guidance activities across the school. These may include individual and group guidance, information sessions, student self-assessment activities, career exploration, workplace visits, meetings with professionals, cooperation with vocational schools and higher education institutions, and information for parents. The coordinator also supports students in identifying possible educational pathways and understanding the relationship between subject choices, competencies, qualifications, and labour-market opportunities.

The Career Guidance Coordinator works closely with classroom teachers, the school leadership team, the psycho-social service, parents, and external institutions. Teachers can provide valuable information about students' interests, performance, and emerging abilities, while the psycho-social service can support the consideration of students' individual, social and emotional needs. Cooperation with universities, vocational education providers, businesses, public institutions, and community organizations enables students to encounter a broader range of educational and occupational possibilities.

2.7. Working hours and incentives

The link between career progression and remuneration is also evident across European education systems, where statutory salaries increase over the course of teachers' careers and may be complemented by allowances and other additional payments **(European Commission et al., 2022). In Albania,** teachers' workloads amount to approximately 30 hours per week in school, comprising teaching, lesson planning, teamwork, pupil assessment, consultations and participation in management and professional development. The school head has discretion to adjust this distribution based on the institution's needs.

To encourage professional development and additional roles, the framework provides salary incentives. Teachers receive increases according to their qualification category and may receive extra pay or reduced teaching hours for roles such as class tutor, mentor, subject team leader, quality assurance coordinator, network leader, or national trainer (ASCAP, 2024).

2.8. Teacher evaluation

Teacher evaluation is grounded in professional standards approved by the Ministry. During the induction phase evaluation has a formative focus: mentors and school leaders observe lessons, review portfolios, and provide feedback to support professional growth. At the end of induction, a certifying evaluation assesses whether the teacher has met standards for independent practice. In subsequent career stages evaluation combines self-assessment, peer review, classroom observation, and external evaluation. School leaders conduct annual performance reviews, while external evaluators from the Quality Assurance Agency conduct periodic observations. Results of evaluation inform promotion decisions, identify professional development needs, and reinforce accountability, teaching quality and continuous improvement.

3. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: EVOLUTION AND CURRENT PRACTICES

Continuous professional development (CPD) in Albania has evolved significantly over the past two decades. Before the National Professional Development Programme, CPD consisted of isolated workshops and donor-driven projects addressing curriculum changes or specific pedagogical approaches. Many teachers participated in training only sporadically, and there was limited linkage between training, teacher standards, or career progression. Gradually the Ministry established national standards and competence frameworks for in-service teachers, introduced licensing requirements, and created regional structures to coordinate training. These reforms laid the foundation for the National Professional Development Programme launched in 2023, which aims to provide a coherent, inclusive, and transformative learning experience for all teachers. The following subsections describe key components of CPD in Albania, the challenges faced and emerging trends.

3.1. National Professional Development Programme

The National Professional Development Programme is a key national mechanism for strengthening teacher competencies, improving the quality of teaching, and learning in Albania. It is organized in cycles of two to three years and is designed in response to national education priorities, curriculum reforms, teachers' professional needs and emerging developments in education. In 2026, the Ministry of Education approved the National Professional Development Programme for the period 2026–2028, communicated through Letter No. 1037/1, dated 4 February 2026 (Ministry of Education, 2026). This approval established the priorities and institutional framework for the professional development of approximately 20,000 teachers and other education professionals annually (Ministry of Education, 2026).

The 2026–2028 programme places particular emphasis on supporting the implementation of the updated curriculum, initially in Grades 1, 6 and 10, as well as on strengthening teachers' competencies in active, inclusive, and learner-center teaching. Its principal areas include the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in language, mathematics and science; interdisciplinary and STEM-based learning; the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into teaching; and the responsible and safe use of technology. The programme also addresses the professional development needs of preschool teachers, assistant teachers collaborating with learners with disabilities, school leaders, quality coordinators and teachers working in Smart Lab environments (Ministry of Education, 2026).

Rather than viewing continuous professional development as a series of isolated training activities, the programme promotes it as a sustained process of professional learning, reflection, and improvement. It encourages teachers to examine their classroom practices, apply new methodologies, collaborate with colleagues through professional networks and learning communities, and adapt teaching to the diverse needs of learners. The content of the training modules is informed by consultations with teachers, school leaders, education experts, and training providers, as well as by school development priorities and evidence from national and international assessments and studies.

In implementing the National Professional Development Programme, ASCAP works closely with the Ministry of Education, regional and local education authorities, schools, professional networks, international partners, and institutions of higher

education. Cooperation with universities is particularly important because it creates a stronger connection between initial teacher education, educational research and continuing professional development. Higher education institutions contribute academic expertise, subject specialists, and trainers and, within the framework of national programmes, support the large-scale delivery of professional development activities. ASCAP provides the common orientation, quality standards, training requirements, and monitoring framework needed to ensure coherence across providers and regions. This cooperation also facilitates the exchange of evidence between universities and schools and supports the development of training that responds more directly to curriculum reforms and classroom realities.

Consultations with teachers, school leaders, universities, and education experts during successive curriculum reforms have consistently highlighted the need to link professional learning more closely with professional standards, evaluation, qualification and career progression.

The programme is also aligned with the Teacher Career Framework, thereby strengthening the connection between professional learning, teacher evaluation, and career advancement. Participation in designated professional development activities may contribute to qualification requirements and support teachers in assuming roles such as mentor, professional network leader, trainer, or school leader. Monitoring and evaluation are integrated throughout the programme. Participant feedback, evidence of classroom implementation, reports from training providers and schools, and relevant data on teaching and learning outcomes are used to assess effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and inform the design of future professional development opportunities.

3.2. Role of training and mentoring

Formal training sessions, seminars, and conferences constitute a core component of CPD. However, research and practice underscore the importance of mentoring and collegial collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Experienced teachers mentor trainees and novice teachers, offering guidance, feedback, and positive role models. Heads of subject teams organize professional development activities, analyze results and facilitate shared reflection. Professional learning communities and networks enable teachers to exchange experiences, develop joint projects, and support each other (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These mechanisms align with OECD findings show that teachers identify collaborative forms of professional development, including peer learning and networking, as particularly impactful on their work (OECD, 2019). Linking mentoring and training to the career ladder system encourages teachers to assume mentoring roles, thereby reinforcing a culture of shared learning.

3.3. Challenges of professional development

Despite the framework and programme, several challenges hinder effective professional development:

- Infrastructure support: Limited funding, particularly for travel and resources, restricts participation in advanced courses or international conferences. Rural schools often lack adequate facilities and internet connectivity.
- Time constraints: Teaching loads leave little room for teachers to engage in training. Flexible scheduling and online modules are beginning to address this issue.

- Digital skills: Many teachers require training in the use of technology for teaching. Investments in infrastructure and digital laboratories are necessary to support blended and online learning formats.
- Evaluation and accountability: School leaders and external evaluators need capacity building to conduct fair and constructive evaluations. Using evaluation data to plan CPD and linking outcomes to career progression remain areas for improvement.

3.4. Emerging trends: Digitalization, STEM, and new roles

Three trends are shaping CPD in Albania:

- Digitalization and digital skills: The digital revolution is reshaping education. The national programme emphasizes equipping teachers with the skills to integrate technology into lessons, create interactive environments and foster pupils' digital competences (Ministry of Education, 2026).
- STEM and interdisciplinary approaches: Integrating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics encourages critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Training modules on STEM and the introduction of makerspaces and robotics labs reflect this direction.
- New roles in schools: Policies are introducing positions such as quality assurance coordinator and career guidance teacher. These roles support internal monitoring, mentoring and student support, requiring targeted CPD and clear role descriptions.

4. LINKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH CAREER ADVANCEMENT

A key aspect of the Teacher Career Framework is the establishment of a clear connection between continuous professional development, teacher performance, and career advancement. Professional growth is not viewed as a separate or occasional activity but as an integral part of a teacher's career. Progression through qualification levels and access to horizontal or vertical roles require evidence that teachers have continuously updated their knowledge and competencies, applied new approaches in practice and contributed to the improvement of their school and the wider professional community (ASCAP, 2024).

Teachers are expected to participate regularly in continuous professional development activities and to document their learning through a professional portfolio. Under the current system, education professionals are required to undertake professional development corresponding to at least ten credits each year. A substantial proportion of these credits must be obtained through nationally accredited activities, ensuring that the training undertaken meets established quality standards and responds to national education priorities. Professional development may include training courses, seminars, conferences, mentoring, participation in professional networks, collaborative projects, classroom-based research, open lessons, publications and the development or evaluation of educational materials. This diversity recognizes that effective professional learning takes place through both formal training and practice-based collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The Framework seeks to connect participation in professional development with its application and impact. Teachers are therefore encouraged to demonstrate how newly acquired knowledge and skills have influenced lesson planning, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, the use of technology, classroom management, and support for diverse learners. Evidence may be presented through professional portfolios, classroom observations, curricular projects, reflective reports, student work, mentoring records or contributions to subject teams and professional networks.

Professional development also supports access to horizontal career roles, including mentor, subject-team leader, professional network leader, national trainer, quality assurance coordinator, career guidance coordinator and evaluator of training modules or educational materials. These roles require specialized competencies, strong professional performance and demonstrated contributions beyond the individual classroom. They allow experienced teachers to advance professionally while continuing to teach and to share their expertise with colleagues. Continuous professional development may similarly prepare teachers for vertical progression to positions such as deputy school head, school principal, external evaluator, or specialist within local and national education institutions (ASCAP, 2024).

By linking professional development, performance evaluation, qualification and career advancement, the Framework seeks to promote learning that is purposeful, evidence-based and relevant to classroom practice. This connection strengthens teachers' motivation to engage in sustained professional learning and ensures that career progression is associated with improved professional competence, increased responsibility and a demonstrable contribution to school development and student success.

5. SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

School-based professional development is an essential pillar of Albania's approach, recognizing that the most sustainable learning occurs within the context of a teacher's daily practice. Legislation on school autonomy and decentralization provides schools with the mandate to design training aligned with their development plans. The following subsections describe the legal framework, roles and responsibilities, needs identification processes and examples of effective practices.

5.1. Legal frameworks and approaches

The Law on Pre-university Education and subsequent bylaws assign schools responsibility for identifying training needs and organizing school-based CPD activities. Central authorities provide guidance and resources through the Quality Assurance Agency and regional directorates. Approaches include in-house training days, collaborative lesson study, professional learning communities, and joint projects with neighboring schools. Schools are encouraged to integrate CPD into their annual development plans and allocate time within the school calendar.

5.2. Roles and responsibilities of central and local actors

Central institutions, the Ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency, set policies, define standards, approve training providers, and support capacity building.

Regional directorates coordinate training programmes and facilitate communication between schools and central authorities. School leaders are responsible for identifying needs, mobilizing resources, organizing training, and fostering a culture of professional learning. Subject team leaders and mentors play a crucial role in designing activities, facilitating workshops, and supporting colleagues. Teachers contribute to needs assessments, participate actively in CPD and share expertise with peers.

5.3. Identifying professional development needs and prioritizing training

Schools use multiple methods to identify CPD needs analysis of student achievement data, lesson observations, teacher self-assessment, feedback from parents and pupils and alignment with national priorities. Based on these inputs, school development teams prioritize training topics and request support from regional or national providers. Tools such as the Standards and Competences for in-Service Teachers provide a framework for assessing current practice and identifying gaps. Needs assessments are reviewed annually as part of the school self-evaluation cycle.

5.4. Examples of successful school-based practices.

Several schools have developed innovative practices that improve teaching quality and student outcomes:

- Lesson study groups: Teams of teachers jointly plan, observe, and analyze lessons to refine instructional strategies. This collaborative process fosters deep professional learning and has led to improved student engagement.
- Peer coaching cycles: Teachers observe each other's classes and provide structured feedback, focusing on specific aspects such as questioning techniques or assessment for learning.
- Interdisciplinary project weeks: Schools organize thematic weeks where teachers design cross-curricular projects with real-world applications. Professional development occurs as teachers learn to integrate subjects, manage teamwork and assess complex tasks.
- Partnerships with universities and NGOs: Schools collaborate with higher education institutions and non-governmental organizations to pilot new methodologies, participate in research, or access specialized expertise.

6. ADDRESSING THE TEACHER SHORTAGE THROUGH INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORMS

Albania, like many countries, faces a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas and in subjects such as science and mathematics. Professional development can be part of the solution by making teaching more attractive and by enabling alternative routes into the profession. Examples include:

- Blended and online certification programmes: Offering flexible, modular courses enables working professionals or career changers to obtain qualifications while maintaining employment.
- Micro-credentials and digital badges: Recognizing specific competences acquired through short courses encourages continuous learning and provides visibility to skills that may not lead immediately to formal qualifications.
- School–university partnerships for career changers: Accelerated programmes combine academic preparation with supervised practice in schools, shortening the time required to become a qualified teacher.
- Incentives for hard-to-staff areas: Additional professional development opportunities and mentoring support are offered to teachers who commit to working in remote regions.

By linking these initiatives to the career framework and ensuring quality through robust evaluation, Albania can address teacher shortages while maintaining standards.

7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the Teacher Career Framework and the National Professional Development Programme offers numerous opportunities for Albanian pre-university education. Creating professional learning communities, investing in digital infrastructure, and strengthening evaluation systems can transform schools into learning organizations.

Key recommendations include:

- Expanding professional learning communities: Combine internal CPD with national networks, supported by online platforms and financial incentives for leaders' networks.
- Investing in digital training and infrastructure: Provide equipment, high-speed internet, and digital laboratories; develop online training and webinars to reduce travel costs and increase flexibility.
- Providing financial and time support: Establish dedicated funds for scholarships and review workload allocations to free up time for CPD; align salary incentives with demonstrated contributions to teaching quality.
- Strengthening evaluation systems: Train school leaders and external evaluators, use clear standards and incorporate evaluation findings into CPD planning.
- Integrating international benchmarks: Continue including PISA and other international assessments in training, using results to inform curriculum and teaching strategies.

8. CONCLUSION

The Teacher Career Framework represents a significant step towards professionalizing Albania's education system. By defining standards, clarifying career pathways, and linking professional development to advancement, it sets the foundation for a learning-oriented profession. Coupled with the National Professional Development Programme and new roles in schools, it signals institutional commitment to modernize teaching and integrate critical thinking, digital skills, and STEM approaches into classrooms. However, successful implementation depends on addressing challenges such as infrastructure gaps, time constraints, and the need for robust evaluation. Through sustained investment, collaborative communities and effective evaluation, Albania can create an environment where teachers thrive professionally and students receive a high-quality education. Reforming the career framework is an ongoing process requiring coordination between institutions, political commitment, and active participation of teachers themselves.

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Supporting Teachers throughout Their Careers Career Progression, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation in Hungary

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Institution profile

The Educational Authority, in accordance with its mission, operates as an executive agency of the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs. Its role is to collect, manage and provide reliable information on education in Hungary in a professional and lawful manner, while supporting the participants and processes involved in teaching and learning.

Its responsibilities cover a broad range of activities across both public and higher education, contributing to the effective operation of the education system through the organisation and support of key processes. These include administering secondary and higher education admissions, maintaining national registers of learners, higher education students, educational institutions and teachers, monitoring educational outcomes, issuing student and teacher identification cards, performing educational administration functions, recognising qualifications, administering national competence assessments and analysing their results, preparing and supporting the organisation of school leaving examinations, organising and delivering CPD programmes for teachers, coordinating subject competitions, developing public education textbooks, managing the national textbook register, administering teacher qualification procedures and the national

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pedagogical and professional inspection system, conducting professional analyses, and contributing to the development of education policy concepts.

These activities are supported by comprehensive digital information systems that facilitate the efficient implementation of the Authority's responsibilities. The staff of the Educational Authority carry out their work with a high level of professional expertise, commitment to their respective fields, and a strong focus on serving the needs of educational stakeholders.

Authors



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Supporting Teachers throughout Their Careers Career

Progression, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation in Hungary

Authors: Katalin Marosi, Bernadett Burucs-Kardos, Petra Burucz-Poór

Abstract

Teachers are central to the quality development of the public education system. Key factors include teachers' professional commitment, the development of their professional and methodological expertise, their openness to new methods and approaches, and their commitment to lifelong learning.

The methods, tools and systems used in Hungary to comprehensively support, measure and evaluate teachers' professional development are as follows:

- teacher education;
- teacher qualification as a requirement for career progression;
- teacher continuing professional development (CPD) system;
- in-school mentoring and external professional support through the specialist consultancy system and the national pedagogical and professional inspection system;
- teacher and school leader performance evaluation system.

Together, these systems contribute to the professional development of those involved in public education. This study focuses on the elements used to assess, evaluate and support the development of teachers' competences, as well as on the links between these elements.

Reviewing and updating the criteria and tools used to inspect and evaluate pedagogical work is an ongoing task. The new government formed in spring 2026, together with the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, which is responsible for education, has identified the review of these systems as one of its objectives.

Keywords: teacher career pathway, teacher qualification, teacher performance evaluation, teacher education system, continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, teacher competence.

Introduction

Supporting teachers' professional competence, performance and ongoing professional development is fundamental to improving the quality of the Hungarian public education system. The following systems support the achievement of this objective:

- Initial teacher education provided by higher education institutions equips prospective teachers with the professional, methodological and pedagogical competences required to enter the profession.
- The teacher qualification system provides an objective assessment of teachers' professional competences and supports progression to higher career stages.
- The teacher performance evaluation system, introduced in 2024, provides feedback on daily pedagogical practice and helps identify individual professional development goals. While this study briefly outlines its evaluation framework, it notes that the system was suspended in spring 2026 following a government decision. A comprehensive review of the methodology and the development of a new evaluation framework are currently underway.
- The CPD system enables teachers to update their knowledge continuously, acquire new methods and innovative approaches, and respond to evolving educational and societal needs. The new government has initiated a comprehensive review of this framework.

Teacher education, performance evaluation, qualification and CPD were originally designed as complementary components of an integrated framework. The intention was that these elements would reinforce one another, support teachers' professional growth and the continuous development of their competences, and provide a sustainable framework for professional development and quality improvement throughout the teaching career. The new government remains committed to these objectives. However, following a comprehensive review and evaluation of the existing system, it intends to achieve them through revised methods and implementation arrangements. As these reforms are currently being drafted, no further details are available at this stage.

1. National Policies and Programmes Supporting Teachers' Induction

Teachers are key actors within the education system, as the quality and effectiveness of education largely depend on their professional work (Rapos, 2026). Consequently, the development of teacher education has become a strategic priority in recent years. Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education defines teacher education as encompassing programmes for infant and early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, conductors (conductive education professionals), special education teachers and subject teachers. The following section outlines the most significant recent developments in teacher education.

The introduction of the Bologna system substantially increased the amount of practical training undertaken by student teachers. During the final phase of their studies, students completed initially a one-semester and later a full-year supervised school

placement, enabling them to gain experience in authentic school settings. These placements provided valuable opportunities to become familiar with the realities of teaching while also revealing areas in which further professional development was needed.

In light of the above, changes were necessary. From 2024, it became possible to modify the structure of teacher education and incorporate practice-based learning throughout the programme. The main features of the revised model include (Government Decree 255/2024):

- **supporting student retention** through career orientation and professional socialisation activities, compensatory and preparatory courses based on assessments of entry-level competences, mentoring by university staff and teacher educators, and differentiated assessment;
- strengthening **practice-oriented learning by providing direct experience** in public education institutions from the first semester onwards through guided observation of different participants—children, teachers, schools and professional support services—during classroom observations, micro-teaching activities and reflective assignments;
- implementing an **extended school placement** supported jointly by mentors and university staff, during which student teachers undertake complex professional tasks in authentic school settings, including teaching, participation in school life, fulfilment of educational responsibilities and observation of organisational processes and professional collaboration; and
- ensuring **competence-based development and assessment and a clear understanding of expectations:** the professional and methodological expectations for student teachers are the same as those for practising teachers already working actively within the public education system.

The attractiveness of the teaching profession has also increased as a result of substantial salary increases introduced alongside the new teacher career pathway and the improved career opportunities it offers. Consequently, applicant numbers for teacher education programmes have risen significantly in recent years. (This increase includes not only first-time entrants to the profession but also practising teachers applying to obtain a teaching qualification in another subject area.)

While qualification requirements for teaching positions are legally defined for each professional field, specific provisions allow for certain exemptions under specific circumstances. In some cases, teachers may be employed on the condition that they obtain the required qualification within a specified period.

Successful induction is a key factor in retaining teachers within the profession. A beginning teacher's ability to integrate into the school community, collaborate with colleagues, apply professional knowledge in practice and engage in continuous professional learning has a significant influence on long-term career development. To support novice teachers, the head of the institution is required to appoint a mentor. In addition, trainers from the Educational Authority support trainees' preparation for the qualification examination by providing practical guidance and examples. Alongside mentoring, the transition into the profession is further supported by the compulsory CPD courses undertaken during the Trainee stage (see Topic 2, Chapter II).

2. Standards and Strategies for Teacher Career Development

I. The Teacher Career Pathway

The legal basis for establishing the teacher career progression system was provided by the Act on National Public Education (2011). Drawing on analyses of international research and studies of international experience, the education system placed motivated and respected teachers at its centre. As a result, the Hungarian teacher career pathway has focused on supporting professional development and recognising high-quality professional performance.

The current legislative framework defines a range of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms aimed at enhancing the quality of the pedagogical and professional work of teachers, school leaders and educational institutions. These mechanisms form part of the quality assurance framework for pedagogical and methodological practice and can be broadly classified into two categories according to their primary purpose: supporting activities and monitoring activities.

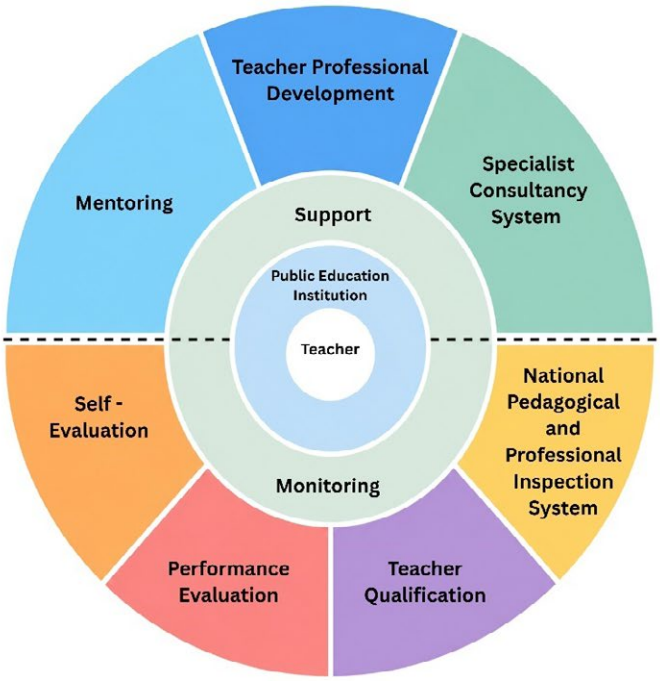


Figure 1: Systems for Supporting and Monitoring Teachers' Professional Activities

1. Supporting Activities

Teachers' pedagogical, professional and methodological competences are primarily developed through:

- institution-based mentoring (see Topic 1);
- the specialist consultancy system coordinated by the Educational Authority and church educational service providers; and
- the teacher CPD system (see Topic 2, Chapter II).

2. Monitoring Activities

Based on the outcomes of internal and external evaluation processes, teachers, school leaders and educational institutions identify for themselves the professional areas requiring further development.

- **Internal self-evaluation**, through which educational institutions define their own development priorities and identify the actions required to achieve improvement in specific areas (Self-Evaluation Handbook, 2026).
- The evaluation criteria for the institutional **performance evaluation system** are currently under review (see Topic 3).
- The national pedagogical and professional inspection system is an external evaluation conducted by qualified experts to assess the professional work of educational institutions. Inspectors gather evidence using a range of evaluation methods and identify areas of outstanding performance as well as areas requiring improvement in order to enhance institutional effectiveness. A specialised form of inspection, involving a comprehensive pedagogical and professional assessment of the public education institution, its school leader and its teachers, was introduced in 2021 (Ministry of Human Capacities, 2012).
- The teacher qualification procedure assesses teachers' professional competences against established standards. The quality of teachers' professional work and their professional performance beyond core teaching duties are recognised through classification into different professional career levels, differentiated remuneration associated with each level, and eligibility for higher-prestige professional responsibilities.

The introduction of the teacher qualification system in 2015 was preceded by a pilot phase. In 2013, evaluation criteria and procedures were developed with the involvement of teachers from different educational sectors and experts in pedagogy and methodology. During 2014–2015, pilot procedures were conducted to test the effectiveness of the evaluation instruments. Across a wide range of educational settings—including nurseries, child protection institutions, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, educational support services, primary-level arts education institutions and special education institutions—the system provides a consistent framework for evaluating pedagogical and professional practice based on publicly available indicators tailored to the characteristics of each sector.

In recent years, both the content and the procedures of the teacher qualification system have been continuously refined in response to evolving social, professional and economic expectations. This process has led to several key developments:

- First, the teacher competence framework has been revised to include competences related to sustainability and environmental education, while greater emphasis has been placed on assessing digital competence.
- Second, the documentation requirements of the qualification procedure have been simplified. This reduction in administrative workload has allowed teachers to focus more on their core pedagogical practice.
- Third, the procedural framework has also been revised. In this context, the regulations governing progression to the second career stage have been modified.
- Finally, practical experience gained during implementation has been incorporated into the procedural framework, with particular attention to the specific characteristics of different educational sectors.

I/1. Stages of the Teacher Career Pathway

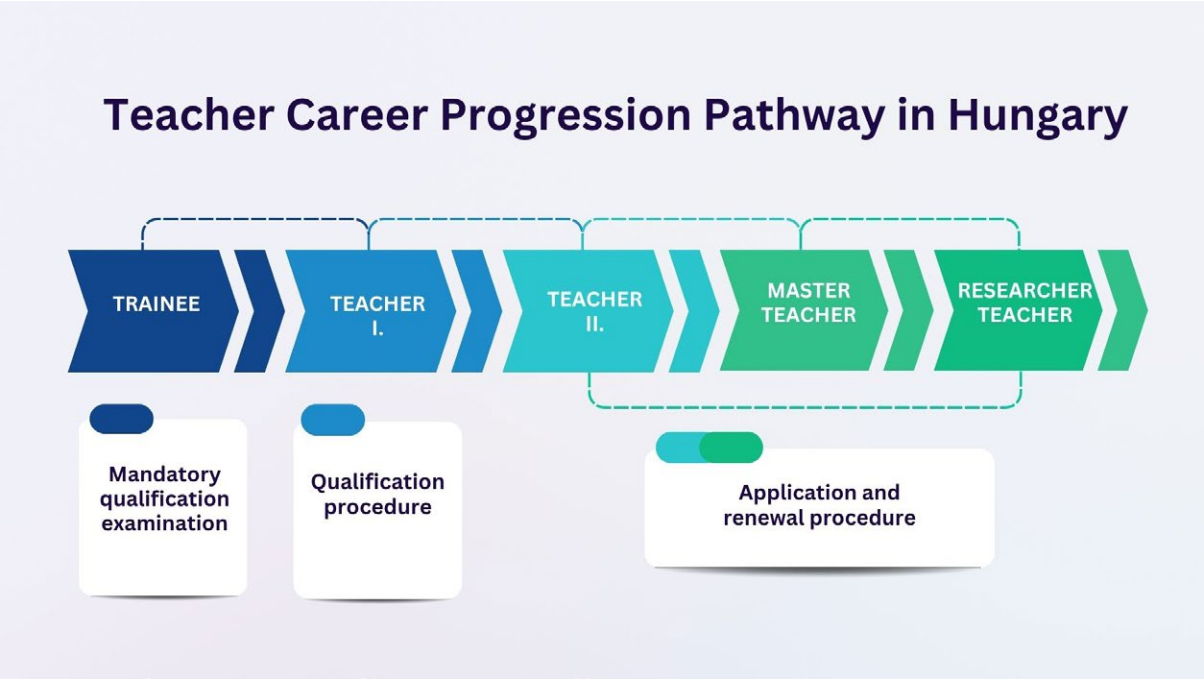


Figure 2: Teacher Career Progression Pathway in Hungary

The core components of the teacher career progression system are the qualification examination, the qualification procedure, and the application and renewal procedures, all of which are organised and administered by the Educational Authority (Figure 2). The procedural rules, content requirements and their methodological framework are defined by the implementing regulation.

The first stage of the teacher career pathway is the Trainee stage, which is mandatory for all teachers employed in positions covered by the teacher career progression system in public education institutions. The traineeship period lasts two years, or one year for teachers who have completed an integrated (single-cycle) teacher education programme. During this period, trainees are supported by an appointed mentor who provides professional guidance and ongoing feedback to help them prepare for the qualification examination. Upon successfully completing the examination, teachers progress to the Teacher I career stage.

Once teachers have completed at least one year of professional practice after being placed in the Teacher I career stage, they may apply for the qualification procedure leading to the Teacher II career stage. Following successful completion of the qualification procedure, teachers must be placed in the Teacher II stage. Under the current legal framework, participation in the qualification procedure leading to the Teacher II career stage has been voluntary since 1 January 2024 (Guide to the teacher qualification system for progression to Teacher I and Teacher II career stages, 2026).

The Master Teacher is the stage of the teacher career pathway that follows the Teacher II stage. Teachers placed in to the Teacher II career stage who hold an professional teaching qualification and have completed at least five years of professional practice after entering the Teacher II stage may initiate the application procedure required for progression to the Master Teacher career stage.

Master Teachers may undertake one of the following activities specified by law:

- innovation and development activities;
- development and support activities;
- leadership activities;
- expert activities in pedagogical and professional inspection and teacher qualification procedures; or
- specialist consultancy activities.

Master Teachers who choose innovation and development, development and support or leadership activities implement a five-year Master Programme and must complete a renewal procedure in the fifth year of programme implementation to retain their Master Teacher stage. Master Teachers who choose expert activities in pedagogical and professional inspection and teacher qualification procedures, or specialist consultancy activities, are subject to specific obligations and procedures laid down in the applicable regulations (Guide to the Application and Renewal Procedure for the Master Teacher Career Stage, 2026).

The Research Teacher career stage represents the highest level of the teacher career pathway and recognises teachers who demonstrate outstanding achievement in research and innovation. Teachers appointed to either the Teacher II or Master Teacher career stage may apply for promotion to Research Teacher if they hold a doctoral degree in a field relevant to their teaching qualification, have at least 14 years of professional experience, and engage in regular professional publication activities. To retain Research Teacher career stage, they must complete a renewal procedure during the fifth year of programme implementation.

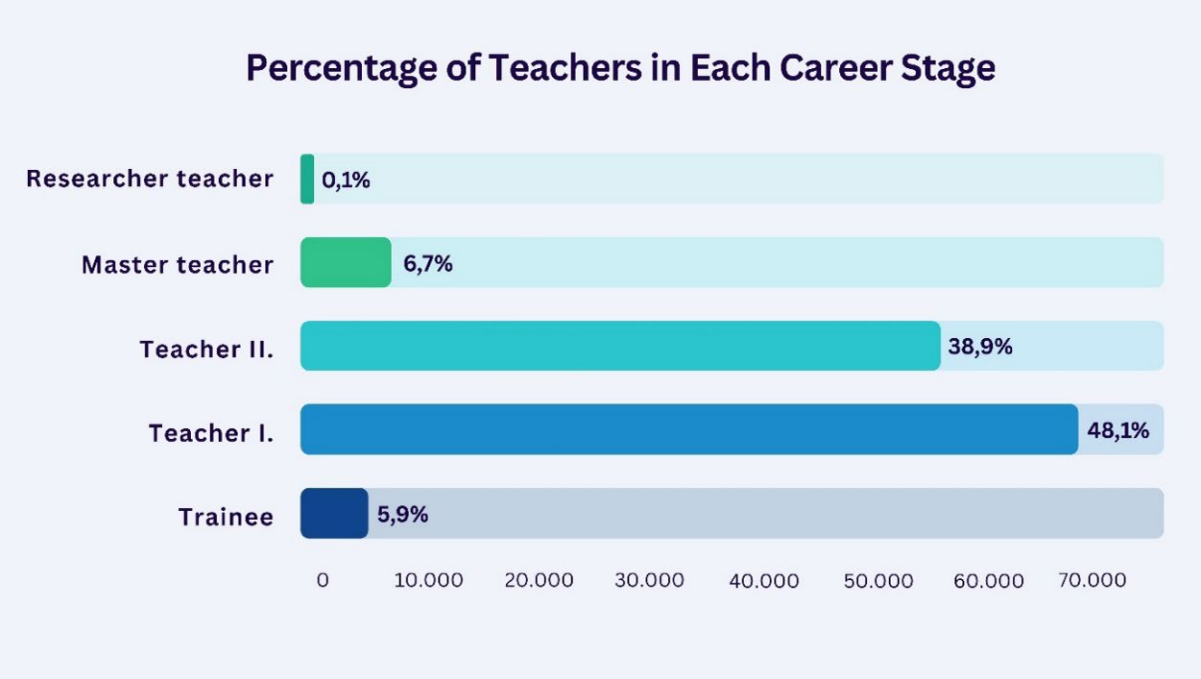


Figure 3: Percentage of Teachers in Each Career Stage

The distribution of teachers across the different career stages (Figure 3) shows that the vast majority of teachers are concentrated in the middle stages of the career pathway. Nearly half of all teachers (48.1%) are placed in the Teacher I career stage, which represents the minimum level required to remain in the teaching profession. This proportion should be interpreted in light of the legal provision allowing teachers who meet specific statutory requirements to be placed directly in the Teacher I career stage without completing the qualification examination (Government Decree 401/2023). Almost 40% of teachers are classified in the Teacher II career stage. This reflects the fact that, between 2015 and 2023, the Teacher II career stage was a mandatory stage of career progression. The relatively small proportions of Master Teachers (6.7%) and Research Teachers (0.1%) indicate that these higher career stages are primarily realistic career progression goals for teachers who, in addition to supporting learners' development and learning, make sustained contributions to knowledge sharing, innovation and research throughout their professional careers.

I/2. Participants in the Qualification Procedure

The teacher qualification procedure is organised and administered with the involvement of the following participants:

- the Educational Authority;
- the members of the qualification committee;
- the teacher undergoing the qualification procedure; and
- the educational institution employing the teacher.

The Educational Authority is responsible for organising and administering the entire process in accordance with the relevant legislation. Its responsibilities include operating the digital infrastructure supporting the procedure, organising qualification procedures, appointing the qualification committee, ensuring compliance with the procedural requirements, maintaining records of the results, and providing information to all participants. Based on implementation experience, the Authority may also propose revisions to the teacher evaluation framework.

The qualification committee acts as the evaluation body throughout the qualification procedure. In accordance with the legislation, it consists of three members:

- The Committee Chair: a public education expert appointed by the Educational Authority, holding the Master Teacher career stage and having successfully completed accredited training in the national pedagogical and professional inspection system and teacher qualification.
- The Subject Expert: a public education expert appointed by the Educational Authority, holding the Master Teacher career stage, having successfully completed the same accredited training, and working in the same or a closely related teaching field as the teacher undergoing the qualification procedure.
- Institutional Representative: a staff member employed by the candidate's institution who holds a leadership position (such as a headteacher or deputy headteacher).

The mandate of the qualification committee begins on the day the teacher's portfolio is evaluated (see Figure 4) and ends on the sixteenth day following the issuance of the qualification certificate.

I/3. The Teacher Qualification Procedure

The teacher qualification procedure follows a calendar-year cycle. From the initial application to placement in the relevant career stage, a single qualification procedure may extend over as many as three calendar years. Figure 4 presents the main stages of the procedure together with the participant responsible for each stage. Different background colours indicate the activities taking place in each calendar year.

From the teacher's perspective, the process begins in March of the year preceding the qualification year. In the case of mandatory procedures, namely progression to the Teacher I career stage, the head of the institution is required to register the teacher for the procedure. For voluntary procedures, teachers may apply on their own initiative for qualification leading to higher career stages.

Following submission of the applications, the Educational Authority verifies whether applicants meet the statutory eligibility requirements. During the summer preceding the qualification year, teachers are informed whether they have been admitted to the procedure. Those admitted are then required to upload their professional portfolio to the electronic platform. Subsequently, the Educational Authority schedules the on-site visit, at which point the qualification committee is formally established.

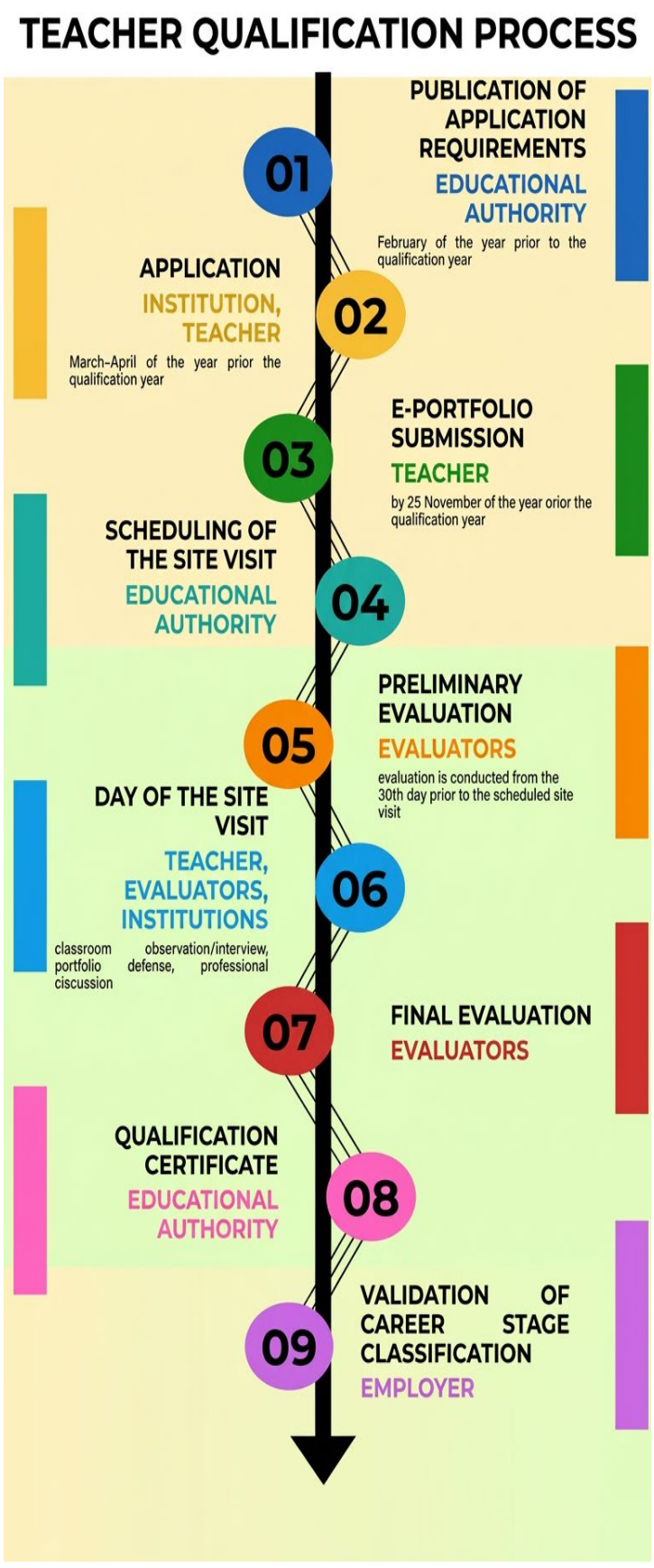


Figure 4: Teacher Qualification Process

From thirty days before the scheduled visit, both the teacher and the qualification committee undertake preparatory tasks. The committee conducts a preliminary evaluation of the documents uploaded to the electronic portfolio system, while the teacher, where necessary, responds to requests for additional documentation and answers the committee's questions.

Following the on-site visit, the qualification committee completes the final evaluation of the procedure. Once the evaluation has been finalised, the teacher receives the qualification certificate. A detailed description of the evaluation methodology is provided in the section **Evaluation Framework.**

After the certificate has been issued, the employer determines whether the qualification outcome requires the teacher to be placed in a higher career stage and, where applicable, carries out the corresponding placement.

I/4. Experts

Teachers applying for the Master Teacher career stage in the role of expert or specialist consultant must, in addition to meeting the general eligibility requirements, satisfy the following criteria:

- have at least 14 years of professional experience by the application deadline;
- have not had an unsuccessful qualification procedure since 1 January 2015;
- meet the application requirements published on the website of the Educational Authority; and
- complete the training programme organised by the Educational Authority.

Teachers may begin carrying out expert activities only after successfully completing both the required training and the application procedure.

The Master Teacher career stage is granted for an indefinite period, provided that the expert continues to perform expert duties on an ongoing basis.

Experts are entitled to a reduction in their regular workload and must be released from their teaching duties for at least one day each teaching week. In accordance with the relevant legislation, experts may undertake assignments commissioned by the Educational Authority for a maximum of 16 teaching days per academic year. These duties are carried out on one designated expert working day each week, during which they are exempt from teaching responsibilities at their own institution.

I/5. Organisation: Professional and IT Aspects

The Educational Authority is responsible for scheduling the on-site visits and 'publishing' the assigned dates to all participants in the qualification procedure. To support this process, it operates a range of integrated digital systems that enable the entire procedure—apart from the on-site visit itself—to be completed and monitored online. These systems include:

- the application platform;
- the e-portfolio submission platform;
- the expert administration platform;
- the visit scheduling platform;
- the evaluation platform;
- the results notification platform; and
- the quality assurance platform.

Together, these digital platforms support teachers throughout the qualification procedure, from the submission of their application to the download of the qualification certificate.

Scheduling qualification visits is a highly complex process carried out by the Educational Authority using a dedicated scheduling algorithm. In organising qualification procedures, the system must simultaneously take into account numerous professional and organisational considerations.

Teacher undergoing qualification	Subject expert on the qualification committee	Chair of the qualification committee	Institutional representative
Primary school teacher - Geography	A qualification as a primary school Geography teacher, with at least five years of professional experience in the field	An expert teacher working in any position	The principal or deputy principal of the institution
Kindergarten teacher	A qualification as a kindergarten teacher, with at least five years of professional experience in the field	An expert teacher working in any position	The principal or deputy principal of the institution
Secondary school teacher -Mathematics - school principal	A qualification as a secondary school mathematics teacher, with at least five years of professional experience in the field	An expert teacher working in any position	An expert with leadership experience delegated by the Educational Authority

Table 1 - Examples of the composition of the evaluation committee

I/6. The Assessment Framework

Progression within the teacher career model requires teachers to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes they apply in their pedagogical practice during the qualification examination, qualification procedure, application procedure or renewal procedure. Together, these three components constitute **the teacher competence framework**. Progression to a higher career stage depends on demonstrating that the required level of competence has been achieved. The expected level of development associated with each competence is defined through **standards**. To support a consistent assessment framework, **indicators** were developed to provide observable evidence of these standards. These indicators translate knowledge, skills and attitudes into concrete behaviours and professional practices that can be recognised by external evaluators (Kotschy, 2011).

Over more than a decade of implementation, this competence framework has evolved in response to emerging challenges in teaching practice and changing societal expectations.

Expected competence levels vary across the different stages of the teacher career model. Each career stage builds on the standards of the preceding one while introducing more advanced expectations. The Teacher I and Teacher II career stages assess the same core competences required for effective day-to-day teaching practice. The distinction lies not in the type of competences assessed but in the expected level of proficiency.

A Master Teacher is a teacher who demonstrates outstanding professional performance, provides high-quality support for learner achievement, and contributes to improving the effectiveness of teaching and education both within their institution and in the wider professional context. The competence framework for Master Teachers is structured around a four-dimensional model comprising: conscious professional development, exploratory and analytical activities, development and innovation, and knowledge-sharing and support.

The Research Teacher career stage, the highest level of the teacher career model, is organised around three core dimensions: research and innovation, knowledge sharing, and conscious professional development. Within the research and innovation dimension, Research Teachers identify, analyse and interpret issues arising from their own and others' educational practice that require research, intervention and evidence-based improvement. They disseminate their experience, research findings and effective practices through professional forums, frequently at national and international levels.

Teacher Competences

Competence 1:	Professional tasks; disciplinary, subject-specific, and curriculum-related knowledge
Competence 2:	Planning pedagogical processes and activities, and self-reflection related to their implementation
Competence 3:	Supporting learning
Competence 4:	Development of the learner's personality; ensuring the application of individualized treatment; appropriate methodological preparedness required for the successful joint education and instruction of disadvantaged learners, learners with special educational needs, or those facing integration, learning, or behavioural difficulties together with their peers
Competence 5:	Supporting and developing the formation of student groups and communities; promoting equal opportunities; openness to social and cultural diversity and to the principles of sustainability; engagement in integration activities; class teacher responsibilities
Competence 6:	Ongoing assessment and analysis of pedagogical processes and learner's personality development
Competence 7:	Competence in environmental education, the authentic representation of sustainability values, and the ability for fostering attitudes related to environmental awareness
Competence 8:	Communication and professional cooperation, problem-solving
Competence 9:	Commitment and professional accountability for professional development

Figure 5: Teacher Competences

Within the assessment framework, indicators provide the practical and observable description of the competences required for progression through the teacher career model. They describe authentic professional activities that enable members of the qualification committee to evaluate teachers objectively during qualification procedures.

I/7. The Assessment Methodology

The assessment methodology used in teacher qualification procedures is based on a standardised, competence-based approach. Competences form the core of the evaluation process and are operationalised through a comprehensive system of indicators. Each procedure combines several mandatory and optional assessment components, which together enable the qualification committee to form an objective judgement of the teacher's professional practice, skills and attitudes. The documentation required for qualification procedures leading to the Teacher I and Teacher II career stages differs from that required for application procedures leading to higher career stages. In addition, both the documentation and certain assessment components vary according to the professional field. The following section outlines the assessment methodology for the qualification examination leading to the Teacher I career stage, using the example of a primary school teacher.

1. **The E-Portfolio**: By the specified deadline, candidates must upload mandatory and optional documents to the digital e-portfolio platform. This portfolio gives the evaluation committee an overview of the teacher's career, professional development, achievements, challenges and difficulties in their

pedagogical practice. While some materials provide context regarding the teacher's background and the environment of the institution employing them, the core of the e-portfolio comprises documentation demonstrating the planning and implementation of educational and teaching activities. This includes student group profiles, thematic outlines, lesson plans, classroom observation logs, and case studies. These documents are accompanied by reflective commentaries in which teachers consciously analyse and evaluate their pedagogical practice, helping the committee understand the teacher's way of thinking and the rationale behind their decisions. Following this review, the committee formulates clarifying questions to guide the teacher's preparation for the portfolio defence on the day of the on-site visit.

2. **The On-Site Visit**: During this phase, committee members observe two lessons or educational activities delivered by the teacher, followed by a professional discussion. This allows teachers to demonstrate their practical pedagogical skills, including the application of educational and teaching strategies and the practical implementation of differentiation, student engagement, and motivation. Based on these observations and the subsequent professional dialogue, a subject-matter expert evaluates the candidate's performance against the nine core competences. During the visit, the teacher also delivers a presentation addressing the questions raised during the preliminary portfolio review. Each committee member independently assesses the portfolio documents and its defence, recording their evaluations on the digital assessment platform. The preliminary assessment of the e-portfolio and the assessment of the visit day are weighted in accordance with the provisions of the relevant government decree. The portfolio and portfolio defence, evaluated independently by all three members of the qualification committee, account for 60% of the final result, while the lesson or educational activity observation, evaluated by the subject expert, contributes the remaining 40%.

The minimum performance thresholds required for progression to each career stage are specified in the procedural regulations as follows:

- Teacher I: 60%
- Teacher II: 75%
- Master Teacher: 85%
- Research Teacher: 85%.

Teachers who successfully complete the procedure during the spring semester are placed in the higher career stage on 1 September of the qualification year. Those who complete the procedure during the autumn semester are placed in the higher career stage on 1 January of the following calendar year.

If the procedure is unsuccessful, teachers remain in their current career stage. In the case of an unsuccessful renewal procedure for the Master Teacher or Research Teacher career stage, the teacher is placed in the career stage held immediately before the renewal procedure.

Where participation in the qualification procedure is mandatory, the procedure must be repeated after the teacher has completed an additional two years of professional practice. If the repeated procedure is also unsuccessful, the employer is legally required to terminate the teacher's employment.

Where participation in the qualification procedure is voluntary, the evaluation may be repeated after two years of additional professional practice, but it is not mandatory. Because participation is voluntary, an unsuccessful outcome does not result in termination of the teacher's employment.

I/8. Teacher Qualification System – Summary

Successful completion of the teacher qualification procedure enables teachers employed in teaching positions, as well as staff employed in positions directly supporting educational and teaching activities, who hold a teaching qualification, to progress within the teacher career model.

A legislative reform that entered into force on 1 January 2024 introduced a new, unified employment status for teachers within the public education system (public education employment status) (Act LII, 2023). Under this framework, teachers' salaries are determined according to differentiated salary bands associated with each career stage.

During the pilot phase (2014–2015), approximately 25,500 teachers participated in qualification procedures. Between 2015 and 2025, around 122,000 qualification procedures were completed, with a success rate of nearly 95%. Over this period, individual teachers could participate in multiple procedures as they progressed through successive career stages.

The Educational Authority conducts an annual analysis of the experiences gained from the qualification procedures. Recommendations concerning the procedure and assessment methodology are submitted to the minister responsible for public education for approval. Currently, the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) applications on the qualification process is under examination. This continuous professional review and analysis of experience help maintain the validity and credibility of the qualification system.

The teacher qualification system is a fundamental component of quality assurance in the teaching profession. Its purpose extends beyond administrative assessment by providing teachers with clear, structured feedback on the current level of their professional practice. The combination of personalised professional evaluation and objective, evidence-based feedback generated through the digital assessment platform supports both the reliability and the transparency of the process. On the basis of this feedback, teachers are able to plan their professional development more consciously by setting realistic, development-oriented goals that strengthen their pedagogical competences and further improve the quality of teaching and learning.

II. The Teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) System

The teacher CPD system was reformed from the 2025/2026 academic year onwards. The previous seven-year CPD cycle was replaced by five-year cycles. The five-year cycle begins in the fifth year following the award of the qualification required for employment as a teacher. During each five-year cycle, teachers are required to complete a total of 120 credits. Of these, 60 credits must be earned through content renewal programmes and a further 60 credits through elective professional development programmes (where one credit is equivalent to 60 minutes of study). Teachers who have reached the age of 55 before the first day of the academic year are exempt from the CPD requirements. It should be noted that this exemption applies only to the obligation to participate and does not prevent teachers from taking part in professional development activities.

The standard five-year cycle does not apply to teachers in the Trainee career stage. During their one- or two-year induction period, they are required to complete two professional development programmes, each worth 15 credits. One programme focuses on the public service nature of public education, while the other relates directly to the teacher's professional responsibilities and is selected by the head of the institution according to the specific content requirements applicable to their work.

School leaders are no longer required to complete the former two-year, fee-paying university leadership programme. Instead, they must complete a Public Education Leadership Programme, organised exclusively by the Educational Authority, which is provided free of charge. The programme lasts two semesters and is worth 120 credits. For those who complete the leadership programme, the training cycle is considered fulfilled.

Subject renewal programmes are designed to update teachers' knowledge in their subject area(s). Elective programmes focus on strengthening and diversifying the pedagogical methods for conveying subject content. Both types of programmes may be organised if they are aligned with one of the following:

- the National Core Programme for Early Childhood Education;
- the National Core Curriculum; or
- the requirements for the national school-leaving examination.

As part of the reform, the Educational Authority introduced an online platform to support the CPD system, known as the Teacher CPD Support Information System (PTTR). The heads of public education institutions prepare an institutional CPD programme for each school year and record it in the PTTR system (https://www.oktatas.hu/tovabbkepzes/pedagogus_tovabbkepzesek/nyilvantartas).

Elective professional development programmes organised by the Educational Authority are delivered with the support of the regional Pedagogical Education Centres through a dedicated digital platform that supports both course administration and delivery. The platform provides access to learning materials and enables participants' progress and completion of the programmes to be monitored.

Number of training programmes offered	Number of applicants	Number of certificates issued (as of 27 March 2026)
819	54 397	22 012

Table 2 - Teacher Professional Development Statistics for the 2025/2026 Academic Year

At the time of writing, the new government has also initiated a comprehensive review of the teacher CPD system.

3. The Teacher Performance Evaluation

As part of the teacher qualification process, teachers receive an external assessment of the current level of their professional practice and pedagogical competences with the involvement of external experts. In addition, it is important that the quality of their work is regularly monitored and evaluated within the institution. One mechanism for this is the teacher performance evaluation system.

The primary aims of performance evaluation are to improve the quality of teaching and educational work, support teachers' individual professional development, and encourage and recognise outstanding professional performance.

The previous system was introduced in the 2024/2025 school year. However, Hungary's new government discontinued this form of evaluation and initiated the renewal of the teacher performance evaluation system.

Nevertheless, the new government remains committed to maintaining the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work at institutional level and ensuring that the quality of their work is reflected in differentiated remuneration. Work has begun on developing a professional proposal for a system capable of assessing teachers' actual performance, with the broad involvement of professional organisations.

This brief professional overview presents the procedure applied during the 2024–2026 period (Ministry of the Interior Decree 18/2024).

Self-assessment and evaluation by school leaders were important elements of the system. At the end of the school year, the person being evaluated and the evaluators jointly reviewed the results, strengths and areas for development during an individual evaluation meeting. Performance evaluation was carried out through a centrally operated online platform.

Taking into account the different core functions of public education, 16 separate professional and methodological guidelines were developed with the involvement of the Educational Authority.(https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/pedagogus_teljesitmenyertekeles/ped_ter_dokumentumok) These guidelines provided detailed descriptions of the specific tasks associated with each evaluation criterion and the corresponding scores that could be awarded. Teachers at the trainee stage did not participate in the performance evaluation system.

Based on the overall results, the evaluating school leader assigned teachers to one of three performance categories. Teachers who achieved a score above 80% could receive a salary adjustment in the following school year.

Experience from the first year of implementing the teacher performance evaluation system highlighted several areas in which stakeholders raised concerns and proposed improvements:

- increased administrative burden;
- subjectivity in the evaluation process;
- tensions within institutions (e.g., regarding the proportionate allocation of individual performance objectives and feelings of envy);
- quotas set by the state maintainer for the different performance categories;
- the limited amount of salary adjustment.

4. Measures to Increase the Supply of Teachers

Assessments of the existence and scale of teacher shortages have been the subject of considerable professional and political debate in recent years. While researchers and teachers' trade unions reported severe, systemic staff shortages, the government at the time repeatedly challenged estimates of the extent of teacher shortages.

To retain teachers in the profession, a range of education policy and government measures were introduced, some of which have already been discussed in previous chapters.

The substantial salary increases implemented in several stages from 2024 onwards contributed to improving the competitiveness of the teaching profession and strengthening its financial and professional recognition. As a result, these measures encouraged not only teacher retention but also entry into the profession.

Compared with 2022, the number of applicants choosing teacher education had doubled by 2024, reaching nearly 18,000, and increased further to 25,000 by 2026.

Interest in short-cycle master's programmes in teacher education was particularly high. Programmes in early childhood education, special needs education and primary education rank among the most popular bachelor's and undivided programmes.

Short-cycle teacher education programmes lasting two, three or four semesters are designed for those who already hold a bachelor's or master's degree and wish to obtain a teaching qualification. The duration of the programme depends on the type of higher education qualification previously obtained. One specialised area of short-cycle teacher education is the integrated programme for teachers of natural sciences and environmental studies. It prepares teachers to teach physics, chemistry, biology, geography and natural sciences at primary and lower secondary level, and natural sciences at upper secondary level.

Practice-oriented, competence-based teacher education strengthens learners' professional preparation and readiness for the labour market. Scholarship programmes and communication campaigns also support and encourage entry into the teaching profession.

The professional integration and socialisation of early-career teachers are supported through the measures described in the previous chapters. For practising teachers, key objectives are to reduce attrition, increase job satisfaction, and strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the teaching profession through appropriate incentives related to remuneration, career development and working conditions.

The main measures include:

- salary increases from 2024 onwards, with teacher salaries required to reach 80% of the average salary of graduates with a higher education degree in Hungary;
- faster progression through teacher career stages and stronger long-term career prospects (see Topic 2, Sections I/1 and I/3);
- teacher performance evaluation (see Topic 3);
- CPD for teachers (see Topic 2, Section II);
- supporting access to educational services, including digital content, exercises and teaching materials developed by the Educational Authority, as well as the use of a digital pedagogical assistant.

Allowing retired teachers to return to employment has become an effective means of addressing staff shortages in individual institutions. Regulatory conditions have also been established to enable final-year teacher education students to work in schools. Teachers working in disadvantaged municipalities receive a substantial salary supplement of 20%, which may contribute to reducing territorial disparities. Similarly, teachers of science subjects receive an additional 7% salary supplement, supporting the retention of subject teachers who are particularly difficult to replace. More flexible workforce management has also been facilitated by easing qualification requirements for teaching positions and introducing transitional provisions. For example, a teacher qualified as a primary school teacher may also teach a specialist subject in the upper grades of a primary school.

Following the results of the 2026 parliamentary elections, a new government was formed. After 16 years, a separate ministry responsible for education was established: the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs. It is responsible for reforming the Hungarian education system, including early childhood care, public education, vocational education and training, adult learning and higher education, as well as for child protection and youth policy.

The Minister immediately began reviewing areas and systems related to public education. Within a relatively short period, changes have already been initiated in

several areas covered in this study. The teacher performance evaluation system in its current form has been discontinued, and work on developing new evaluation criteria has begun with the involvement of professional organisations. Further proposed changes will affect the range of textbooks available in public education and the National Core Curriculum, which sets out the foundations of education. The CPD system for teachers is also under review, with the aim of liberalising access to training. Reviews of the organisations responsible for maintaining public education institutions and of the operation of higher education institutions have also begun, together with the development of proposals for change.

In light of ongoing professional and legislative changes, the processes described in this study may be subject to change.

Conclusion

Change is an inherent and enduring feature of contemporary education systems. Ongoing social, demographic, political, economic, structural and technological developments directly shape the operation of public education institutions, organisational processes, expectations regarding teachers' professional and methodological practice and the ways in which it is evaluated. Consequently, educational institutions and the professionals working within them must continuously adapt to evolving legislative frameworks, changing societal expectations and the constantly developing requirements of teaching and learning.

At the same time, these changes do not alter the fundamental professional expectation placed on teachers: the delivery of high-quality educational practice that supports children's development and contributes to achieving the objectives of public education. Professional expertise, the ongoing development of pedagogical competences, ethical professional conduct, and a commitment to high-quality teaching and learning remain enduring values that provide a stable point of reference, even in a changing environment.

Under the leadership of the newly established Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, a comprehensive review of the systems and processes presented in this study has already begun. Evidence-based decision-making relies on a systemic, multi-perspective analysis of activities and procedures—incorporating past evaluations, stakeholder consultations, expert recommendations, and comprehensive impact assessments.

The emerging policy approach places children, teachers and educational institutions at its centre. Maintaining and further improving the quality of education depends on a well-respected teaching profession whose members are able to develop professionally, exercise professional autonomy, and remain committed to serving the interests and future of children.

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IRELAND

Towards Excellence in Learning for All
The role of Teacher Professional Learning in Ireland



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Institution profiles

The authors of this paper represent three key partners involved in the development and delivery of teacher professional learning (TPL) in Ireland. The Department of Education and Youth (DEY), Oide, the national school support service, and the DEY Inspectorate. The DEY provides funding and establishes the policy context for TPL across the school system including overseeing the governance and operation of Oide. Oide, develops, coordinates, and facilitates a national programme of quality-assured TPL for teachers and school leaders and other school staff to support capacity building around all dimensions of educational policy and practice including curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Youth evaluates the quality of education provision in schools and settings, advises and shares insights from this work to support the development of policy and programmes of TPL and is a key stakeholder in the quality assurance processes within Oide.

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ESTHER DOYLE - Esther Doyle is an Assistant Chief Inspector with the Department of Education and Youth. She is the Lead for the Inspectorate's primary and post-primary curriculum and assessment policy unit. Esther has represented the Department of Education and Youth at home and abroad on committees linked to education and inclusion. Prior to joining the Inspectorate Esther worked as an assistant principal, post-primary teacher and guidance counsellor.

Towards Excellence in Learning for All The role of Teacher Professional Learning in Ireland

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the national system of teacher professional learning (TPL) in Ireland in 2026. It begins by outlining the policy context for TPL which includes the enactment of major curriculum reform at both primary and post-primary school level, national policy initiatives in respect of well-being, child protection, inclusion, Irish language development, and the development of the school workforce. New structures created in recent years to support the national enactment of school leader and teacher professional learning, which entailed the creation of a new schools' support service called Oide, are outlined. As a new service, Oide aims to be a world class leader in the provision of TPL through its unique and collaborative approach to the design of these learning experiences. Development and implementation of professional learning experiences (PLEs) in pursuit of this goal are explored in some detail. The role of the Department of Education and Youth's Inspectorate is outlined at various stages of the process, from conception to design to evaluation of the impact of professional learning at school level. The paper identifies a continuum of offerings to schools and provides insight into quality assurance and impact measurement processes. The paper concludes with an overview of consultation processes and collaborative practices designed to ensure that current and future workforce development initiatives are flexible, responsive and ready to meet the challenges of a dynamic evolving education environment and its impact in schools.

Keywords: Teacher professional learning, curriculum reform, Department of Education and Youth, Oide, digital technologies, newly qualified teachers, school leadership

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the national system of post qualification TPL in Ireland. It does not include initial teacher education and focuses on TPL provision for school leaders and teachers in Ireland's approximately 3,200 primary schools, 725 post-primary schools, 150 special schools and 150 centers for education nationally (Department of Education and Youth, 2026a). This paper is being written at a critical point in the development of the Irish education system. Significant reform of curricula across the continuum of state-funded education provision, from early childhood to the end of upper secondary school, has commenced with enactment strategies planned to the end of the decade and beyond. The national goal of inclusive education for all is being supported through the generation and implementation of a variety of policy initiatives that target specific aspects of provision and practice in schools and classrooms. These are intended to promote positive participation in education for all children, irrespective of ability or background. New initiatives have also been planned to invigorate and promote the Irish language, and Ireland is also responding positively to international policy drivers such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Department of Education and Youth, 2026b) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Department of Education and Youth, 2026c).

This complex web of policy development requires careful support and management if it is to translate into the everyday lived realities of school leaders, teachers, children and young people in schools. The Irish Government has committed major resources to deliver a comprehensive programme of TPL as part of this support in the coming years, recognising that the quality of Ireland's teaching profession is a critical factor in sustaining and enhancing the quality of education outcomes. The Department of Education and Youth (DEY) ensures that a range of high-quality models of teacher professional learning is provided to school leaders and teachers through a range of agents. These include Oide, the national support service for school leaders and teachers, the national network of Education Support Centres, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and appropriate groups, bodies and institutions who are empowered to design, develop and deliver TPL programmes.

In the following sections of this paper the role and function of Oide are detailed as it is the leading actor in the provision of TPL in Ireland. Within this overview, details of the development and delivery of PLEs are provided, including the role played by the Department of Education and Youth Inspectorate in bridging the theory to practice divide and ensuring that a cycle of evaluation and insight into classroom practice is at the heart of TPL design processes.

2. Oide, the professional learning support service for schools

2.1 Establishment of Oide

Oide is Ireland's support service for schools, established in 2023 through the integration of four legacy support services. The key objective for the establishment of Oide was to bring a unified and strategic approach to professional learning, enhancing school leader and teacher capacity across all sectors of the Irish education system. Prior to Oide's establishment TPL provision had been fragmented and sector based and whilst there was significant expertise in each of the previous independent organisations, opportunities for synergy, cross-sectoral coherence and continuity in education practice were not being harnessed.

Oide's vision is to "support the transformation of education in Ireland by empowering school leaders and teachers to create dynamic and impactful learning experiences for all students" (Oide, 2024, p.8). Its mission is to provide high quality, evidence-informed, innovative, reflective and responsive professional learning experiences and resources for school leaders and teachers that enable them to meet the educational needs of all learners. In pursuit of its vision and mission, Oide engages positively and proactively with all relevant stakeholders to evaluate needs and establish priorities which will support the best possible outcomes for schools, school leaders, teachers and learners. In doing so, it prides itself as being a listening, highly responsive and future-proofed organisation, attuned to the need for streamlined communications between itself and all schools and centres for education, ensuring that both the varied and individual needs of schools are efficiently catered for.

Oide's workforce is composed primarily of teachers on secondment from their schools supported by experienced administrative and professional ICT staff. This composition ensures that professional learning experiences are grounded in authentic classroom experience and are genuinely designed **for teachers, by teachers**.

Oide's organisational structure is currently comprised of nine key divisions that support both curricular and administrative functions. Sectoral divisions supporting curricular areas include programme and subject specific teams at post-primary level, and teams supporting key curricular areas at primary level. There are dedicated cross-sectoral divisions (i.e., divisions that provide support across both primary and post-primary schools) to support school leadership, the use of digital technology in teaching and learning and Gaeilge (the national and first official language of Ireland). National efforts relating to increasing the use of Gaeilge as a daily living language in Ireland is driven primarily through the 20-year Strategy for Irish Language (2010-2030) (Department of Education and Youth, 2020). Other policies relevant to the work of this division include the Policy on Gaeltacht Education **(Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta)** (Department of Education and Youth, 2016), the Policy for Irish Medium Education Outside Gaeltacht **(Polasaí don Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht)** (Department of Education and Youth, 2025a) and the Action-Plan for Irish in English Medium Schools **(Plean-gnímh don Ghaeilge i scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla).** (Department of Education and Youth, 2025b). There is also a cross-sectoral division to support Droichead Induction (see Teaching Council of Ireland, 2026) for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). The Droichead Induction division supports the professional growth of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and its annual work plan is grounded in Ireland's Teaching Council's Droichead: The

Integrated Professional Induction Framework (2017a). The Administration Division, comprised of administration staff based in a headquarters and several national sub-offices, manage governance, finance, human resources, and information technology systems to enable smooth operations. Underpinning the work of all divisions across Oide are the **Operations** and the **Research and Quality Assurance** teams who work across all facets of the organisation to support TPL planning, operations, scheduling and logistics. They are also responsible for ensuring the PLE being designed and facilitated is research-based and quality assured to the highest standard. Oide's divisional structure facilitates flexible staffing deployment with secondees moving between divisions annually depending on skills and capacity requirements to facilitate the implementation of annual DEY approved work programmes. There is also the advantage of cross-divisional collaboration to support the specific needs of schools.

2.2 Ensuring High-Quality Professional Learning

Under the aegis of the Teacher Professional Learning Section (TPLS) of the DEY, Oide's unique positioning allows for greater connection and coherency between the schools it serves and the wider education system. In line with a recent review of relevant literature on professional learning by King **et. al** (2022), Oide endeavours to provide PLE where the core purpose is to foster sustained effective school leader and teacher practice which in turn supports learner experiences and outcomes. All PLE provided by Oide adheres to a robust set of design and quality assurance protocols (Department of Education and Youth, 2026e). These protocols implemented by Oide are underpinned by planning principles, such as consultation and collaboration, mapping curricular reform, review of highly effective national and international practice and reflection of current national policies.

The consultative and collaborative nature of the quality assurance process involves working with partners in education from different agency bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (a statutory body that advises the Minister for Education and Youth on curriculum and assessment matters), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (a statutory body that advises on education delivery for children with special educational needs) and the Inspectorate of the DEY, to ensure the professional learning is responding to school and system needs. School leader and teacher voice play a vital role in the scoping, design and review phases for all professional learning that Oide provides. The collaborative and transparent nature through which all PLE material is quality assured is essential to making a positive impact on school, teacher and learner outcomes.

3. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Youth

3.1. The Inspectorate

The Inspectorate is a division of the Department of Education and Youth. Its duties are outlined in the Education Act 1998, which sets out evaluative, advisory, and capacity-building functions. The Inspectorate operates with statutory independence in inspecting schools and other education settings. Its overarching mission is to provide for quality assurance of the Irish education system experienced by children and young people from birth to eighteen years. The Inspectorate contributes to the wider DEY goals and strategic priorities and is well-placed to provide a particular perspective informed by its research and evaluative work in schools and similar settings. The design of TPL by Oide for school leaders, teachers and others is stimulated by policy, systemic reform and emerging needs of schools. Most professional learning design work begins with, or stems from, the release of new or revised curriculum, strategies or policies.

3.2. Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary, Special and Post-Primary Schools

Looking at Our School (2022b) is a quality framework developed by the Inspectorate. It recognises the importance of quality teaching and sees excellence in teaching as the most powerful influence on learner achievement. It acknowledges the pedagogical skills required to enable high-quality learner experiences and outcomes. The framework is also used to facilitate reflective practice and to inform the design of continuing professional learning for teachers and school leaders.

Given the value placed by the Inspectorate on TPL, a unit of the Inspectorate (Business Unit 8) actively works with TPLS and Oide to provide inspectorate support as agreed in the Department's **Design and Quality Assurance Protocols (2025).** A link inspector is assigned to each curriculum, programme, subject or leadership area/team within Oide. Inspectors are selected based on their curriculum or subject knowledge and expertise. They support and communicate with the senior leader and TPL design team in Oide to ensure the integrity of the pedagogy and subject knowledge content within the professional learning design. In addition to the link inspectors, two inspectors are assigned to TPLS as a final point of quality assurance for TPL designs.

3.3. Design Types and Features

To reflect system and reform priorities, the learning context and the evolving nature of professional development, there are three distinct types of TPL design: Type 1 (core), Type 2 (supplementary), and Type 3 (resources). Type 1 Core designs typically involve a full-day engagement, or a series of full-day engagements over a specified period, with school leaders and teachers at a national level. Type 2 supplementary designs are generally single events, or a series of single professional learning events at a local or national level. Type 3 resources typically support the overall programme of professional development and are responsive to the needs of school leaders and teachers as they emerge throughout engagement with system stakeholders.

Inspectors play different roles from scoping, design, to review stages. The Oide Senior Leaders for research & quality assurance communicate the overall design timelines and the schedule of design review days to the TPLS Inspectors. This systemic coherence better supports the alignment of policy intentions; curriculum developments and the professional development support provided to schools and educational settings.

4. Supporting the enactment of curricular reform

Currently, Oide is playing a pivotal role in supporting school leaders and teachers through the ongoing changes to curriculum within the primary and post-primary school sectors.

4.1. Primary and Special Schools

Oide has two dedicated Primary Divisions that provide professional learning across the following areas: Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF) (see NCCA, 2026a), Languages and Literacy, Social and Environmental Education, Wellbeing, Arts Education and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). They also provide professional learning in the areas of inclusion and diversity, team teaching, English as an additional language (EAL), Reading Recovery (a school-based, short-term, early literacy intervention), Maths Recovery (an intervention programme designed to improve number sense and numeracy skills) and Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). Launched in 2005, DEIS is the state's main policy initiative designed to address educational disadvantage. A revised DEIS Plus Strategy was launched in 2026.

The recent introduction of the new PCF aims to build **'on the successes and strengths of previous curricula while recognising and responding to [the] challenges, changing needs and priorities'** of primary and special schools in Ireland today (NCCA, 2023). Oide's role in supporting the implementation and enactment of the PCF within schools seeks to work with school leaders and teachers in every primary and special school across the country. In the case of special schools in particular, Oide works in collaboration with NCSE who have a specific remit in supporting special education provision in Ireland. Frequently, for example, Oide and NCSE will jointly collaborate in designing TPL that is relevant to teachers teaching in both mainstream and special school settings.

All of Oide's professional learning experiences model pedagogy promoted by national and international best practice to ensure planning for meaningful classroom learning experiences that thus ensure positive learner outcomes.

4.2. Post-primary Schools

Oide has two dedicated divisions that provide professional learning across the full suite of programme and subject provision at post-primary level. Oide's Guidance team provides professional learning to support the important role of Guidance Counsellors in post-primary schools, along with developing professional learning resources to support whole-school guidance in line with the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (Department of Education and Youth, 2026f). Regional teams provide whole-school professional learning to support programmes such as Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes (personalised programmes that are tailored to the individual learning needs of the student), Transition Year (an optional, one-year, non-exam programme in Irish post-primary schools) and Leaving Certificate Applied (a two-year senior cycle programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life). Oide's Inclusive Education team provide professional learning opportunities in areas such as team teaching, Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), English as an additional Language (EAL) and Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) (see NCCA, 2026b for information on the JCSP programme).

The reform of curriculum at Junior Cycle, (the programme of education provided at lower second level), commenced in 2015, saw the introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework (JCF) which sought to offer a more flexible programme for students' learning, a balance between knowledge and skills and a dual approach to assessment that would support student learning over the three years of junior cycle. This new approach to assessment reduced the importance of one externally assessed summative examination and increased the prominence of classroom-based assessments and formative assessment so schools could report on a '**broader picture of a student's learning**' (Department of Education and Youth, 2015). With an increased emphasis on collaboration between teachers to inform and develop their understanding of learning, teaching and assessment in their classroom practice, came a greater emphasis on the role of professional learning in supporting the enactment of this reform. Since 2015, therefore, post-primary teachers have received sustained professional learning in their subject areas, along with whole-school (or whole-teaching staff) PLEs to support programme delivery in their schools.

Currently, there is a redevelopment afoot at senior cycle (i.e., the programme of education provided at upper second level) that will bring closer alignment with the junior cycle. At the heart of this redevelopment is the understanding that the educational experience at senior cycle should **'help every student become more enriched, engaged and competent as they further their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions in an integrated way'** (NCCA, 2022). As part of the redeveloped curriculum a new specification for study will be introduced for each Leaving Certificate subject, along with an additional assessment component (or AAC). This new approach to assessment at senior cycle ensures a broader scope of reporting on student learning and alleviates some of the pressure of the final summative examination.

The DEY recognise the provision of high-quality teacher professional learning as essential to the successful implementation of senior cycle redevelopment. To that end, Oide's post-primary teams will facilitate an initial four-year professional learning programme which includes multiple professional learning experiences throughout each school year for teachers of new and redeveloped senior cycle subjects.

5. Supporting School Leadership

Effective leadership is increasingly being recognised as central to the development of a quality education system in many jurisdictions including, as highlighted by King and Nihill (2019), in Ireland. Consequently, providing a variety of high-quality professional learning opportunities for school leaders has become an important focus of Oide's work. Oide's Leadership Division is made up of primary, post-primary and cross-sectoral teams dedicated to supporting the professional learning needs of all school leaders. It provides a range of professional learning to support middle leaders, aspiring senior leaders, newly appointed senior leaders and established senior leaders.

5.1. School Leaders' Induction Programmes

The provision of national induction programmes for newly appointed principals and deputy principals is a core feature of the work of Oide's Leadership Division. The role of the school principal is complex in the dynamic environment of a school, and it is

important that newly appointed school principals have opportunities to learn and to reflect on their role and their school, and on pedagogy and policy.

Misneach is a two-year national induction programme that provides both personal and professional development for newly appointed principals. The programme is designed and facilitated by a team of experienced seconded school leaders. It is enriched by collaborative conversations and reflections on the challenges and opportunities that often present themselves to school leaders. These conversations question and extend existing perceptions and practice and help to build relational ties and trust between principals. Mentoring and coaching are important features of support provided within this induction programme with each newly appointed principal being assigned an experienced school principal as a mentor.

Tánaiste is a one year personal and professional reflective and practical programme whereby newly appointed deputy principals come together to explore a wide variety of modules aimed at developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes as they begin their journey as new school leaders.

5.2. Supporting Curriculum Redevelopment

Oide's Leadership Division, in collaboration with the relevant curricular divisions of Oide, offers a range of professional learning experiences to support school leaders in leading, implementing and enacting redeveloped curricula in their schools. This professional learning fosters school leaders' ability to lead change by providing practical strategies, leadership insights and collaborative opportunities to enable them to navigate the complexities of embedding change within their schools. The support provided in this space provides school leaders with a deep understanding and knowledge of the overall implications of curriculum redevelopment for their individual school curriculum, their school timetable, teacher assignment and at post-primary level, implications for subject choice. It also explores what curriculum redevelopment looks like at classroom level, unpacking for school leaders, for example, the implication of new curriculum frameworks and subject specifications, interrogating learning outcomes, implications for teaching pedagogies and student learning styles and exploring new or revised approaches to student assessment, both formative and summative. The underlying emphasis in the context of this support is that the school leader is supported as a leader of learning in their school, which many school leaders find challenging to give their attention to, especially given the heavy administrative load associated with their role.

5.3. Supporting School Self-Evaluation and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

Further professional learning offered by Oide's Leadership Division includes programmes to support leading School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). SSE is a collaborative, evidence-based and reflective process where schools review their own practices to improve student learning outcomes. Led by school management, it involves gathering feedback from teachers, parents, and students to identify strengths and areas for improvement. As referenced earlier, DEIS, launched in 2005, is the Department of Education and Youth's main policy initiative designed to address educational disadvantage at both primary and post-primary levels. In March 2025, a further €48 million investment was announced in a new DEIS Strategy to 2035. A key objective of Oide's TPL offerings in these spaces is to effectively equip school leaders with the skills and tools to use data effectively in their planning and subsequent decision making to improve the educational experience of all learners.

At primary level, targeted professional learning experiences for DEIS schools are complemented by sustained in-school support, alongside dedicated programmes such as **Making DEIS Work** and tailored supports for newly appointed school leaders to strengthen collaborative, inclusive DEIS planning and effective SSE practices.

A structured suite of supports is also provided at post-primary level, including online SSE workshops and a six-step programme delivered over six months, alongside a year-long research-informed DEIS programme focused on data literacy, target-setting and implementation.

6. Supporting National Policy

As mentioned previously, a guiding principle of Oide's design and quality assurance process is to ensure all professional learning is **'informed by policies, frameworks and strategies and [is] responsive to emerging needs of the education system'** (Department of Education and Youth. (2026). This principle not only underpins the curriculum support offered by Oide, but is also demonstrated in further areas of support, including Irish Medium Education, Digital Technology in Education and Teacher Induction.

6.1. Supporting Gaeilge in Schools

Upon the establishment of Oide, a division called the GaelAonad was incorporated into the organisational structure of the new support service. This division has specific responsibility for professional learning in the curricular area of Irish (language), and for schools operating through the medium of Irish. This division comprises four teams - a primary team, a post-primary team and two cross-sectoral teams. The GaelAonad represents a first for a distinct structure in any teacher education school support service in Ireland to support the professional learning needs of schools working in the Irish-medium education sector.

As a cross-sectoral division, the GaelAonad has responsibility for the professional learning needs of school leaders and teachers of all subjects (including Gaeilge) in Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools. The GaelAonad liaises with, supports and advises other divisions within Oide who support schools in the Irish-medium context in meeting their legal obligations (as a public body supporting education, Oide is obliged to provide services through Irish) and in the design of high-quality and contextualised (as relevant) professional learning **as Gaeilge.** It also ensures that Oide's focus on the development of the language is visible and explicit both internally and externally. The support provided by Oide's GaelAonad Division is threefold:

- **Curricular Area of Gaeilge:** The GaelAonad Division provides extensive support for the teaching and learning of Gaeilge across Irish-medium and English-medium schools at both primary and post-primary level. All PLE is designed to enhance teacher capacity and promote best practice in Irish language education.

- **Supports for Irish-medium Context:** Irish-medium education presents unique pedagogical and linguistic challenges. The GaelAonad Division provides specialised support for schools operating in language immersion contexts. These supports are grounded in national policy such as the recently published policy for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht and include bespoke PLEs and strategic planning guidance.

- **Other Areas of Support as Gaeilge**: In addition to curricular and immersion-specific supports, the GaelAonad Division supports broader aspects of professional learning through Irish. This includes Child Protection training, whole-school professional learning to support curricular redevelopment, and leadership development.

6.2. Supporting Effective Use of Digital Technology in Schools

Oide Technology in Education (Oide TiE) plays a pivotal role in embedding digital technologies effectively and responsibly across Irish schools. Its responsibilities encompass not only strategic implementation but also policy leadership, the provision of professional and technical expertise, curriculum support, and the facilitation of professional learning for school leaders and teachers. Together, this integrated ecosystem of support enables schools to navigate national reform and align with global developments in digital education. Some of these areas of support are mentioned below.

- **Curricular support:** Oide's Digital Technology teams of seconded teachers support schools to purposefully embed the use of digital tools and resources to support learning, teaching and assessment. This work involves coordinating national digital initiatives and pilot projects to explore new and emerging educational technologies. Support for curriculum change is provided by helping school leaders and teachers to embed digital technology into redeveloped processes.

A team of permanent professional digital support personnel within the division (i.e., not seconded teachers), is involved in a range of digital learning projects and initiatives. One such initiative includes Webwise (see www.webwise.ie) which promotes the autonomous, effective and safe use of the internet by young people. The initiative develops a comprehensive range of supports and resources for schools, teachers and parents, along with an information hub that provides up-to-date guidance on new technologies, social media trends and online safety best practice. Another initiative is Scoilnet. Scoilnet offers over 21,000 free, curriculum-aligned teaching and learning resources for primary and post-primary schools. It supports digital learning through tools like **Scoilnet Maps** and the **Irish Newspaper Archive**, while enabling teachers to share, adapt and contribute resources.

- **Supporting National Policy:** Oide TiE's work is embedded in the broader policy ecosystem. It contributes directly to the implementation of the **Digital Strategy for Schools (2022-2027)** (Department of Education and Youth, 2022b) ensuring that digital technologies are central to effective and equitable learning experiences. Its remit also intersects with multiple national strategies and frameworks in Ireland, including:

- Looking at Our School, 2022 (Department of Education and Youth, 2022b), building digital competence as a key driver of school improvement.
- STEM Education Policy Statement (Department of Education and Youth, 2017) and Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy (Department of Education and Youth, 2023a), strengthening core digital learning and computational thinking skills.
- Education for Sustainable Development (Department of Education and Youth, 2022c), intersecting digital and sustainability literacies.
- Harnessing Cyber as an Engine of Economic Growth (Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, 2024), developing cyber-awareness and resilience.

- National Counter Disinformation Strategy (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2025), promoting critical thinking and responsible digital citizenship.

  - **Global and European Alignment:** Oide TiE's work is also informed by Ireland's involvement in global and European digital education initiatives. Its frameworks and guidance are aligned, for example, with the EU Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2020), the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (European Commission, 2017), the Better Internet for Kids Strategy (European Commission, 2022) and the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (European Union, 2024). Through its engagement with these policy instruments, Oide TiE helps align Irish education with current international developments and standards in digital education. A leading example of this 'policy-to-practice' continuum is the recent publication of Guidance on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Schools (Department of Education and Youth, 2025c), jointly developed by the Department of Education and Youth and Oide TiE. This guidance helps school leaders and teachers develop informed, balanced perspectives on the potential and challenges of AI in education.

6.3. Supporting Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

Oide's Droichead Induction Division supports the professional growth and integration of newly qualified teachers (or NQTs) as they embark on their teaching careers. Grounded in the Teaching Council's (the Teaching Council is the regulator of the teaching profession in Ireland) **Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework** (2017a), and aligned with DEY's requirements, the division's work reflects Oide's vision of empowering educators through collaborative, reflective, and practice-based learning. As a cross-sectoral division, comprising seconded primary and post-primary teachers, its central purpose is to enhance the professional learning of NQTs, as well as the practicing teachers and school leaders who support them. By supporting both NQTs and their mentors, this helps to lay the foundation for sustained professional growth and lifelong learning.

The Droichead induction process supports NQTs through two complementary strands of professional learning designed to promote reflection, collaboration, and continuous growth. These strands are the same for both the primary and post-primary sectors.

Strand A: School-Based Induction

This strand focuses on school-based induction, where NQTs are supported by experienced colleagues in a culture of mentoring, observation, and professional dialogue. To this end, a range of PLEs are provided to established teachers and school leaders who wish to become certified members of their school's Professional Support Team (PST) for NQTs. PST members can continue to access further ongoing professional learning to enhance their mentoring skills and professional practice. There are also dedicated supports available for school leaders to help them lead Droichead effectively and develop it as a whole-school initiative.

Strand B: Additional Professional Learning

This strand focuses on supporting NQTs as they meet the requirements of **Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework** through structured professional learning activities. The Droichead Induction Division facilitates professional learning for NQTs throughout their first year in the profession. The focus of this professional learning addresses areas such as introducing NQTs to the profession, professional responsibilities, developing reflective practice skills,

effective classroom management, differentiation and inclusion. Encouraging NQTs to reflect on their Droichead journey is a key element including supporting them in identifying next steps as they transition to Cosán (The Teaching Council, 2017b), the national framework that guides and supports teachers' professional learning following their induction.

The work of this division embodies Oide's commitment to fostering a culture of professional learning that begins at entry into the profession and continues throughout a teacher's career. By providing a structured, supportive, and reflective induction process, the division ensures that NQTs are not only guided through the early stages of their professional journey but are also encouraged to develop the habits of collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement that define effective teaching.

7. Models and Modes of Professional Learning

Oide works in partnership with schools and Education Support Centres to ensure that professional learning opportunities are accessible and responsive to the needs of schools nationwide. Ireland's network of twenty-one full-time regional education support centres provides a vital infrastructure for delivering Oide's programmes locally, enabling teachers and school leaders to engage in high-quality professional learning within their own communities. This collaboration ensures coherence between national priorities and local implementation, supports the sharing of expertise, and fosters strong professional networks. Schools also act as sites for facilitation of professional learning, notably for PLE during implementation of the school closure model. The different models of professional learning support provided by Oide are represented in Figure 1.

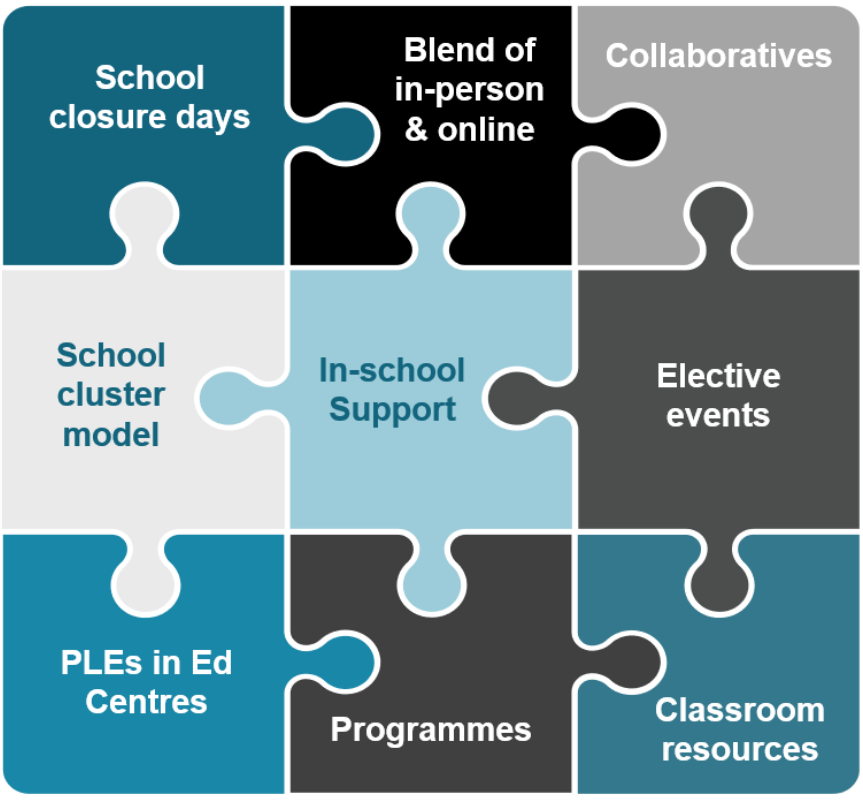


Figure 1: Models of TPL Provision

1. **In-person PLEs:** Traditional in-person, interactive workshops remain a cornerstone of Oide's approach, offering opportunities for deep engagement, hands-on learning and peer collaboration. This model is a feature of support offered by all divisions within Oide and can be provided in the form of part-day, full-day or multiple full-day learning experiences. These PLEs can be held regionally, hosted in education support centres, or in schools during school closure days. An example of an in-person PLE is the school cluster model which is often hosted by a school bringing together teachers from neighboring schools to participate in shared professional learning opportunities.
2. **Online and Blended Professional Learning Experiences:** Recognising the need for flexibility, Oide has extensive digital offerings. School leaders and teachers can, for example, access a wide range of webinars, online collaborative and self-paced modules that allow for asynchronous learning. Blended models combine online content with in-person support, enhancing accessibility while maintaining depth of learning.
3. **Professional Learning Collaboratives:** Like professional learning communities, Oide Collaboratives are bespoke models of professional learning that afford teachers and school leaders time and space to come together and work collaboratively, to discuss ideas or issues which have arisen as they engage with new learning approaches. Collaboratives have a participant-led focus, direction and content with the intention of becoming self-sustaining.
4. **Professional Learning Clinics:** In the context of curriculum redevelopment, professional learning clinics offer school leaders and teachers a dedicated forum to address emerging needs and queries. Currently, this model of professional learning is exemplified through online clinics that support the implementation of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum and Primary Language Curriculum, along with online clinics for school and curriculum leaders aimed at guiding the successful implementation of curriculum change within their school contexts.
5. **In-School Support:** Oide provides bespoke, tailored support directly to schools, enabling professional learning to be embedded within the school's own school improvement and school self-evaluation plans. When schools request this support it can take the form of a one-off engagement/visit or a sustained support model where an Oide staff member will work closely with the school community in the school's identified area of need.
6. **The Small Schools Project:** Oide's Small Schools Project supports clusters of small primary schools, in collaboration with stakeholders, by proposing, funding, resourcing, and beginning trial projects and approaches to support sustainability for small schools.
7. **Resource Development:** Oide curates and develops a wide range of classroom materials and resources that support classroom practice. These resources, regularly updated to reflect current policy and practice, are accessible via Oide's website, oide.ie, and at Scoilnet.ie.

Finally, in a bid to address challenges in teacher shortages, and to support schools in meeting the needs of their specific student cohorts, a model of professional learning has been initiated in recent years by the Department of Education and Youth to support practicing teachers in gaining additional, recognised professional teaching qualifications. Fully funded teacher 'conversion' courses, generally provided on a part-time basis across one- or two-years duration by a third level institution, have been offered that facilitate teachers qualified in a particular subject/s (such as, physics or technology) to gain a qualification that would also allow them to teach an additional subject (for example, Mathematics). A most recent initiative, to assist schools in meeting the needs of students with special

educational needs, sees a fully funded post-graduate diploma programme of teacher professional learning offered to teachers starting from September 2026. This programme is for one academic year's duration. The qualifications resulting from this course are recognised by the Department of Education and Youth in the area of special education for teachers fulfilling the following roles: Special Education Teacher (SET), Teacher in a Special School and Teacher in a Special Class in recognised Primary and Post-Primary schools.

8. Discussion

This paper has outlined a significantly evolved and increasingly coherent national system of teacher professional learning (TPL) in Ireland, shaped by a period of unprecedented policy reform and system-wide change. The establishment of Oide as a unified support service represents a decisive shift from historically fragmented provision towards a more integrated, strategic and system-responsive model. This integration has strengthened alignment between policy intent, curriculum reform and classroom practice, while also enabling greater consistency in the quality and accessibility of PLEs across sectors. The success of this initiative to date is attributed several key factors including:

Intentional ambition for coherence across structures, stakeholders and processes: As an example, Oide's collaborative design model, underpinned by strong partnerships with agencies such as the NCCA, NCSE, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the Inspectorate, ensures that TPL is grounded in both policy and practice. The formalised role of the Inspectorate, particularly through the link inspector model and quality assurance protocols, is a notable strength. It bridges the often-cited gap between policy design and classroom enactment, ensuring that professional learning is pedagogically sound, inclusion-focused and reflective of real classroom contexts.

Deliberate prioritisation of teacher voice and practitioner expertise: The extensive use of seconded teachers within Oide ensures that PLEs are authentic, contextually relevant and responsive to emerging needs. This "for teachers, by teachers" approach supports higher levels of engagement and trust among participants, while also fostering a culture of professional agency and shared ownership of reform.

Flexibility and adaptive models of provision: The diversity of models and modes of TPL provision, the continuum of supports — from large-scale national programmes (Type 1) to responsive resources (Type 3), alongside in-person, online, collaborative and in-school models—demonstrates a commitment to accessibility and differentiation. Notably, the inclusion of professional learning collaboratives, clinics and sustained in-school supports indicates a shift away from one-off events towards more sustained, embedded and practice-focused learning.

The paper also highlights the central role of TPL in supporting major national priorities, including curriculum reform, inclusion, digital transformation and Irish language development. In particular, the integration of digital technologies and alignment with European and global frameworks positions Ireland's TPL system as forward-looking and responsive to emerging educational challenges, including the ethical and pedagogical implications of artificial intelligence.

However, the scale and complexity of ongoing reform also present challenges. The concurrent implementation of multiple policy initiatives places considerable demands on school leaders and teachers. While TPL provision is extensive, ensuring that it translates into sustainable changes in classroom practice remains an ongoing priority. Issues such as time constraints, workload pressures and varying levels of school capacity may impact the depth and consistency of engagement.

This underscores the continued importance of differentiated support, leadership development and the embedding of professional learning within whole-school improvement processes. Furthermore, while quality assurance processes are robust, the measurement of impact, particularly in terms of student learning outcomes, remains complex. The system is increasingly focused on evidence-informed practice, but there is scope to further strengthen data collection, longitudinal evaluation and the use of impact metrics to inform future TPL design.

9. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The evolution of teacher professional learning in Ireland offers several important lessons for both national and international contexts.

- System coherence is critical to effective reform
- A coherent system reduces duplication, enhances communication and ensures that supports are strategically targeted.
- **Collaboration enhances quality and relevance**
  The partnership model involving the Department of Education and Youth, the Inspectorate, national agencies and practitioners is central to the success of TPL design and delivery. Meaningful consultation with teachers and school leaders ensures that professional learning is grounded in real needs and challenges.
- **Professional learning must be sustained and practice-focused**
  A shift towards ongoing, collaborative and embedded models of professional learning, such as in-school support and professional learning communities, supports deeper engagement and more meaningful changes in practice than isolated training events.
- **Teacher and leader agency should be prioritised**
  Empowering teachers and school leaders as active participants in their professional learning fosters ownership, motivation and innovation.
- **Leadership development is essential for system change**
  A strong focus on school leadership, including induction and ongoing development programmes, recognises the pivotal role leaders play in embedding change, supporting teachers and driving school improvement.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness are key in a dynamic system**
  The wide range of TPL models and modalities allows the system to respond to diverse school contexts and emerging priorities.
- **Policy alignment must be accompanied by support for implementation**
  Ambitious policy reform requires equally robust and well-resourced professional learning supports to ensure effective enactment at classroom level.
- **Ongoing evaluation and impact measurement are vital**
  A focus on impact evaluation—particularly linking TPL to student outcomes—will strengthen the evidence base and inform continuous improvement.
- **Investment in early career support builds long-term capacity**
  Structured induction programmes play a crucial role in establishing habits of reflection, collaboration and continuous learning, which are essential for sustaining a high-quality teaching profession.
- **Future readiness requires a balance of innovation and stability**
  Ireland's TPL system demonstrates the importance of being forward-looking—particularly in areas such as digital education and AI—while maintaining a stable foundation of pedagogical quality, inclusion and equity.

10. Future Developments

The establishment of Oide in 2023 was one of several key initiatives taking place across the education system to review structures, provision and practices, identify and consolidate strengths and establish goals and targets for improvement. Currently, an Education Convention is underway in Ireland to afford all stakeholders in the education system the opportunity to discuss, critically evaluate and, where necessary, redesign the way education will be experienced by children and young people in primary and secondary level education into the future. A central pillar of these deliberations will be the education workforce of the future. To realise the vision of a high quality and inclusive education system that prepares Ireland's children and young people for their current and future lives, what capacity will need to be afforded to staff in schools? Will the traditional roles of school leader and teacher need to be reviewed and evolved? Will other professional roles become integral to the staffing of schools? How will these roles collaborate? Will the advances in digital technology impact and how can they be positively harnessed in the best interests of high-quality educational experiences? Embarking on the national conversation on these significant questions is challenging. However, it is only possible because one of the biggest decisions - that of the centrality of highly trained professionals to deliver whatever vision emerges from the Education Convention - has already been agreed. Investment in the education workforce in Ireland will continue to be a priority. Oide as the lead agent for professional learning will play a pivotal role. Through collaboration with schools, education partners, and various education networks, Oide bridges national priorities with local needs, fostering a culture of professional growth that is responsive, inclusive, and future-focused. Through its integrated approach, Oide ensures coherence across the continuum of professional learning, offering high-quality, evidence-informed, and innovative professional learning opportunities. As Ireland continues to transform its education system, Oide remains central to empowering educators to create dynamic and impactful learning experiences for all learners.

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KOSOVO

Teacher Education in Kosovo: Structure, Reform, and System Coherence

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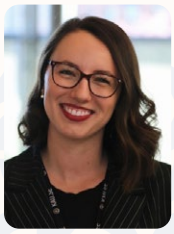
The Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina (Kosovo) was established in 2002 to offer study programs for the preparation of preschool educators and primary and lower secondary level teachers as a continuation of the tradition of the four Higher Pedagogical Schools (SHLP) that operated until that time in Prishtina, Prizren, Gjakova and Gjilan. As largest and oldest teacher education in Kosovo, it currently has about 2000 students at three study levels. It offers Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D. programs for the preparation of educators and teachers for all levels as well as various professionals in the field of education. The Faculty of Education is a member of the Association of Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) and has established the Institute of Research and Development in Education (IRDE) as a way to engage with schools in various professional development activities for school staff and also in various development and research projects.

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Teacher Education in Kosovo: Structure, Reform, and System Coherence

Authors: Blerim Saqipi, Fjolla Kaçaniku, Elmedina Nikoçeviq-Kurti

Abstract

This chapter examines the structure, development, and functioning of teacher education in Kosovo, with particular attention to the continuum of initial teacher education (ITE), the teacher career system, and continuous professional development (CPD). Over the past two decades, Kosovo has undertaken extensive reforms aimed at aligning teacher education with European frameworks, competence-based approaches, and broader quality standards. While these reforms have contributed to the expansion and formalization of teacher education, this chapter explores the extent to which policy developments have translated into coherent and meaningful changes in practice.

The analysis shows that ITE in Kosovo has developed into a diversified and institutionally dispersed system in which programme design, pedagogical approaches, and the integration of theory and practice vary across institutions and pathways. Although competence-based reforms have significantly influenced policy discourse and programme structures, their implementation has often remained partial, resulting in formal alignment without corresponding transformation in teaching, learning, and practicum practices. Similar patterns are evident in the teacher career and CPD system. Despite the existence of established licensing frameworks, professional development structures, and clearly defined institutional responsibilities, implementation remains uneven and fragmented. CPD provision is frequently characterized by project-based and insufficiently coordinated activities, with limited alignment with teachers' professional needs and everyday school practice.

The chapter argues that the key challenge facing teacher education in Kosovo is not the absence of policy reform, but the persistent gap between formal frameworks and their implementation. This reflects a broader systemic fragmentation across the teacher development continuum, rather than isolated weaknesses within individual components of the system. Strengthening teacher education therefore requires greater coherence between ITE, induction, career development, and CPD; a stronger pedagogical and practice-based core; and a shift from compliance-oriented approaches towards sustained professional learning and classroom impact. The chapter concludes that meaningful reform will depend on stronger institutional coordination, stable support mechanisms, and the capacity to translate formal policy commitments into coherent and sustainable practices that strengthen teacher development and, ultimately, contribute to improved student learning.

Keywords: Standards of the teaching profession, Initial Teacher Education, Teacher Professional Development, School-Based Professional Development, Teacher licensing

Introduction

This chapter examines the development, structure, and challenges of teacher education in Kosovo, with a particular focus on the relationship between initial teacher education and the teacher career and continuous professional development system. Over the past two decades, Kosovo has undertaken extensive reforms aimed at aligning teacher education with European standards and competence-based approaches (Kaçaniku, 2024). While these reforms have contributed to the expansion and formal structuring of the system, important questions remain regarding coherence, implementation, and the extent to which teacher education effectively prepares teachers for the realities of classroom practice (Saqipi, 2019).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it aims to provide a critical analysis of initial teacher education in Kosovo, moving beyond descriptive accounts to examine how institutional structures, programme design, and reform processes shape teacher preparation in practice. Second, it situates initial teacher education within the broader teacher development continuum, including entry into the profession, career progression, and continuous professional development. By doing so, the chapter highlights the extent to which these components function as a coherent system or remain fragmented in implementation.

The chapter begins by outlining the system context and policy architecture that govern teacher education in Kosovo. This section introduces the key actors, policy frameworks, and regulatory mechanisms that shape both initial teacher education and continuous professional development, and highlights the gap between formal policy design and practical implementation. It then turns to initial teacher education, examining its expansion, institutional organization, and programme design across universities. Particular attention is given to the ways in which Europeanisation and competence-based reforms have influenced programme structures and discourse, while also revealing persistent tensions between policy intentions and practice.

Building on this, the chapter identifies key challenges within initial teacher education, including the enduring theory–practice divide, fragmentation across institutions and programme types, and limitations in quality assurance processes. These challenges are further illustrated through an analysis of different programme routes, highlighting inconsistencies in the extent to which programmes function as genuine teacher preparation pathways.

The final part of the chapter shifts focus to the teacher career system and continuous professional development. It examines entry into the profession, the structure of the licensing system, participation in professional development, and the role of different actors in supporting teacher learning. Particular attention is given to structural limitations that affect the coherence and effectiveness of the system, including uneven implementation and limited coordination of professional development.

1. System context and policy architecture

Teacher education in Kosovo has developed within a broader trajectory of post-war reconstruction and European-oriented higher education reform. Over the past two decades, both initial teacher education and continuous professional development have been increasingly formalized and shaped by policy frameworks that aim to align the system with European standards and competence-based approaches (Kaçaniku, 2022). Initial teacher education has been institutionalized within universities, while continuous professional development has gradually been embedded within the teacher career system and school-level practices. While these developments are often presented as progress, a closer examination reveals persistent gaps between policy design and implementation that continue to affect both initial teacher preparation and continuous professional development (Saqipi, 2019).

The regulation of initial teacher education in Kosovo is embedded within a broader policy and governance framework that combines central regulation with institutional autonomy. At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) defines policy directions and establishes the regulatory framework guiding the system. Within this architecture, the **Law on Pre-University Education (2011)** not only governs schooling but also embeds teacher training standards, linking teacher preparation directly with recognized higher education qualifications, while the **Law on Higher Education** (2011) sets the conditions for the functioning of higher education institutions, including those responsible for initial teacher education, while accreditation standards define the formal requirements under which teacher education programmes are designed, approved, and evaluated. Quality assurance is organized through a dual structure, combining external oversight by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) with internal quality assurance mechanisms developed and implemented by higher education institutions in accordance with their own regulations (Kaçaniku, 2020).

These national and institutional arrangements are intended to operate as a multi-layered regulatory system that aligns policy expectations with institutional implementation, creating a formally coherent framework for initial teacher education (Vanari & Kaçaniku, 2023). In practice, however, this coherence remains largely procedural, as these mechanisms prioritize formal compliance over substantive quality. Accreditation processes focus primarily on programme documentation and alignment with prescribed standards rather than on implementation, teaching quality, or the actual preparedness of graduates (Kaçaniku, 2024). As a result, programmes may satisfy regulatory requirements while remaining limited in their capacity to develop the competences required for effective teaching.

These limitations become more visible when examining how initial teacher education is organized and delivered across institutions. Teacher education provision is located primarily within five Faculties of Education, alongside other faculties that offer subject-based pathways relevant to school teaching (Kaçaniku, 2022). While this configuration broadens access and diversifies provision, it also distributes responsibility across institutions with different academic traditions, priorities, and understandings of teacher preparation. In the absence of a strong coordinating mechanism to align programme structure, content, and pedagogical expectations, this institutional dispersion results in variation in how teacher education is enacted (Saqipi et al., 2025). As a consequence, formally similar policy requirements are translated into differentiated programme designs and uneven learning experiences across institutions.

Recent reforms have sought to address these differences through the introduction of competence-based approaches, reflecting broader European developments in teacher education. These reforms have influenced programme design, particularly through the incorporation of learning outcomes and competence frameworks. However, their impact has been uneven, as competence-based principles are often interpreted through existing academic traditions rather than reshaping them. In this context, reform operates more as an additional layer within existing programme structures than as a driver of pedagogical change (Kacaniku, 2024). Consequently, variations in programme design and delivery persist, limiting the extent to which competence-based approaches translate into more consistent and practice-oriented teacher preparation (Saqipi et al., 2025).

To understand how these institutional and programmatic variations have been shaped over time, it is necessary to consider the evolution of standards-based teacher policy in Kosovo. Early interventions, such as the **Standards of Pre-Service Teacher Education Programming** (2005), were followed by the **Teacher Competency Profile and Teacher Performance Assessment Standards** (2010), and later consolidated within the **Strategic Framework for Teacher Development in Kosovo** (2017) (Saqipi, 2012, 2019). These developments initially focused on defining what future teachers should know and be able to do at the point of entry into the profession, thereby directly influencing the design and orientation of initial teacher education programmes. At the same time, they progressively expanded toward a broader conception of teacher development across the career. This framework defines teacher competences across career stages and establishes a continuum linking initial preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development. Within this logic, teacher competences are understood as integrated combinations of professional values, knowledge, and skills that evolve throughout a teacher's career (Perolli-Shehu et al., 2023).

Strategic Framework for the Professional Development of Teachers (2017) establishes professional standards for teachers throughout their career path (initial preparation, entry into the profession, and ongoing career advancement). It specifies the competencies required at different stages of a teacher's career and defines the phases for implementing the teacher career development system. The main purpose of this document is to provide a coherent career pathway for the professional development of teachers in Kosovo, incorporating a unified set of performance standards and competencies across the four stages of the teacher career and licensing system (entry phase, career license phase, advanced license phase and permanent license phase).

The standards of the teaching profession are summarized in four main domains:

1. Professional values, attitudes, and behaviors
2. Professional knowledge and understanding
3. Professional skills and practice
4. Learning and professional engagement

These domains and their corresponding standards, along with their specific indicators, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Domains, Standards, and Specific Indicators (Strategic Framework for the Professional Development of Teachers, 2017)

DOMAINS	STANDARDS	INDICATORS
1. PROFESSIONAL VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS	**Standard 1** Recognizes and upholds the key values and criteria established by the Ministry of Education (MES).	1.1 Bases teaching practice on the values and principles of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework and the MESTI Code of Conduct. 1.2 Carries out teaching duties and responsibilities with professionalism, a high level of commitment, integrity, and accuracy. 1.3 Understands and respects the legal, administrative, and organizational requirements of the profession, including teaching hours and time management.
2. PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	**Standard 2** Demonstrates positive and objective attitudes and behaviors regarding students' well-being and learning.	**2.1** Understands students' physical, social, and intellectual development and promotes lifelong learning. **2.2** Knows how students learn and supports them in achieving learning outcomes. **2.3** Treats all students equally and with respect. **2.4** Creates a safe and supportive learning environment that maximizes learning and encourages students to become independent individuals, decision-makers, lifelong learners, and productive members of society capable of solving problems.
	Standard 3 Demonstrates knowledge of the curriculum/ subject content and professional subject didactics.	**3.1** Has thorough knowledge of the teaching subject within the Kosovo Curriculum Framework. **3.2** Knows how to deliver subject content using a variety of effective teaching techniques. **3.3** Develops differentiated instruction to support inclusive participation and address the specific learning needs of students with diverse abilities. **3.4** Possesses a range of classroom management strategies.
3. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND PRACTICES	**Standard 4** Plans and implements effective teaching and learning.	**4.1** Sets challenging learning goals. **4.2** Uses a variety of teaching strategies to guide, motivate, and stimulate students' higher-order thinking. **4.3** Selects and uses appropriate resources and develops teaching materials for topics where no literature is available. **4.4** Uses appropriate technology in a safe, responsible, and ethical manner to enhance learning.
	Standard 5 Plans continuous assessment (assessment for learning), provides feedback, and reports on students' learning.	**5.1** Conducts ongoing assessment of students' progress and communicates regularly with students to provide constructive feedback. **5.2** Develops plans that address gaps in students' achievement. **5.3** Interprets student assessment data in order to improve students' learning. **5.4** Reports on students' achievement.
4. LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT	**Standard 6** Engages in continuous professional development.	**6.1** Identifies and plans personal professional learning needs. **6.2** Uses new professional learning to improve teaching practice. **6.3** Collaborates with colleagues to improve teaching practice. **6.4** Adapts and improves teaching practices through learning and reflection.
	Standard 7 Engages professionally with colleagues, parents, and communities.	**7.1** Collaborates with colleagues to improve the teaching and learning environment. **7.2** Communicates effectively with students, parents/ guardians, and colleagues. **7.3** Participates in various collaborative professional networks and broader professional communities, and promotes knowledge sharing and discussion on relevant educational issues. **7.4** Conducts action research within the school environment.

Building on this policy foundation, attention shifts from initial teacher education to the regulation of the teaching profession and continuous professional development. The teacher career system is structured through licensing regulations (Saqipi, 2012), further operationalized through the **Administrative Instruction on Teacher Licensing** (2023), which defines licensing stages and links them to requirements for professional development, performance evaluation, and career progression. In principle, this creates a structured pathway in which initial teacher education feeds into continuous professional development, with progression tied to accumulated professional learning and demonstrated competence. CPD is thus positioned as a central mechanism for maintaining and advancing teacher quality, with schools and municipal structures expected to play an active role in identifying needs, facilitating participation, and supporting teacher development in practice (Saqipi, 2014).

This extended framework is supported by a set of actors responsible for linking teacher preparation with professional practice. The Education Inspectorate monitors the quality of teaching and the implementation of standards at school level, while municipal education directorates and schools function as key sites where professional development takes place and where policy expectations are translated into practice. These actors are intended to form a coherent system linking initial preparation, entry into the profession, and ongoing professional development (Mehmeti, 2024).

However, despite this relatively comprehensive policy architecture, the system remains only partially coherent in practice. While formal frameworks articulate connections between ITE, licensing, and CPD, implementation is uneven. The licensing system is not yet fully operational across all stages, and the link between professional development and career progression remains inconsistently enforced. As a result, CPD often functions in a fragmented manner, shaped by project-based provision and limited systemic coordination, rather than as a fully embedded component of a coherent teacher development system. This fragmentation is particularly visible at the level of schools and municipalities, where **access to and quality of professional development opportunities vary significantly** (Saqipi, 2019).

The gap between policy and practice is therefore a defining feature of Kosovo's teacher education system. While the policy architecture presents a coherent vision of a teacher development continuum, the realities of implementation, across both initial teacher education and continuous professional development, remain fragmented and uneven across institutions, municipalities, and schools. This tension between formal alignment and practical incoherence provides the necessary context for understanding the challenges discussed in the following sections.

2. Initial teacher education in Kosovo: Expansion, Europeanisation, and unresolved fragmentation

2.1. Institutional architecture and programme design

Initial teacher education (ITE) in Kosovo has expanded significantly over the past two decades, but expansion has not produced a coherent national architecture. Since the "universification" of teacher education in 2002/03, responsibility for preparing teachers has shifted from higher pedagogical schools to university-based provision. By 2013, five public institutions were offering ITE, with the Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina remaining the largest and most influential actor in the system. This institutional growth has often been presented as a sign of modernization, yet a closer reading suggests that Kosovo has developed not a unified teacher education model, but a patchwork of pathways shaped by institutional autonomy, uneven reform uptake, and weak national coordination (Kaçaniku, 2022).

At the formal level, initial teacher education in Kosovo appears relatively well regulated, drawing on a combination of national policy frameworks and institutional regulations that define programme structure and requirements. These provisions establish differentiated routes for teacher preparation across levels and subject areas, creating what is, in principle, a structured and vertically aligned system. The main qualification pathways, including their credit structure and practice requirements, are summarized in Table 2. However, this formal coherence masks important inconsistencies. While policy defines clear expectations in terms of programme duration, credit allocation, and school-based practice, these requirements are translated unevenly across institutions and programme types. As a result, common standards coexist with significant variation in curricular design and the balance between academic and pedagogical preparation (Saqipi & Hoti, 2019).

Table 2. Formal pathways in initial teacher education in Kosovo

Teacher category	Qualification pathway	Credit structure	Practice requirement
Preschool and primary teachers	Bachelor level programme	240 ECTS	Minimum 25 ECTS school-based practice
Subject teachers	Bachelor + Master model	180 ECTS (subject) + 120 ECTS (MA)	Minimum 15 ECTS practice (MA level)

This gap between formal design and enacted programme realities becomes particularly visible in the organization of provision. The faculties of education in Prishtina, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Gjakova, and Prizren offer broadly similar bachelor routes for primary and pre-primary teaching, many of them inherited from earlier models developed under the umbrella of the University of Prishtina. At a structural level, this suggests a degree of standardization. However, beyond these faculties, other units also function as de facto teacher preparation providers, particularly in subject teaching and specialist fields such as English language, German language, French language, arts, music, and physical education (Saqipi et al., 2025).

While this broader provider landscape expands access, it simultaneously disperses responsibility for teacher preparation across institutions that are not uniformly oriented toward pedagogical formation. In effect, Kosovo's ITE system is distributed across faculties with different academic cultures, priorities, and underlying

assumptions about what it means to prepare a teacher. As a result, programme design is shaped as much by disciplinary logics as by teacher education objectives, which further complicates coherence across the system. This institutional dispersion makes alignment difficult, particularly in the absence of a strong national mechanism to synchronize programme content, structure, and pedagogical expectations across institutions (Saqipi, 2019).

This institutional dispersion and variation in programme design point to a more fundamental pattern in the organization of teacher preparation. What emerges is a stratified model of teacher education, in which class teachers are prepared within relatively integrated education faculties, while many subject teachers are produced through a sequential model that separates subject mastery from pedagogical formation. This is not unusual internationally, but in Kosovo the separation appears especially pronounced. In this context, programme structures tend to privilege disciplinary knowledge, positioning pedagogy, practice, and professional identity as secondary or supplementary components of preparation. Such a model risks reproducing hierarchies between "academic" and "professional" knowledge and leaves the professional dimension of teaching vulnerable to marginalization (Kaçaniku, 2024).

This configuration is closely linked to the trajectory of reform that has shaped ITE in Kosovo over the past two decades. Rather than representing a fully reconfigured system, current programme structures reflect the way reform ideas have been layered onto existing institutional arrangements. Understanding why these patterns persist therefore requires moving beyond programme design to examine how reform agendas, particularly those associated with Europeanisation and competence-based education, have been interpreted and enacted in practice (Kaçaniku, 2025).

2.2. From structural reform to competence-based discourse

Kosovo's initial teacher education reforms have been deeply shaped by Europeanization. The Bologna Process, the Tuning project, Erasmus mobility, and European teacher competence frameworks have all influenced the language, structure, and aspirations of teacher education reform (Kaçaniku, 2022).
These reforms introduced ECTS logic, quality assurance mechanisms, learning outcomes, and a broader competence-based vocabulary oriented toward teacher professionalism, adaptability, reflection, inclusion, and lifelong learning. In this sense, Kosovo has clearly moved away from a purely content-based conception of teacher preparation at the level of policy discourse (Saqipi & Hoti, 2019).

The shift toward competence-based teacher education in Kosovo has been partial and uneven. Although policy frameworks in Kosovo promote a competence-based approach, implementation across study programmes remains inconsistent. A study by Kaçaniku (2024) found a notable lack of cohesion in teacher competence development, with a significant gap between the design and implementation of competence-based programmes. Variations in teaching styles, student activities, practical engagement, and assessment methods exist across courses and among teacher educators. These discrepancies lead to tensions stemming from differing emphases on knowledge, skills, and values, which seem compartmentalized rather than integrated into a unified programmatic framework. As a result, changes tend to be more formal than substantive. While programme frameworks increasingly reflect competence-based design, largely driven by aspirations for European alignment and the adoption of external reference points, these developments have not translated consistently into pedagogical practice. Programme traditions remain highly influential, generating tensions between reform rhetoric and its enactment. According to Kaçaniku (2024), although some teacher educators have begun to

integrate competence-based approaches into their teaching, for many others the underlying principles remain insufficiently understood or only superficially applied. In this sense, the reform has not resulted in a transition from one coherent paradigm to another. Rather, it has introduced a new conceptual layer onto an established academic tradition in which teachers continue to be primarily positioned as holders and transmitters of knowledge. As a result, competence-based language is often incorporated at the level of programme documentation, while its implications for teaching, learning, and assessment practices remain only partially realized (Kaçaniku, 2024).

This point is crucial for a critical reading of reform. The main change has often been structural and discursive rather than pedagogical. Learning outcomes have been added, competences have been named, and programme documents have been reformulated, but deeper questions about teaching, learning, practicum design, assessment, mentoring, and the role of teacher educators have been less consistently addressed. Many teacher educators continue to interpret competence-based education through a traditional academic lens, giving priority to knowledge and understanding while paying less attention to skills, values, attitudes, reflection, and action. This suggests that reform has often produced surface convergence with European expectations rather than deep transformation in programme logic (Perolli-Shehu et al., 2023). This helps explain why, despite extensive reform efforts, core challenges in programme design and implementation continue to persist.

2.3. Persistent challenges: Theory–practice divide, fragmentation, and formalistic quality assurance

The partial and uneven nature of this transition helps explain why structural and curricular inconsistencies persist across the system. In other words, the limitations observed in programme design are not isolated technical issues, but the outcome of how reform has been interpreted and enacted in practice. Three interrelated challenges are particularly visible: (i) the enduring theory–practice divide, (ii) fragmentation across multiple levels, and (iii) a largely formalistic approach to quality assurance (Vanari & Kaçaniku, 2023).

The most persistent challenge in Kosovo's initial teacher education is the enduring gap between theory and practice. Across the reviewed programmes, there is repeated evidence that theoretical and disciplinary content is privileged over sustained professional practice. Even where school practice is formally included, it is often insufficiently integrated across the duration of the programme. This matters because the competence-based turn, at least in principle, is supposed to bridge exactly this divide by connecting knowledge, performance, reflection, and professional judgment. In Kosovo, however, practice has too often remained an appendage rather than an organizing principle of programme design (Saqipi & Hoti, 2019).

A second challenge is fragmentation at multiple levels. Institutionally, the system is fragmented across universities and faculties. Professionally, teacher education is fragmented between academic subject preparation and pedagogical formation. Culturally, it is fragmented by uneven understandings of reform among teacher educators and institutional leaders. European ideas are adopted in policy, but their meaning is filtered through weak ownership at macro level, fragmented organizational culture at meso level, and isolated professional cultures at micro level. This diagnosis is especially useful because it shows that fragmentation is not merely administrative. It is also epistemic and cultural, affecting how programmes are imagined, enacted, and evaluated (Kaçaniku, 2022).

Quality assurance, meanwhile, has not resolved these issues. Accreditation has undoubtedly pushed institutions to document their programmes more systematically and align them with formal standards. Yet the evidence from Kosovo suggests that accreditation often privileges documentation, formal compliance, and external review over the quality of enactment (Kaçaniku, 2020). Programmes may look aligned on paper while remaining weak in practicum organization, pedagogical integration, and student-teacher engagement. The problem is compounded by rotating international reviewers whose recommendations may be inconsistent and only partially attuned to Kosovo's educational context. In that sense, accreditation has functioned more effectively as a compliance mechanism than as a driver of pedagogical renewal (Saqipi, 2019).

A final challenge concerns the unresolved status of teacher professionalism in programme design. European frameworks promote a view of teaching that includes reflection, inquiry, collaboration, inclusion, innovation, and adaptive expertise. Yet several Kosovo programmes still reflect a narrower conception of teacher preparation centred on content delivery and end-of-course assessment. This is particularly visible in programmes with little or no school practice. The critical issue, then, is not whether Kosovo has reformed teacher education, but what kind of reform has actually taken root. Much of the system has moved toward European structures and language, but not all of it has moved toward an equally strong professional conception of teaching (Kaçaniku, 2024).

These patterns suggest that the next stage of reform in Kosovo cannot rely on further structural alignment alone.

2.4. Fragmented provider landscape and ambiguous teacher-preparation routes

These system-level challenges become particularly visible when examining how different programmes function in practice. The boundary between academic study and teacher preparation remains blurred, with some programmes formally or informally positioned as routes into teaching despite lacking the core elements of pedagogical preparation. Table 2 synthesizes how these patterns manifest across programme types, highlighting variation not only in institutional provision but also in the extent to which programmes operate as coherent and practice-oriented teacher education routes (Saqipi et al., 2025).

A persistent weakness in Kosovo's ITE system is that fragmentation extends beyond institutional dispersion across universities and into the provider landscape itself. Several programmes positioned outside, or at the margins of, the core teacher education framework are treated as relevant pathways into school teaching, even though they are not structured as full teacher preparation programmes. Evidence from the KosEd review shows, for example, that language and literature programmes primarily function as academic degrees, lacking both structured pedagogical components and school-based practice. Similar patterns are evident in arts, music, and physical education, where programme design is shaped by disciplinary, performance, or sports-science logics rather than by pedagogy, classroom practice, and professional formation (Saqipi et al., 2025).

At the same time, these inconsistencies are also present within formally recognized teacher education routes. Variations in programme duration, the scope of pedagogical coursework, and the extent of school-based practice point to uneven depth in teacher preparation. In particular, shorter and more compressed study pathways tend to offer limited opportunities for sustained pedagogical engagement, raising questions about their capacity to support the

development of teaching competences. The issue, therefore, is not simply one of curricular imbalance, but of a blurred boundary between academic study and teacher preparation across the system as a whole. This blurring weakens systemic coherence and helps explain why Kosovo continues to exhibit what the literature describes as surface convergence with European reforms, alongside fragmented and uneven implementation in practice (Kaçaniku, 2022, 2025).

Table 3. Blurred and uneven routes into teaching in Kosovo

Illustrative route	Why it may be read as a route into teaching	Core issue in teacher education terms	Indicative pattern
Primary teacher education programmes	Formally recognized and standardized routes for preparing class teachers	Structurally similar, but uneven implementation; theory–practice tensions persist; variation in mentoring and delivery affects student experience	Balanced ECTS structure exists on paper, but overemphasis on academic knowledge and limited development of practical skills and professional values
MA-level teacher education routes	Located within education faculties and positioned as advanced teacher preparation pathways	Uneven depth across programmes; shorter and compressed routes limit pedagogical development and school practice	Variation in duration and practice components; some programmes remain theory-oriented with limited practical engagement
Language and literature programmes	Directly linked to school subjects and socially perceived as pathways into teaching	Designed as academic degrees rather than teacher education; lack pedagogical coursework and practice	Strong emphasis on subject knowledge; minimal or no structured teaching preparation
Arts and music-related programmes	Often associated with teaching roles in schools	Dominated by disciplinary and performance focus; weak integration of pedagogy and practice	Limited pedagogical components and absence of structured school-based training
Physical education and sports programmes	Clearly linked to a school subject area	Oriented toward sports science rather than teacher preparation; marginal focus on pedagogy	Emphasis on technical and scientific knowledge with minimal preparation for teaching practice

The analysis points to two interconnected patterns. On the one hand, ITE appears formally standardized, yet its implementation produces uneven learning experiences. On the other hand, alternative and advanced pathways into teaching vary considerably in their pedagogical depth, with some routes remaining insufficiently oriented toward practice-based teacher preparation.

3. Continuous professional development and teacher career system

3.1. Interest in the teaching profession

As presented in subtopic 2., Teacher Education in Kosovo is primarily provided at public universities through Faculties of Education, where students are trained in pedagogical theory and teaching practice in order to work in primary schools. Teacher preparation is offered at five main universities in Kosovo: The University of Prishtina, the University of Gjilan, the University of Prizren, University of Gjakova and the University of Mitrovica. In general, places in teacher education programs in Kosovo are often filled quickly, even though the number of available places may be limited or has been reduced over the years. This happens because there is still continuous interest from candidates in studying teaching, especially in primary and pre-primary education.

The literature provides consistent evidence that teacher candidates in Kosovo are primarily motivated to enter the teaching profession through intrinsic factors. Both Kastrati & Gjelaj (2025) and Kaçaniku et al. (2022) report that students' initial decision to pursue teaching is strongly linked to a desire for working with children, contributing to learning and development, and making a meaningful social impact. Teaching is therefore perceived not only as an occupational choice, but also as a value-driven and socially responsible career path.

In particular, Kastrati & Gjelaj (2025) highlight that many student teachers associate the profession with the opportunity to influence future generations and support societal development, which reinforces a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment. Similarly, Kaçaniku et al. (2022) find that student teachers often enter teacher education with positive motivational beliefs, including a perception of teaching as a profession that aligns with their personal skills, interests, and communication abilities.

Alongside these intrinsic motivations, both studies also indicate the role of extrinsic considerations, although these are less dominant at the point of entry. Teaching is sometimes viewed as a relatively stable career option, especially in contexts where employment opportunities are limited. However, concerns related to low salary levels and limited social recognition are already present in students' perceptions and may influence their long-term commitment to the profession. The prestige of the teaching profession is widely recognized as dynamic and often low or declining in many contexts, making the motivations of individuals who choose teaching despite this situation an important and underexplored issue. Research shows that such individuals are often driven by a strong commitment to social contribution and improving education, as well as the desire to realize their personal and professional potential, even in the face of challenges such as low salaries, high responsibility, and limited social recognition (Augustinienė & Stanišauskienė, 2025).

Taken together, these studies suggest that sustaining interest in the teaching profession requires targeted support mechanisms. In particular, continuous professional development plays a critical role in maintaining motivation by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Structured opportunities such as mentoring, reflective practice, supervised teaching experiences, and ongoing pedagogical training can strengthen student-teachers' professional identity and increase their confidence in classroom practice (Nikoçeviq-Kurti & Saqipi, 2022).

Furthermore, one should note the importance of enhancing the social and professional recognition of teachers in Kosovo. When teaching is positioned as a valued and respected profession within society, and when teachers are supported through improved working conditions and clear career development pathways, student-teachers are more likely to maintain their initial commitment to the profession. Overall, the literature suggests that while initial interest in teaching in Kosovo is strong, its sustainability depends on a combination of effective teacher education practices, continuous professional development, and broader societal appreciation of the teaching profession.

Teaching profession in Kosovo has been challenged by a decreasing interest of younger generation to go into teaching profession. Statistics show that there has been an approximate 50 percent decrease of applicants in teacher education programs (over last five years) at the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education where the competition and number of programs is highest in the country. Though in major programs such as primary teacher education and early childhood teacher education there is still more applicants than places available the proportion has decreased to about 2 applicants to a place in year 2025/2026 available in early childhood education as opposed to 3.8 applicants for a place available in year 2020/2021. Similarly, in year 2020/2021 there was a ratio of 4.7 applicants for a place in primary teacher education program as opposed to 2.6 applicants for a place in year 2025/2026. The situation has been more worrying in subject teacher education programming in which currently it is not possible to attract sufficient candidates for most of the programming in various programs of teaching subjects in social or natural sciences. This is a reflection of how the interest of youngsters, attractiveness of the profession as well as status of the profession has been changing in Kosovo over last 5 years calling for more systemic policy making actions to change the reality.

3.2. Induction/entry intro profession

The induction program in Kosovo for new teachers is not yet fully institutionalized or consistently formalized, however, there are clear indications of initiatives aimed at developing and strengthening such a system. New teachers often begin their work without a structured national mentoring system (Nikoçeviq-Kurti & Saqipi, 2022). This creates a need for more organized entry-to-the-profession programs, where novice teachers are supported by mentors and receive continuous training during their first year of teaching. With the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Faculty of Education, and supported by UNICEF, working draft manuals have been developed to support beginning teachers in the process of adaptation and professional development during their first year of work, and to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and steps of the mentoring and evaluation process for obtaining a career license.

The Administrative Instructions of MES on licensing, performance evaluation, and professional development further specify the implementation of this framework in practice. Administrative Instruction 14/2023 on the Licensing System and Career in Teaching defines the entry phase as a mandatory one-year probation period, during which the teacher is supported by a mentor and evaluated to determine whether they meet the professional standards for obtaining a regular license. Administrative Instruction 15/2023 on Teacher Performance Evaluation sets out mandatory classroom observations and the internal evaluation process, while Administrative Instruction 16/2023 on Teachers' Professional Development integrates professional development as an essential part of the entry phase and the licensing process. During the entry phase, it is expected that the novice teacher goes through several

interconnected steps that support their adaptation to the profession and the school environment. These steps include planning and orientation, mentoring and professional development support, as well as final evaluation.



Figure 1. Steps of the entry phase

The entry phase of teachers' is divided into three main sub-phases:

- **Preparatory phase**, which includes the introduction of the teacher to the institution, getting to know the mentor, presentation of legal and administrative documents, and the initial orientation of the novice teacher.
- **Developmental phase**, which focuses on active mentoring, continuous support, and the development of professional competencies.
- **Evaluation phase**, which aims to assess the teacher's progress, reflect on the experiences gained, and determine the outcomes of the entry phase through the application for the career license.

Professional development in the entry phase is integrated with mentoring and classroom practice observation, which are mandatory components of the licensing process. Through guided reflection, professional discussions, and mentor support, the novice teacher develops the necessary skills to meet the standards of the Framework (MESTI, 2017) and to prepare for the final evaluation and the attainment of a regular teaching license (MESTI, 2023).

3.3. TPD system structure

In Kosovo, policies for teacher professional development (TPD) are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) through the State Council for the Licensing of Teachers (SCLT). This body is responsible for setting standards and performance indicators for in-service teachers. It also recommends standards, procedures, and criteria for: the teacher licensing and career system; the approval, implementation, and monitoring of professional development programs, including school-based professional development; the professional development of school leaders and education administrators; the evaluation of teacher performance for career advancement; and the evaluation of principals and deputy principals' performance in educational institutions (see Law on Pre-University Education (2011) & MES, AI 13/2023).

The TPD is provided through two forms that are also linked to the teacher licensing system. It includes all programs and activities carried out in accordance with the applicable legal framework and implemented by accredited providers approved by the MES, as well as activities organized directly by schools. School-Based Professional Development (SBPD) includes professional learning activities carried out within schools under school leadership and active participation of staff. These activities include seminars, professional meetings, mentoring activities, symposiums, and similar forms of collaboration (UA 14/2023) as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Forms and practical modalities for School-Based Professional Development (SBPD)

Forms of SBPD	Suggested practical modalities for schools
School-based programs/ training	Organization of pedagogical days (full days dedicated to staff training). Semester-based subject-specific programs (continuous training for groups of teachers within their subject area). Partnership with a central school (or with smaller schools that may join training organized by larger schools). On-site/online combination (part of the training conducted at school, part online for flexibility). Cascade training (a trained group of teachers passes on knowledge to other colleagues).
Workshops and seminars in schools	Organization of short sessions for practical problem-solving (90-minute sessions). Teaching laboratory (one teacher demonstrates a lesson, others observe, reflect, and discuss). "Host rotation" model with neighboring schools (one school hosts, then another, in rotation). Peer-to-peer workshops (an experienced teacher leads workshops for colleagues).
Peer counselling and mentoring	Creation of mentor–mentee pairs or triads (a new teacher is paired with experienced colleagues or subject peers). Development of "step-by-step learning" (short lesson observations for peer learning). Cross-school mentoring (combination of online meetings and school visits). Collegial mentoring through a mentoring cycle (3–4 teachers meet regularly for reflection and mutual support). Cross-disciplinary triads (mentoring between teachers from different subject areas).
Action research	8-week mini-research projects in groups (testing a new method and reflecting on results). Practice-based learning cycle (plan–observe–reflect–redesign) (cyclical analysis of a shared lesson). Cross-school groups with municipal-level presentations (small schools collaborate and share findings at school and municipal level). Mini-projects integrated into the curriculum (small research activities directly linked to subject topics). Partnerships with universities (collaboration for methodological and academic support).

However, it is worth noting that SBPD is the field is sporadic and implemented only in selected schools and still not coherently and consistently throughout the country as regulation enables and demands. Professional development programs are officially approved programs focused on contemporary teaching and learning. They are delivered either by external providers or through school-based structures and may be directly related to classroom practice or broader professional preparation.

Overall, the structure of TPD policies in Kosovo are centrally regulated, quality-assured, and closely linked to teacher licensing and career progression.

3.4. Licensing reform

A set of documents related to the professional development of teachers derives from the Strategic Framework for Teacher Development (2017). However, these documents were revised and republished in 2023. Similarly, the teacher licensing system has also undergone several changes, including the removal of the "mentor teacher" license, a reduction in the number of required hours for obtaining a teaching license, and an increased allocation of hours for school-based training. Similarly, the state examination for the teaching profession has

also been introduced in new licensing reform; however, it has not yet started to be implemented in practice. Until its application begins within the system, any person who has been selected for a teaching position by a municipality in Kosovo and has received a one-year contract may participate in the Entry Program in Teaching. The teacher licensing system is implemented in connection with the pre-service teacher education system, the state examination, and teachers' professional development throughout their career (see Figure 2).

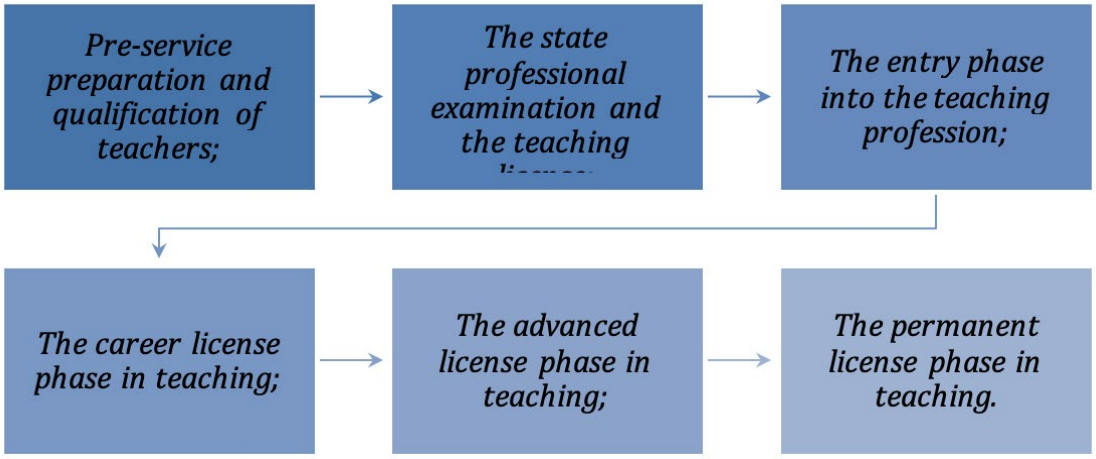


Figure 2. The teacher licensing system

As presented in Table 5., for each teaching license, specific conditions are defined regarding how it is obtained, its duration and renewal, the required training hours, and other criteria in accordance with the standards of the Strategic Framework for Teacher Development (MESTI, 2017) and the requirements of the Administrative Instruction on the Licensing System and Career in Teaching (MESTI, 2023).

Table 5. Teacher Licensing System: Conditions, Duration, Renewal, and Professional Development Requirements (MESTI, 2017)

Stages of teacher licensing	The duration	Professional development	Performance evaluation	The duration
The entry phase into the teaching profession	The phase of entering the teaching profession begins after the initial employment of the teacher in an educational institution of pre-university education.	There is no number of hours	Teacher undergoes the TPE process, directed by the school and MED	One year
The career license phase in teaching	After the successful completion of the introductory phase	100 hours	The renewal of the career license is done through the TPE run by the school/MED.	7 years
The advanced license phase in teaching	All teachers with a career license who have at least 8 years of work experience, including the introductory phase, are eligible to apply for an advanced license.	200 hours	Teachers undergo a qualifying exam by the Ministry and TPE run by the Education Inspectorate	7 years
The permanent license phase in teaching	All teachers with a advanced license after completing at least 7 years of work with an advanced license, they have the right to apply for a permanent license.	300 hours	Performance evaluation directed by the Education Inspectorate	The permanent license has no time limit and does not need to be renewed.

3.5. Structural limitations

Although Kosovo's teacher professional development system is based on well-developed policy frameworks, it is still affected by a number of structural and practical limitations. To effectively address these challenges, it is necessary to ensure stable funding, strengthen licensing incentives, enhance coordination among stakeholders, and develop a more strategic and practice-focused approach to TPD provision, in order to create a coherent and sustainable system that supports meaningful teacher development and improves student learning outcomes.

In this context, the Faculty of Education, with the support of UNICEF Kosovo, has conducted a Needs Assessment for In-Service Teacher Professional Development (TPD) Programs: Identifying Priorities and Gaps (2025), which provides important evidence for understanding current challenges and informing future improvements in the system. The report highlights several structural limitations in the teacher professional development (TPD) system in Kosovo. A key issue is the fragmentation of the system and lack of coordination among main stakeholders (such as MESTI, municipal education directorates, faculties, NGOs, and schools), which results in disconnected efforts and no coherent teacher career pathway.

Another major limitation is the reduction of TPD to a purely quantitative requirement, where professional development is measured mainly through accumulated hours and certificates rather than meaningful learning and improvement of teaching practice. In addition, training programs are often misaligned with teachers' needs, as they tend to be theoretical and insufficiently practical, failing to address specific classroom challenges (Krasniqi & Buleshkaj, 2024).

The system also suffers from weak school-based professional development, due to poor management, lack of teacher involvement in planning, and absence of needs-based prioritisation. Furthermore, TPD provision is financially unsustainable, as it relies heavily on donor funding instead of stable national funding mechanisms.

Other structural weaknesses include an ineffective licensing system with limited incentives for career advancement, a fragmented and poorly monitored network of training providers, and a lack of follow-up mechanisms such as mentoring or classroom support, which limits the application of newly acquired skills. Finally, the results point to a traditional mindset among many teachers, where teaching is still viewed mainly as content delivery, rather than a process focused on critical thinking and lifelong learning. The results conclude that the system is often based on the assumption that short training courses are sufficient, but in practice they do not adequately prepare teachers for the complexity of classroom realities, which leads to reduced motivation and limited impact of CPD. There is also a need to better integrate professional development into daily school practice through mentoring, follow-up, and accountability, while strengthening the role of schools in identifying and addressing their own training needs (Nikoçeviq-Kurti et al., 2025).

While also considering approaches to address teacher shortages through innovative and motivational forms of professional development, these efforts should be closely linked to broader systemic reforms. What is needed is a stronger national coordination mechanism, clearer expectations for the pedagogical core of all teacher education pathways, more consistent monitoring of programme implementation against teacher standards, and a reconceptualization of practicum as a central site of professional learning rather than a peripheral requirement. Without that shift, Kosovo risks maintaining a formally Europeanized but substantively uneven system of ITE, one that expands access and complies with reform language while still struggling to prepare teachers in a genuinely coherent, practice-rich, and competence-oriented way (Kaçaniku, 2025).

As for challenges and future perspectives, these emerging approaches aim to support newly qualified teachers and strengthen the profession. They include fast-track induction and mentoring programmes, structured classroom coaching, and support systems that help accelerate professional readiness and reduce early-career dropout. Overall, improving CPD requires a more practical, structured, and locally responsive approach that ensures meaningful application of training in classrooms.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the structure, development, and functioning of teacher education in Kosovo, with particular attention to the relationship between initial teacher education and the teacher career and continuous professional development system. Across both domains, a consistent pattern emerges. While Kosovo has established a relatively comprehensive and formally aligned policy framework, the translation of these frameworks into practice remains uneven and fragmented.

At the level of initial teacher education, the system reflects a combination of expansion, institutional diversification, and European-oriented reform. However, this expansion has not resulted in a coherent national model of teacher preparation. Instead, it has produced a stratified and dispersed landscape in which programme design is shaped by institutional autonomy, disciplinary traditions, and uneven interpretations of reform. As a result, formal standardization coexists with significant variation in pedagogical depth, the integration of theory and practice, and the extent to which programmes function as genuine teacher preparation pathways.

The analysis further shows that competence-based reforms, while influential at the level of policy discourse and programme documentation, have not yet translated into consistent pedagogical transformation. Rather than replacing existing approaches, they have been layered onto an established academic tradition, often resulting in surface alignment without deep change in teaching, learning, and practicum design. This helps explain the persistence of core challenges, including the theory–practice divide, fragmented provision, and a formalistic approach to quality assurance.

At the same time, the chapter demonstrates that these issues are not confined to initial teacher education but extend across the broader teacher development continuum. The teacher career and continuous professional development system is similarly characterized by strong formal design but limited coherence in implementation. Although licensing frameworks, professional development structures, and institutional roles are clearly defined, their enactment remains uneven. Continuous professional development often operates through fragmented, project-based provision, with limited alignment to teachers' needs and weak integration into everyday school practice.

These findings point to a systemic challenge rather than isolated weaknesses. The central issue is not the absence of reform, but the nature of its implementation. Kosovo has achieved a high degree of formal alignment with European frameworks, yet this alignment has not been accompanied by equally strong mechanisms for coordination, pedagogical development, and sustained support at institutional and school levels. As a result, the system continues to oscillate between coherence in policy and fragmentation in practice.

Looking forward, strengthening teacher education in Kosovo requires moving beyond further structural reform toward deeper systemic integration. This includes reinforcing the pedagogical core of all teacher education pathways, ensuring that practice-based learning becomes central rather than peripheral, and developing stronger links between initial preparation, induction, and continuous professional development. Equally important is the need to shift from compliance-oriented quality assurance toward approaches that prioritize implementation, professional learning, and classroom impact.

The effectiveness of teacher education reform in Kosovo will depend on its capacity to bridge the gap between formal frameworks and lived practice. Without this shift, the system risks maintaining a trajectory of expansion and alignment that remains only partially realized in terms of preparing and supporting teachers for the complex realities of teaching.

The chapter argues that teacher education in Kosovo is characterized by a tension between formal alignment with European frameworks and fragmented implementation in practice. While the system has made important progress in establishing policy frameworks and expanding provision, further efforts are needed to strengthen coherence across initial teacher education and continuous professional development, and to ensure that reforms translate into meaningful changes in teacher preparation and professional learning.

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Growing Together: Collective and Individual Professional Learning: A Holistic Model of Professional Development in Luxembourg's Education System

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Institution profile

The Institut de Formation de l'Education Nationale (IFEN) is Luxembourg's National Institute for Professional Development in Education. Established in 2015 and operating under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, IFEN's mandate encompasses the training and continuing professional development of all professional groups within the public education system: primary and secondary teachers, teachers specialising in special needs education, school leaders, educators, and psycho-social professionals. The evolution of the legislative framework in 2022 further strengthened its scope by expanding its target groups and consolidating its missions.

IFEN designs and delivers continuing professional development programmes, coordinates the structured induction of new professionals (Stage), supports school development, and maintains an extensive network of more than 1,500 expert trainers from Luxembourg and across Europe. In 2024-2025, the institute recorded over 107,000 enrolments across more than 4,500 sessions. Through its digital platforms

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(LearningSphere, IFEN Inspire), the Pedagogical Documentation Centre, specialist support teams (I-DS, AccES, I-CN), and physical learning spaces at Walferdange and Esch-Belval, IFEN acts as the central hub for professional learning across the Luxembourg education system.

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Growing Together Collective and Individual Professional Learning – A Holistic Model of Professional Development in Luxembourg's Education System

Dr. Christian Lamy

Abstract

Luxembourg aims to provide pupils with the best possible conditions for learning and personal development. Central to this ambition are well-qualified and motivated education professionals who view themselves as lifelong learners – research increasingly highlights that effective professional learning is one of the most powerful levers for improving educational quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019). Equally important is the transformation of schools into learning organisations, where individual and collective development processes mutually reinforce one another. This article presents how Luxembourg has developed a holistic model of professional development that brings together all education professions – teachers, educators, school leaders, and psycho-social professionals – under one institutional roof, fostering learning across the full continuum of the professional biography. The IFEN, Luxembourg's National Institute for Professional Development in Education, acts as a central hub connecting policy, practice, and innovation. Particular emphasis is placed on induction: IFEN accompanies all newly recruited professionals – teachers, educators, and psycho-social staff across all sectors of public education – through a structured two-year induction phase, serving as the single gateway into the Luxembourg education system. Subsequently, a diversified and increasingly digitalised continuing professional development ecosystem provides sustained learning opportunities across the entire career. More than 1,500 experts from across Europe contribute as trainers, while IFEN actively supports schools as learning organisations and fosters networking at national and international levels. Overall, the Luxembourg model integrates individual and collective learning across the entire professional life cycle, while contributing to educational quality, system coherence, and the long-term attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Keywords: professional learning, induction, school development, learning organisation, digitalisation, European network, Luxembourg, IFEN

1. Introduction: Professional Development as a Strategic Priority

Education systems in the twenty-first century operate in an environment of constant transformation. Scientific and technological advances, societal changes, and growing expectations of schools require educational institutions to renew themselves continuously. In this context, the quality of education rests more than ever on the capacity of professionals and organisations to learn, to adapt, and to innovate collectively.

Luxembourg is a small, highly diverse country of approximately 700,000 inhabitants, home to around 118,000 pupils and 17,000 teachers, educators and psycho-social staff working across approximately 200 public schools. Its distinctively international profile - marked by multilingualism, cultural diversity, and migration - places considerable demands on teaching and school organisation. International comparative studies have repeatedly shown that highly diverse education systems require strong professional learning structures to support teachers in addressing heterogeneous learner needs and increasingly complex classroom realities (OECD, 2019; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). Against this backdrop, investing in the quality and continuity of teacher professional development is not merely desirable: it is a strategic necessity.

Over the past two decades, Luxembourg has moved from a scattered landscape of training opportunities to a coherent, nationally coordinated system of in-service professional development. At the centre of this transformation is the National Institute for Professional Development in Education (IFEN), a body under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth. The creation of IFEN in 2015 marked a decisive step in structuring this system. The evolution of the legislative framework in 2022 further strengthened its scope by expanding the target groups and consolidating its missions in the areas of training, accompaniment, and organisational development of educational institutions.

Luxembourg has set itself a clear ambition: to offer every pupil the best possible conditions for learning and development. This requires two interdependent conditions that also define the strategic mission of IFEN: well-qualified, motivated professionals who embrace lifelong learning and schools that function as genuine learning organisations, where individual growth and collective development reinforce one another in the service of pupils. This dual focus reflects international research on effective school improvement, which emphasises that sustainable educational change emerges when individual professional learning and organisational learning processes develop in parallel (Fullan, 2006; Stoll & Kools, 2017).

IFEN serves all professional groups within the public education system - teachers, teachers specialised in special needs education, educators, school leaders, and psycho-social professionals - from their first day in the profession to the end of their career. Rather than a conventional training provider, IFEN functions as a hub within a learning system: an interface between education policy and practice, and an infrastructure for lifelong learning.

The scale of IFEN's reach reflects this ambition. In 2024–2025, the institute recorded 107,818 enrolments across 4,569 sessions, involving 15,716 individual participants (IFEN internal unpublished data). Training programmes are delivered in Luxembourg's three official national languages - Luxembourgish, French, and German - reflecting the country's constitutional multilingualism. In response to the growing internationalisation of the teaching workforce and the expansion of international classes within public schools, an increasing share of IFEN's programmes

is also offered in English, ensuring that internationally recruited professionals can participate fully from the outset of their career in Luxembourg.

IFEN's programme development follows a triple orientation: aligning its offer with the expressed needs of schools and educators; actively introducing new impulses from international research and practice; and supporting the implementation of national education policy reforms. When new policies are introduced - such as French-language literacy instruction in primary schools or the national AI-framework - IFEN designs and delivers the accompanying professional development programmes, acting as an integral part of the implementation strategy for educational reform.

The Luxembourg model rests on a fundamental conviction: the quality of an education system cannot, in the long term, exceed the quality of its professionals (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), a relationship subsequently reinforced by research on teacher professional learning and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Curricula, infrastructure, and educational programmes all matter, but sustained investment in the professional learning of those working directly with children and young people remains decisive. This contribution shows how Luxembourg has built a holistic model of professional development that connects initial training, career entry, continuing professional development, and school development as an interconnected space for growth. A guiding ambition is that IFEN itself embodies what it advocates for schools: innovative methods, rigorous self-evaluation, and a genuine identity as a learning organisation.

2. Initial Training of Education Professionals

A distinctive feature of Luxembourg's education system is that initial teacher education takes place through multiple routes: some primary school teachers complete their training at the University of Luxembourg – the country's only public university - while others, particularly those entering primary education, are trained abroad, most notably in Belgium. Secondary school teachers are in large part also trained at universities abroad, across a wide range of disciplines and institutions in France, Germany, Belgium, and beyond. This means that many newly qualified professionals have had limited exposure to the specific realities of the Luxembourg school system during their initial training. A further dimension of this diversity is the opening of international classes within Luxembourg's public schools, staffed by teachers recruited internationally from diverse national education traditions. Beyond the variety of training institutions, the pathways into teaching are themselves becoming more diverse. In response to growing teacher shortages, Luxembourg has opened routes for career changers: professionals with degrees in other fields can now pursue tailored programmes in educational sciences and enter teaching with prior professional experience. This broadens the incoming cohort considerably - enriching it with varied life and career experience, while also increasing the heterogeneity of professional backgrounds, prior knowledge, and expectations that IFEN must address at the point of entry. These developments reflect a broader international trend towards diversified pathways into teaching, driven by increasing recruitment needs and evolving labour-market conditions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

A strategic priority is therefore to ensure that induction training is firmly anchored in the national context - including multilingual education policies, curricular frameworks, and the challenges of highly heterogeneous classrooms. A particular challenge concerns secondary school teachers: the majority studied abroad, often with a subject focus rather than a teaching qualification. Many enter with

strong content knowledge but limited preparation in pedagogy and didactics. For these professionals, the Stage carries a specific compensatory function - building the methodological competences initial training did not provide and supporting the transition from subject expert to expert teacher. Research on teacher induction consistently highlights that this transition from academic preparation to professional practice represents a critical period during which targeted support can significantly influence professional confidence, effectiveness, and retention (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2019). For IFEN, the conclusion is clear: the induction phase must create a common professional foundation that transcends national, institutional, and biographical boundaries.

Every teacher, educator, and psycho-social professional entering public education must pass through IFEN's structured induction programme, giving IFEN a unique responsibility: to ensure that all new entrants acquire the context-specific knowledge, professional competences, and reflective dispositions necessary for high-quality practice in Luxembourg's schools.

3. Standards and Strategies for Career Development

3.1. The Teacher as Learner: A Conceptual Foundation

The conceptual core of Luxembourg's model is the guiding principle of the Teacher as Learner. Rather than treating professional development as externally driven training, this principle recognises education professionals as adult learners with diverse biographies, motivations, and professional realities. It draws on insights from adult education and andragogy: adults engage most intensively with content that is directly relevant to their professional practice, increasingly steer their own learning pathways, and learn most effectively when they can actively shape their own development (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Closely linked is the concept of Teacher Agency: the capacity of teachers to make informed, purposeful decisions about their professional practice and development, based on classroom realities, critical reflection, and a clear sense of their own professional goals (Biesta et al., 2015). Rather than responding passively to learning opportunities, teachers with agency take responsibility for their own professional growth - they make deliberate learning choices, initiate changes in their teaching, and contribute actively to the growth of their colleagues. This is not simply an individual disposition: it is shaped by the conditions the system provides, making the quality and accessibility of the professional learning environment a decisive factor in whether teachers can act with genuine agency.

This requires appropriate framework conditions: autonomy, access to resources, collaboration, and a culture of trust. Lifelong learning is, in this context, not merely an individual obligation but a central element of a professional culture in education.

3.2. Legal Framework for Continuing Professional Development

In Luxembourg, continuing professional development is legally anchored as a professional obligation for all educational staff. A minimum number of training hours is prescribed for each reference period (Règlement grand-ducal modifié du 23 mars 2009 fixant la tâche des instituteurs de l'enseignement fondamental; Règlement grand-ducal modifié du 24 juillet 2007). This formal requirement is deliberately

combined with a high degree of individual responsibility: professionals independently decide on the content, providers, formats, and scope of their development activities - guided by personal needs, professional questions, and the priorities of their workplace.

A comparable principle applies to schools as organisations. They are required to plan and implement development processes systematically - notably through school development plans – while retaining considerable scope for shaping their own objectives, priorities, and approaches. A characteristic feature of the Luxembourg system is the deliberate absence of centrally prescribed content priorities for professional development or standardised development programmes. Likewise, there is no mandatory link between individual professional development decisions and school development plans. Both levels initially follow their own logics, but are embedded within a shared systemic framework.

This very circumstance also presents a challenge: the articulation between individual learning processes and collective school development processes does not happen automatically, but must be consciously shaped. Through dialogic formats, exchange processes, and targeted support services, IFEN works to strengthen the connection between individual learning pathways and school development processes – without undermining the autonomy of individual actors.

3.3. Teacher Performance Appraisal

Luxembourg's approach to teacher performance appraisal reflects the broader philosophy of the national model: quality is pursued through professional learning rather than through external control. The Luxembourg system is characterised by the deliberate absence of national competence frameworks or standardised reference models for teacher (self-)evaluation. There is no formal, externally imposed performance appraisal linked to career progression or salary increments beyond the general civil service regulations.

Instead, both the professional development activities of individual professionals and the key steps of school development are subject to formal validation by the respective hierarchical leadership. This primarily serves to confirm and document activities - it is not systematically linked to inspection procedures or performance-related evaluation interviews. Professional development is therefore understood as a self-directed, reflection-based process rather than as a performance management tool. This does not mean that quality is ignored: precisely because no binding national standards are prescribed, the need arises to continually reflect on criteria for quality teaching time and again, and to develop them collaboratively. What Luxembourg's model achieves, by linking professional development with school development plans, the ePortfolio, and systematic reflection, is a form of ongoing formative appraisal – embedded in professional practice rather than imposed from outside. This same logic also underpins how Luxembourg conceives professional learning across the different levels of the system.

3.4. A Systemic Perspective: System, School, and Classroom

Luxembourg's model is organised around a consistently systemic perspective. Professional learning is not understood in isolation as individual qualification, but as part of a dynamic system in which societal conditions, organisational processes, and personal learning pathways are interconnected. Research has demonstrated how elements across teacher, school, and learning activity subsystems interact to shape professional learning outcomes (Opfer & Pedder, 2011) - a multi-level understanding that underpins Luxembourg's approach.

At the system level, education is situated in the context of profound societal transformations. Digitalisation, ecological challenges, social inequalities, and the rapid transformation of the world of work are fundamentally changing the demands placed on schools. Against this backdrop, the professional development of the school system acquires a clear normative orientation: it serves to improve the learning and living conditions of children and young people.

At the school level, the school as an organisation comes into focus. Quality here does not arise primarily through individual excellence, but through collective learning capacity. Schools are understood as learning organisations whose effectiveness depends significantly on collaboration, shared responsibility, professional communication, and leadership (Fullan, 2006). International research on professional learning communities reinforces this view: evidence suggests that teachers' collaborative work within such communities improves instruction and contributes to school effectiveness (Antinluoma et al., 2021). In this understanding, school development is not an add-on project, but an expression of continuous collective reflection on teaching, pedagogical attitudes, and institutional processes.

At the classroom level, the individual education professional stands as a learning adult. The guiding principle of the Teacher as Learner forms the central reference point here. Professional development is not understood as linear competence accumulation, but as a personal and professional maturation process that encompasses motivation, self-efficacy, emotional security, and reflective capacities. A central area of tension arises from the autonomy of adult learners, the fact of being part of a system to which collective challenges are brought, and the responsibility towards pupils. Professional freedom therefore always stands in relation to a societal mandate and thereby also acquires an ethical dimension.

3.5. Pedagogical Guiding Principles

The further development of the Luxembourg model is guided by fundamental assumptions about professional learning. Sustainable professionalisation is primarily driven by intrinsic motivation (Timperley, 2011; OECD, 2019): professional development is not merely regarded as a professional obligation, but as an expression of professional self-responsibility and as an integral part of a learning profession.

The model is built on several interconnected principles: professional learning is active, experience-based, and problem-oriented; autonomy is linked with responsibility; development only has lasting effect when it leads to changes in teaching and positive effects on pupils' learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley, 2011); individual and collective school development are consistently linked; and reflection is not an isolated activity but a social practice embedded in professional exchange. The overarching goal is to establish reflection as a permanent professional habitus – supported by instruments such as the portfolio, case-based analysis, video analysis, and collegial consultation.

A further principle is that professional development must invest in the whole person. IFEN's offer therefore encompasses personal development: building resilience, defining goals, and cultivating emotional fitness. Professional development should be experienced as a resource – a space where professionals encounter new ideas, share challenges, and are supported in integrating them into practice.

4. The Architecture of Learning Formats: Learning Differently

The pedagogical principles outlined above are reflected in the concrete design of IFEN's learning offer. The institute deliberately pursues a strategy of diversifying learning formats, responding to the varied learning preferences, professional situations, and developmental needs of education professionals. Under the guiding concept of Learning Differently (Se former autrement, IFEN's institutional framework), IFEN describes six core pathways to professional learning.

Central to this approach is a fundamental shift in how professionals engage with the offer. Rather than browsing a catalogue, participants are asked to begin with two questions: What do I want to learn – which competences, which challenges? And: How do I want to learn - through reading, discussion, peer exchange, experts, or hands-on formats? This dual question encourages professionals to reflect on their identity as learners and to make deliberate choices about their development, rather than simply selecting from a menu.

4.1. Seeking Inspiration - Inspiration and Knowledge Exploration

A first pathway involves encountering new perspectives, ideas, and pedagogical approaches. IFEN brings together formats that allow education professionals to seek inspiration and deepen their knowledge independently, at any time and from any location. At the centre is the digital platform IFEN Inspire, a portal for pedagogical resources open to the entire education community. Content is available in multiple formats: videos, the IFEN Podcast, research articles, thematic dossiers, and curated thematic learning pathways guided by trainers and experts.

The Pedagogical Documentation Centre complements these digital resources with a collection of over 28,000 works (IFEN internal catalogue data). IFEN's learning and working spaces at Walferdange and Esch-Belval provide physical learning environments designed for collaborative work and pedagogical innovation. A key example is the f.use – future space for education project: a dedicated training space conceived and furnished to embody what innovative professional learning can look like. Yet f.use is far more than interior design: it is a statement about what a school of the future can be – a place where curiosity is cultivated, collaboration replaces isolation, and learners are active agents in their own development.

4.2. Learning Together – Collective Learning and Professional Communities

Professional learning is, to a significant degree, a social process. Under the Learning Together category, IFEN brings together formats that support collective learning, including inter-school exchange, peer-to-peer learning, professional networks, and thematic working groups.

Structured classroom observation visits allow teachers to observe, analyse, and reflect on real teaching and learning situations in other schools. Peer-to-peer learning brings experienced practitioners into the role of mentors, sharing their knowledge through workshops, collegial discussion groups, or practice-based case analysis. IFEN also supports the development of professional exchange networks, both autonomous (self-organised) and moderated (with external facilitation).

While IFEN brings in more than 1,500 external experts from across Europe, the institute is equally convinced that every teacher is an expert with something

valuable to share. These collective learning formats serve as a marketplace for good ideas, where practitioners present their innovations, share their approaches, and learn from each other. A central goal is to make teachers proud of their practice and to communicate that showing one's work is not only permitted but actively encouraged. This reflects a broader cultural shift: teaching is not a private matter confined to the closed classroom, but a shared professional practice that benefits from openness, exchange, and collective development.

4.3. Being Supported – Individual and Organisational Support

A third pathway places professional development directly in the context of concrete challenges encountered in day-to-day work. IFEN offers a range of support formats: individual coaching, group coaching, mediation, and tailored accompaniment of school development processes. Group coaching brings a professional coach to work with a school team to clarify collective goals, strengthen collaboration, and develop shared competences. Individual coaching offers a confidential space for professionals to reflect on their situation and develop concrete strategies for practice.

A distinctive feature of Luxembourg's model is the accessibility of individual coaching. Every education professional can access a personal coach within a matter of days – free of charge and for up to twelve hours. This offer is not reserved for crisis situations: it is designed as a resource for self-exploration, professional orientation, and personal growth. Participants use coaching to better understand their working style, to define professional goals, to identify their strengths and areas for development, or simply to gain perspective on everyday challenges. The ease of access – without waiting lists or financial barriers – reflects a clear institutional conviction: investing in individuals, including in their inner lives, matters.

At the organisational level, IFEN deploys specialised permanent staff to support schools directly. School development specialists (I-DS) accompany primary schools in sustained, long-term processes, building trust and fostering collaboration between neighbouring schools through regional clusters. Their counterparts in secondary education, the school accompaniment specialists (AccES), work alongside school leaders, steering groups, and professional development delegates to support development processes that engage all staff. School development is understood as participatory, and IFEN provides dedicated training in project management, facilitation, and collective goal-setting. The digital competence specialists (I-CN) ensure that every school has a designated contact person for sustained support in digital integration and media education – including "éducation aux et par les médias" – providing a reliable school-level reference for critical media literacy. IFEN also supports schools in designing tailored in-house training and accompanies administrative departments within the Ministry itself, fostering coherence across the entire system.

4.4. Participating in Training – Structured Professional Development

Structured training programmes form the backbone of IFEN's offer. Seminars are typically run in groups of 12 to 20 participants, enabling genuine exchange and dialogue. Formats range from practice-oriented seminars with implementation phases to reading circles and study visits. Particularly effective are seminars with a practice phase, in which participants test new approaches between sessions and return to collectively reflect on their experience. The thematic breadth is considerable: classroom instruction, pupil support, parental involvement, inclusion, well-being, digital skills, leadership, and more. Methods are expected to be activating, participatory, and action-oriented. IFEN's in-house programme designers

(concepteurs de formation) support trainers in structuring their offers, conduct onboarding conversations, and provide feedback based on participant evaluations. A pool of ten permanent in-house trainers serves as a frontrunner group in innovative training, providing best-practice examples through the Train-the-Trainer programme.

Among the more innovative formats is the Pedagogical Walk - combining physical movement with workshops, thematic reflection, and professional exchange in outdoor settings. It embodies a broader philosophy: professional development should itself be an engaging, joyful experience that challenges the assumption that learning must happen indoors.

4.5. Attending Events – Collective Learning Moments

Large events, conferences, and themed gatherings offer a further pathway to professional learning. Lectures and conferences make current thinking visible; symposia bring together researchers, experts, and practitioners; and Pedagogical Exhibitions connect art, culture, and professional reflection in unexpected ways. A further example is the ciné-débat - a film screening followed by structured professional discussion, illustrating that learning can happen anywhere, including cinemas and other inspiring venues. Events of this kind frequently serve as a first point of contact with IFEN. Beyond the formal programme, IFEN deliberately creates informal moments within these gatherings: unstructured conversations across professional boundaries, chance encounters between colleagues who would never otherwise meet. A particularly important ambition is to bridge the gap between research and practice: IFEN's symposia bring researchers and practitioners into genuine dialogue, making scientific findings accessible to professionals in the field.

4.6. Following a Learning Pathway – Longer-Term Learning Pathways

Beyond single events, IFEN develops structured learning pathways that support sustained competence development over time. These are not simply seminars delivered in successive stages, but carefully organised learning journeys in which contents, formats, and experts are deliberately sequenced and aligned. Participants commit to a minimum of fifty hours across a multi-month programme combining seminars, practice phases, reflection, collegial exchange, and digital resources, with progress recognised through digital badges. Content addresses key themes: literacy, digital education and AI & Digital Literacies, social-emotional development, civic education, and curricular innovations. While each pathway engages multiple trainers, a dedicated lead trainer ensures continuity throughout the journey, accompanying participants from beginning to end and serving as the primary point of contact. Formats range from structured seminars and peer-learning sessions to individual reflection tasks and digital sequences, honouring the reality that sustained development requires multiple lenses.

4.7. A Nationwide Approach: On Demand, Tailored, On Site

A fundamental evolution in IFEN's approach is the growing shift from a centrally organised catalogue towards demand-driven, tailored, and on-site provision. IFEN is active across the entire country – not only at its two main sites in Walferdange and Esch-Belval, but in schools, forests, sports halls, swimming pools, and wherever professional learning can take place in authentic contexts.

In-school professional development is not new to Luxembourg. In-house training days – "journées pédagogiques" – have existed for years, particularly in secondary education. However, these were often organised without clear internal coherence, systematic

needs assessment, or attention to transfer. What has changed fundamentally is the approach: today, schools request tailor-made training directly from IFEN, designed in close collaboration with on-site specialists. Bespoke provision requires careful clarification of objectives, advance discussion of transfer into practice, and alignment with the school's development plan - ensuring coherent, need-responsive, impact-oriented responses. This demand-driven approach is resource-intensive but represents a significant opportunity: it is precisely at the intersection of individual professional development, school development, and context-specific programme design that sustainable transfer can be anchored – on demand, tailored, on site.

5. School-Based Professional Development

5.1. The School as a Learning Organisation

School-based professional development is a cornerstone of Luxembourg's model. Schools are not merely passive recipients of centrally designed training programmes; they are understood as learning organisations with their own development logic, priorities, and practices. The School Development Plan (PDS) provides the structured framework within which schools define objectives, plan measures, and systematically reflect on progress. School development is not understood as a centrally prescribed reform programme, but as a locally owned learning process. This understanding is closely aligned with international frameworks describing schools as learning organisations characterised by collective inquiry, collaboration, shared vision, and continuous improvement (Stoll & Kools, 2017).

5.2. Specialist Support and the Role of School Leadership

IFEN deploys dedicated specialist staff (I-DS, AccES, I-CN) to support schools in their development processes. These specialists are permanent IFEN staff, deeply integrated into the institute's institutional expertise. Professional development and school development are not separate concerns but mutually reinforcing processes: insights from training feed into school development; experiences from practice in turn inform the design of new programmes, creating a continuous loop between learning and institutional change.

Leadership development is a central dimension of IFEN's offer - and its scope goes significantly beyond formal school leaders. In Luxembourg's model, leadership is understood broadly: it encompasses all professionals who take on responsibility within their school or institution, whether as a director, deputy director, the president of a school committee in primary education, or a colleague coordinating a steering group or a pedagogical subject group. IFEN's programmes are designed for this wider circle, simultaneously supporting those already in leadership roles and actively inspiring new colleagues to step forward. The offer is deliberately positioned as high-quality and prestigious - a signal that taking on responsibility brings access to exceptional learning opportunities.

Among the most valued formats are international study visits. These bring groups of school leaders and aspiring leaders to education systems abroad, offering direct encounters with different approaches to leadership and school organisation. Far more than a study programme, they open professional horizons, build lasting cross-national networks, and generate insights that participants actively bring back and apply in Luxembourg - making international mobility one of the most impactful professional learning tools in IFEN's portfolio.

6. The Structured Induction Phase (Stage)

Career entry occupies a particularly prominent place in Luxembourg's approach. The Stage is a structured and accompanied induction programme that applies to all newly recruited professionals across the public education system, including teachers in the primary education (Enseignement fondamental), the secondary education (Enseignement secondaire) and in adult education, as well as the educational and psycho-social staff. This interprofessional scope is a key feature of the Luxembourg model. Research consistently highlights that structured induction plays a crucial role in ensuring continuing professionalisation for newly qualified teachers and supporting their transition into professional activity (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021) - a principle Luxembourg extends to all education professions. For many professionals, the Stage is both the entry point into the Luxembourg education system and their first shared professional experience across professional boundaries.

The Stage pursues several central objectives: to ease the transition from initial training to professional practice, to support the development of professional identity, to consolidate competences, and to foster social and professional integration. Research on novice teachers in Luxembourg confirms that first-year teachers' satisfaction is closely tied to meeting individual needs - such as feeling competent, self-consistency, and positive professional relationships – underscoring the importance of induction that combines professional development with attention to these personal dimensions (Lamy, 2019). The Stage is grounded in socio-constructivist principles, with exchange formats, collegial learning, and reflective practice forming central elements. It generally spans two years and comprises a general training component, a subject-specific component, and a practical professional training component.

The induction phase is based on a shared responsibility between IFEN and local institutions: IFEN provides the conceptual framework and training programmes, while schools assume a central role in daily accompaniment. This responsibility is carried jointly by IFEN trainers, school leaders, Stage coordinators, subject advisors, and pedagogical advisors.

The portfolio plays a central role throughout the entire Stage, documenting the trajectory of professional learning, connecting theory with practice, and serving as the basis for reflection and assessment. As Schön emphasises, professional competence arises from the capacity to engage in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action - turning experience into situated judgement (Schön, 1983). The portfolio gives this reflective process a visible form and a cumulative structure. Evaluation encompasses both formative elements and certifying components, carried out by multiple actors, enabling a differentiated multi-perspectival assessment of professional development.

The digitalisation of the Stage extends into classroom practice. Newly appointed teachers are introduced to videography as a learning tool: they record, analyse, and reflect on sequences of their own teaching – individually and in supervised group settings - building the capacity for critical self-observation and evidence-based professional development.

7. Digitalisation and Innovative Approaches to Professional Development

7.1. Blended Learning as Pedagogical Principle

The digitalisation of IFEN's continuing professional development offer is neither a purely technical add-on nor a simple transfer of existing practices into digital formats. It is part of a broader pedagogical development through which IFEN is advancing its role as the central hub for professional learning, with the aim of enhancing the quality of learning processes, fostering participant engagement, and enabling forms of professional development that would not be possible in exclusively face-to-face settings. This approach is in line with international developments: organisations such as the OECD increasingly emphasise the importance of coherent Professional Learning Systems (OECD, 2020).

A central principle of IFEN's digitalisation strategy is its commitment to Blended Learning – widely recognised internationally as a particularly effective approach to professional development. Blended Learning combines the strengths of face-to-face learning with those of digital formats, offering a flexible continuum of learning arrangements. The guiding principle is clear: pedagogy should not adapt to the tool – the tool should adapt to the pedagogical requirements of professional development.

7.2. LearningSphere – The Central Digital Learning Space

LearningSphere is the centrepiece of IFEN's digital learning environment: a central platform that brings together diverse learning formats, materials, and exchange opportunities. A distinctive and strategically important feature is that the entire platform – and the broader digital ecosystem around it – was developed entirely in-house by IFEN's own team. This gives the institute a high degree of freedom and flexibility: the platform can be continuously adapted, extended, and refined in direct response to pedagogical needs and user feedback, without dependency on external vendors or lengthy procurement cycles. When a major update of the existing Moodle infrastructure was due, IFEN chose not to pursue a purely technical upgrade. Instead, the platform was fundamentally redesigned from within, with a clear focus on usability and pedagogical scenarios. A key feature is a set of pre-built course templates and Smart Elements - standardised didactic building blocks specifically designed for IFEN's training context. They combine technical functionality, consistent design, and built-in pedagogical guidance, helping trainers move confidently into digital formats. Through ongoing development, LearningSphere is being progressively transformed from a training platform into a comprehensive digital ecosystem for professional learning, with dedicated areas for portfolio work, exchange formats, resources, and the accompaniment of professional development.

7.3. The IFEN Studio and IFEN Inspire

The IFEN Studio has its origins in the pandemic period, when it was created as a pragmatic solution for producing digital learning materials. Through sustained investment in technical equipment and team expertise, the studio now produces high-quality video formats developed collaboratively with trainers. These open new possibilities for innovative learning arrangements, in particular flipped classroom models. IFEN Inspire, officially launched in late 2025, complements IFEN's structured training offer with an open space for inspiration and informal learning. It makes experiences and practices visible through thematic dossiers, guides, articles, and audiovisual content. A central element is the IFEN Inspire Podcast, which offers education professionals and experts a space for dialogue and exchange.

7.4. The ePortfolio: Making Learning Journeys Visible

The ePortfolio represents the third pillar of IFEN's digitalisation strategy. Already central to the induction Stages, it is set to play an increasingly prominent role in accompanying professional development processes more broadly. By making learning journeys visible, structuring reflection, and facilitating exchange between participants and their mentors, the ePortfolio turns professional growth into an ongoing, documented process. At IFEN, digitalisation is considered successful when it becomes unobtrusive and self-evident – enriching and sustaining learning processes without unnecessarily complicating professional practice.

8. The IFEN Network and Quality Assurance

IFEN's training activities draw on a network of more than 1,500 experts from Luxembourg and across Europe. Because trainers are geographically dispersed, IFEN has developed a substantial support offer to keep this community connected and aligned, coordinated by a dedicated internal unit. The Train-the-Trainer programme combines digital professional development with in-person meet-and-greet moments and collaborative formats that build a shared professional culture. A central tool is the Trainer Hub – a dedicated platform providing comprehensive information about IFEN, its pedagogical vision, and the Luxembourg education context. The ambition is to foster a professional community rather than merely maintaining a network of experts. IFEN invests in the best possible working conditions for its trainers: clear communication, timely feedback, and mutual respect - because a well-supported trainer is more likely to deliver training that reflects IFEN's values.

This approach reflects a broader ambition to make IFEN itself a learning institution. All services are subject to systematic evaluation by participants, and the feedback gathered drives continuous improvement of training quality and programme design.

A further dimension is communication and outreach. Professional development may be legally required, but obligation alone does not generate enthusiasm. IFEN invests in making its offer attractive and visible – because learning is, above all, an emotional experience. The institute communicates actively across multiple channels: social media, podcasts, newsletters, and events that convey the breadth and appeal of its offer. IFEN reaches out proactively rather than waiting for professionals to find its programmes. Even for a public institution with a mandatory remit, the logic of attraction is essential: IFEN must earn the engagement of its participants.

Discussion

The Luxembourg model of professional development addresses all three focal themes of the CIDREE Yearbook 2026: teacher induction, in-service continuing professional development, and innovative approaches to addressing teacher shortage. Taken together, these dimensions illustrate a coherent understanding of professional learning as a system-wide strategy rather than a collection of isolated initiatives.

Teacher induction

On teacher induction, the Stage represents a robust and distinctive response. By extending induction across all education professions under a shared framework, Luxembourg goes beyond conventional teacher-only programmes. The emphasis on

reflective practice, the portfolio, and distributed responsibility between IFEN and local institutions creates conditions for genuine professional integration across an increasingly heterogeneous cohort of new entrants.

Continuing professional development

On in-service CPD, the model is notable for its combination of legal obligation and individual autonomy. The Learning Differently architecture reflects a mature understanding of how adults learn, and the growing shift towards demand-driven, tailored, on-site provision embeds professional development more deeply in each school's institutional context.

Teacher shortage

Professional development also has an important role to play in addressing teacher shortages, although it cannot replace structural recruitment measures. International research suggests that meaningful induction, sustained learning opportunities, and collaborative professional cultures contribute to teacher motivation, professional satisfaction, and long-term retention (OECD, 2019; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

In Luxembourg, this strategic role is reflected in several complementary features: a structured induction phase that supports successful entry into the profession, diversified learning formats that reduce barriers to participation, and long-term professional learning pathways that encourage continuous development throughout the career. Together, these elements contribute to making teaching a profession in which professionals wish not only to enter, but also to remain and grow. Structural factors such as salaries and working conditions remain decisive and lie beyond the remit of a professional development institute, yet professional learning can make a meaningful contribution to the attractiveness and sustainability of the profession.

Taken together, these three dimensions illustrate one of the distinctive features of the Luxembourg model: rather than treating induction, continuing professional development, school development, and teacher retention as separate policy domains, Luxembourg has sought to integrate them into a coherent professional learning system. In this sense, professional development becomes not only a mechanism for improving teaching quality but also a strategic instrument for strengthening schools, supporting the teaching profession, and enhancing the long-term resilience of the education system.

Perspectives and Challenges

The Luxembourg model is a system in motion, and important challenges remain. Professional development must increasingly be experienced not as an additional obligation but as an integral part of professional identity. This requires learning opportunities that are flexible, practice-embedded, and responsive to the realities of teachers' work, while also strengthening well-being and intrinsic motivation.

Looking ahead, further progress will depend on strengthening the connection between individual professional learning and collective school development, improving the transfer of learning into classroom practice, and harnessing the opportunities offered by digitalisation and artificial intelligence in pedagogically meaningful and ethically responsible ways. Maintaining this balance between innovation, professional autonomy, and systemic coherence will remain one of the central challenges for IFEN and the Luxembourg education system.

Conclusions / Lessons Learned

Luxembourg's model of professional development offers a distinctive and coherent response to the challenges facing education systems across Europe, conceiving of professional learning not as a series of isolated training events but as an ongoing, multi-layered process in which individuals, schools, and the system develop together.

The following lessons from the Luxembourg experience may be of value to other education systems:

- Combining a legal minimum requirement for professional development with wide individual autonomy over content, format, and provider strikes an effective balance between systemic coherence and professional agency.
- Diversifying learning formats and asking professionals both "What do I want to learn?" and "How do I want to learn?" transforms professional development from a catalogue-driven transaction into a reflective, deliberate choice.
- Investing in the induction phase as a substantive professional learning process - not merely an administrative entry - builds professional identity and system-wide coherence from the very start of the career.
- Moving towards demand-driven, tailored, and on-site provision anchors professional development in the real context of each school and creates the conditions for genuine transfer into practice.
- Pursuing quality through formative mechanisms, portfolio work, and collective reflection – rather than high-stakes appraisal - places quality improvement as an intrinsic professional responsibility.
- Making professional development a visible institutional priority strengthens both educational quality and the long-term attractiveness of the teaching profession.
- Systematically integrating individual professional learning and collective school development - and conceiving them as a holistic whole rather than parallel tracks - is the key to building schools that genuinely improve for pupils and professionals alike.
- Investing systematically in digitalisation and modern, flexible learning formats is not only a pedagogical imperative - it is a strategic necessity for a public institution that wishes to remain relevant, competitive, and attractive in an increasingly dynamic professional development landscape.

The ambition is clear: a learning education system, in which teachers are supported as professionals, empowered as learners, and recognised as the key drivers of educational quality. Growing together – individually and collectively – is not merely a vision, but a daily practice.

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Professional Development in Schools and the Assessment of its Impact on the Quality of Teaching in Montenegro



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Institution profile

Bureau for Education Services is a professional institution and a government body under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation. It's responsible for ensuring, improving, and keeping an eye on the quality of teaching in schools of sub-university level. The institution works on improving the curriculum, suggests programs for preschool, primary, and high schools, handles analysis, research, and development of the education system, checks the quality of teaching, supports and tracks the professional growth of teachers and educators, and collaborates with international education organizations like UNICEF, UNESCO, the EU, the Council of Europe, OECD, and TALIS. In collaboration with other institutions, it implements the educational policies created by the relevant Ministry and participates in cross-sector cooperation and the implementation of policies related to children and youth in the areas of security, health, social protection, human rights, culture, media, and sports, including cooperation with the non-governmental sector (NGOs).

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Author



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The areas in the focus of her professional engagement include programs and policies for the development of students'/teachers' socio-emotional skills, gender equality, media and film literacy.
She has also established cooperation with relevant international organizations: UNICEF, British Council, OSCE, UNESCO, and the U.S. Embassy in Podgorica.

Professional development in schools and the assessment of its impact on the quality of teaching in Montenegro

Author: Ljiljana Ivanović

Abstract

This paper presents the System (framework) for professional development of teachers/educators in Montenegro (in-service), with a special focus on teacher professional development at the school/kindergarten level. This part of the System includes various activities carried out in schools to strengthen teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers are the driving and main force of the education system, and professional development at the school level happens through a 'learning community' where teachers improve their competencies through reflective practice, professional responsibility, collaborative learning, and teamwork.

The paper presents both the legal and institutional basis for teachers' professional development in Montenegro and its connection with teachers' initial education (pre-service), as well as the key professional-theoretical publications and documents related to this area, especially from the perspective of the Teacher Competency Standards and the Standards for Teachers' Professional Development. The work also includes a look at the role of the principal as the 'first learner in the school' in monitoring and encouraging teachers' professional development, as well as teachers' professional advancement. With special attention, the paper examines the impact of teachers' professional development from the perspective of the latest domestic and international research, analyses, external and internal evaluations of professional development, and objectively assesses the effects of teachers' professional development on the quality of teaching/learning and student achievement.

Keywords: teachers, reflection, learning, change, competencies, school/kindergarten, evaluation

Introduction

The world in the 21st century is characterized by intense and rapid changes, globalization, fast and efficient communication, rapid development of the internet - artificial intelligence (AI). Despite strong technological development, various learning opportunities, as well as numerous challenges, the role of teachers in preparing children and young people for life remains crucial. Dynamic development brings a new approach and new culture of continuous learning not just for students but also for teachers, which is reflective, diverse, intense, and continuous and better suits the needs of new generations.

Within the framework of a deep reform of the educational system in Montenegro, launched in 2000, and the Book of Changes (2002), the educational system was reformed at all levels according to the modern educational paradigm: student-centered teaching, an inclusive approach, and the role of the teacher as a mediator in the process of knowledge acquisition, the one who designs learning activities for the development of the child/student and all of their potential. Competent teacher in interesting and stimulating way creates a stimulating environment for learning adjusted to every child.

A special significance in the education reform was given to the development of teachers[1]' competencies. The teacher professional development system, as a structured framework, was developed in the period from 2005 to 2009, supported by World Bank funds. The concept of lifelong learning is the foundation of the teacher professional development system in Montenegro, created by experts, teachers, principals, assistant principals, professional associates, as well as professional consultants from Europe. Teacher professional development is defined as an integrative, continuous process of improvement that begins on a teacher's first working day and ends upon retirement. All professionals in educational institutions develop and enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities through learning, practical work, and research. By going through this process, a teacher becomes a practitioner who reflects and sets the goals of their professional development according to the students' needs, their own needs and the needs of the school. The goal of progress in teachers' professional competence is the improvement of the quality of teaching/learning, better student achievement, readiness to accept changes, increased trust of parents/guardians, the professional/public community, and the encouragement of teachers' initiative, autonomy, and reputation.

1 The term teacher refers to: teachers, educators, professional associates, teaching associates, and other performers of educational work (hereinafter: teachers).

1. Institutional and legal context of professional development

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation creates educational policy through the development of legal, sub-legal, and strategic documents, conducts operational planning and budgeting, as well as supervision of educational and upbringing institutions. As part of the reform, the following institutions were established and/or transformed: Bureau for Education Services, the Center for Vocational Education, the Examination Center, and the Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Materials, with the aim of providing institutional and professional support in the implementation of reform solutions in the field, in preschool institutions and schools. Bureau for Education Services is the leading institution for monitoring, improving, and evaluating educational processes, including the professional development of teachers within a special organizational unit, the Department for Continuous Professional Development. This role is also carried out by the Center for Vocational Education for VET.

From the beginning of the development of the Framework (2005-2009), the goal has been for teacher professional development to be strongly grounded in legal legislation. The General Law on Education as well as other laws related to all levels of education up to the university level stipulate that: Teachers have the right and the duty to engage in professional development in various fields through professional training programs and other forms of continuous teacher development. The director of an educational institution is the pedagogical leader, performs pedagogical-instructional work, and "encourages professional education and training of teachers and proposes their advancement" (General Law on Education and Upbringing of Montenegro, 2025). The legal foundation of teacher professional development undoubtedly represents a strong point of our educational policy. In addition, legal legislation guarantees the autonomy of institutions, as well as teachers, in terms of:

- Autonomy of schools/teachers in ways of organizing teaching,
- choosing active methods,
- various forms of working with students, and
- choosing tasks within the established educational program General Law on Education and Upbringing of Montenegro, 2025.

In addition to the law, four regulations – subsidiary acts – further precisely regulate the field of professional development of teachers in Montenegro, namely:

- Regulation on the Organization of Teacher Professional Training and the Method of Selecting Authors of Professional Training Programs, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 63/2016 and 56/2025, prescribes the organization of professional training through training programs, as well as the method of selecting program authors. The regulation provides for various activities and forms of training: individual, formal, and informal. A public competition for programs is announced and carried out at a biennial interval by the Bureau and the Center. Programs selected through the public competition are published in the program catalog on the websites of the Bureau and the Center. The Bureau and the Center organize training in priority areas of professional development and may also organize training at the request of an educational institution or teacher. For each program attended, a certificate is issued to the teacher by the Bureau or the Center.

- The Rulebook on the detailed conditions, manner, and procedure for issuing and renewing a work permit for a teacher, principal, and assistant principal of an educational institution, Official Gazette of Montenegro No. 23/2014, defines a work permit (license) for educational work with a duration of five years, which proves the level of general and professional competencies. A teacher receives the first license after passing the professional exam. The basic requirement for relicensing is attending accredited professional development programs for teachers in 16 hours for priority areas and 8 hours from other professional development programs. Priority areas are determined by the Ministry based on proposals from the Bureau for Education Services and the Center for Vocational Education.
- Regulations on the types of titles, conditions, manner, and procedure for proposing and awarding titles to teachers, Official Gazette of Montenegro 43/09, 2009, establishes four teaching titles: mentor-teacher, advisor-teacher, senior advisor-teacher, and researcher-teacher according to the hierarchical order. The regulations prescribe general and special conditions for each higher title. Among the special conditions, attending professional development programs, preparing professional papers, conducting exemplary and experimental lessons, mentoring interns or students who win awards at competitions, domestic and international conferences are highlighted.
- Participation in the development of subject programs, textbooks, or the reviewing of textbooks is evaluated with a higher number of points. Both segments are considered cumulatively – each higher rank includes more points from these two activities. The defined Standards for Teaching Ranks (Our School, Bureau for Education Services, 2008) ensure objective and fair career progression. In addition, the school principal and the teachers' council, based on the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) and the Bureau for Education Services report on the quality of educational work, propose teachers for higher ranks. The rulebook lays out the responsibilities and duties of the principal, the Teaching Council, and central educational institutions.
- The Rulebook on the Completion of the Professional Exam for Teachers, Official Gazette of Montenegro, 2021, defines the rights and obligations of novice teachers, mentor teachers, Ministry of education, science and innovations, and principals of educational institutions. Special emphasis is placed on the pedagogical-psychological and didactic competencies of teachers.

1.1. Initial teacher education in Montenegro

Initial teacher education falls under the competence of higher education institutions, while continuing professional development, according to the General Law on Education, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 89/25, is entrusted to Bureau for Education Services (for preschool teachers, primary school teachers, subject teachers for primary schools and gymnasiums, teachers of general education subjects for secondary vocational schools, pedagogues, psychologists, speech therapists) and to the Center for Vocational Education (for teachers of vocational subjects in secondary vocational education – three-year or four-year programs).

Teachers are educated at the state University of Montenegro, three private universities, and one independent private faculty. Preschool teachers conduct

educational work in preschool institutions and in the first grade of elementary school with professional qualifications for work and 180 ECTS from basic, three-year studies. Class teachers – primary school teachers work in the lower grades of elementary school from 1st to 5th grade with professional qualifications of 240 ECTS from basic studies. Subject teachers conduct lessons in specific subjects in the third, partially in the second cycle of elementary school, in gymnasiums, and also teach general education subjects in secondary vocational schools with professional qualifications of at least 240 ECTS. Teachers of vocational subjects in secondary vocational schools, with education as economists, lawyers, doctors, engineers... have a level VII professional qualification and 240 ECTS. This category of teachers does not have the slightest share of pedagogical-psychological and methodical-didactic subjects during their initial education. These teachers develop knowledge and skills from these subjects after entering the teaching profession, that is, through attending professional development programs and the mandatory relicensing process. Effects of the continuous professional development (in-service) are connected directly to initial educations (on-service). The condition for improving the quality of pre-university education is through the harmonious development of both services.

1.2. Competency standards for teachers and principals

The professional-theoretical basis for the development of the professional development system is established by the Teacher and Principal Competency Standards, 2016, which were prepared by the Bureau for Education Services and adopted by the National Council for Education, an independent professional body operating under the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation. The Standards define the required level of knowledge, skills, and competencies for performing teacher tasks and their professional development. S1: Students and the teaching/learning process, S2: Effective and safe learning environment, S3: Knowledge of the profession and subject program, S4: Knowledge of subject methodology, S5: Planning and preparing lessons, S6: Assessment and grading, S7: Professional development, S8: Leadership and collaboration. The Standards present cumulative (pre-service and in-service) standards, so their function, among other things, is to define the gradual developmental trajectory of teacher training: from university studies to activities that should be carried out in-service, i.e., through continuous professional development of teachers. Each standard is operationalized through descriptors viewed from three aspects: practice, knowledge, and attitudes.
The overall professional development of teachers should represent a coherent, continuous, and comprehensive process of advancement.

2. Professional development of teachers at the school/kindergarten level (PDTS/K)

Professional development framework is layered system and its key elements in Montenegro are mutually connected and balanced:

- Teacher professional development at the school/kindergarten level PDTS/K,
- Catalog of teacher professional training programs,
- Evaluation of teacher work performance ETWP
- Mentorship teacher novice,
- Higher teacher titles,
- Training program for principals
- Trainer training ToT
- Relicensing
- Regulations, publications, guidelines
- All these elements are interconnected and mutually coordinated:
- Scheme of the Teacher Professional development system of Montenegro, Bureau for Education Services.

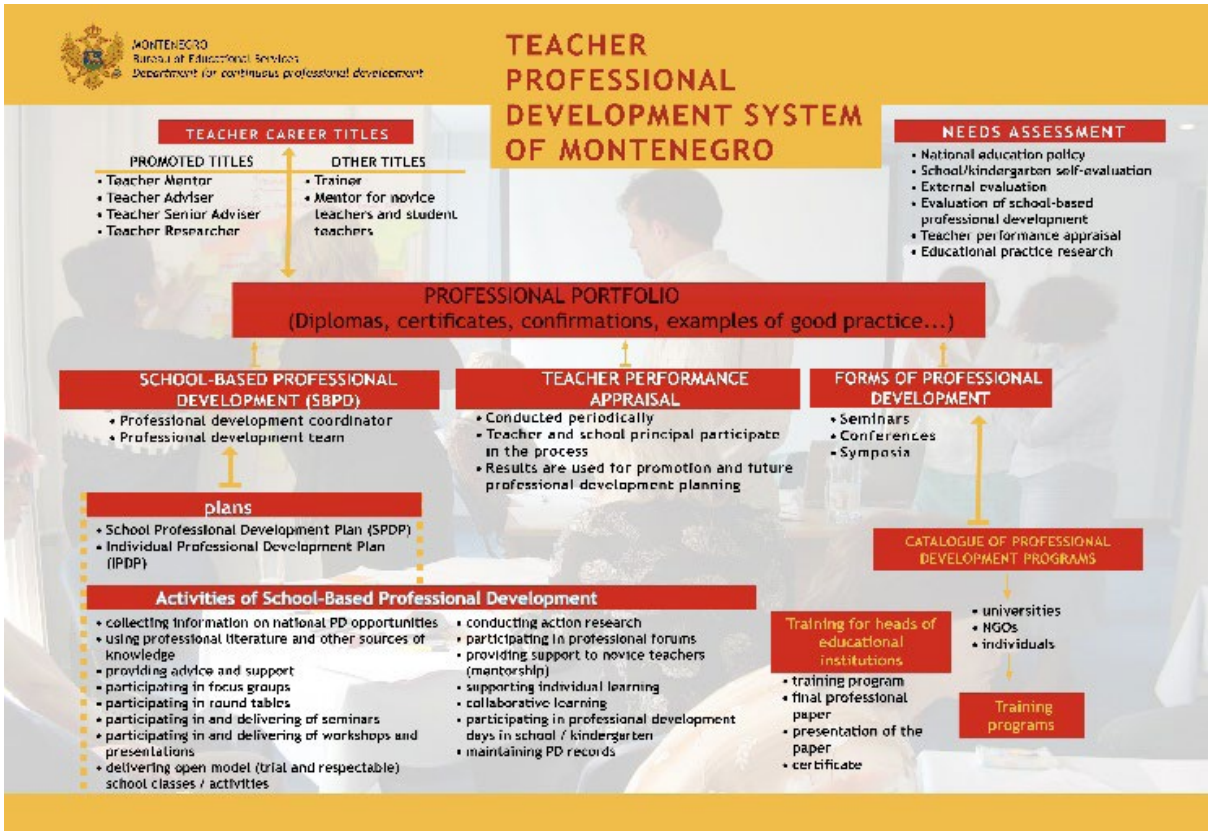


Figure 1. Teacher Professional development system of Montenegro

The professional development of teachers at the school/kindergarten level PDTS/K is the core of professional development, as it emphasizes the school/kindergarten as a learning community, primarily affirming collaborative learning and the continuity of the process of improvement knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The Montenegrin educational system has defined seven Standards for the professional development of teachers, which serve as guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development and connect teachers' practice with student competences.

1. The education system understands the importance of teachers' professional development and supports it, the culture of teachers' professional development is developed,
2. **Professional development mostly takes place within the educational institution, and collaborative learning is the primary method of learning,**
3. **Selected activities improve the quality and effectiveness of professional development,**
4. Principals of educational institutions support teachers' professional development and engage in professional development themselves,
5. Professional development is based on the analysis of available data on the quality of teaching and learning and the results of relevant research on how changes develop,
6. The goals of professional development are aligned with standards for teachers and principals and curriculum outcomes,
7. The goals of professional development are aligned with standards for teachers and curriculum outcomes.

For each of the standards, a description was made and indicators were listed, and standards 2 and 3 strongly emphasize the importance of professional development at the school/kindergarten level.

Standard 1: The education system understands the importance of teachers' professional development and supports it.

Description	Indicators
All institutions of the educational system recognize the importance of professional development and each, within its own jurisdiction, undertakes activities that enable and support the professional development of teachers.	• Legal regulations (laws, rulebooks) support the system of teachers' professional development • a strategy for professional development at the educational system level has been adopted; • annual action plans of relevant institutions include support for professional development • the educational institution has a professional development plan at the institutional level • teachers have a personal professional development plan and maintain a professional portfolio.

The PDTS/K has been introduced in all educational institutions in Montenegro and has been continuously improving and developing to this day. Parallel to the system development a few researches had been conducted on the topic of professional development. The first research titled the Impact on the system of professional development on the school level (Bureau for Education Services, 2009) confirmed the basic hypothesis that different PDTS/K activities have positive impact on teacher's motivation, implementation of the active methods of learning, and thinking about the teacher's practices. In all schools/kindergartens, coordinators for PDTS/K were first appointed, most often from among pedagogues and/or psychologists, and then PDTS/K teams were form ed depending on the size of the school, consisting of 5-7 members, including the head of the institution. Coordinators cooperate with the

Bureau for Education Services/Centre for Vocational Education. For the continuous process of developing the system, three versions of the manual published in 2009, 2013, and 2017 are of particular importance. The second edition gave development phases, and the third introduced the standard teacher practices at four levels, with British Council collaboration (Teaching for Success, 2016):

Table1: Level of achievement of competency standards

LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT	DESCRIPTION OF THE LEVEL
RECOGNITION	Teachers are familiar with the standard and can recognize it, but they do not apply it
UNDERSTANDING	Teachers have the knowledge of the need to understand the importance of standards but do not apply it in practice
APPLICATION	Teachers have the knowledge that is needed to understand the significance of standards but they do not apply it in practice
INTEGRATION	Teachers integrate the Standard and its subcomponents into teaching practice, and they are part of their daily practice

Integral part of the manual is the new Questionnaire for the self-evaluation of the teachers which permits to the teachers to reach their competences using given descriptors. The manual contains overall and digitalized new model of the professional portfolio.

In an effort to allow each teacher to assess the level of their professional development, the authors of the Montenegrin model have developed career development stages for teachers (Popović, Subotić & Vešović -Ivanović,2017).

1. Beginner teacher with two years of work in a school/kindergarten
2. Developing teacher with several years of work in a school/kindergarten
3. Competent teacher – actively improves their knowledge and skills
4. Exemplary teacher – a role model for colleagues
5. Expert teacher (holder of higher titles, author of textbooks, manuals, training program materials...

In order to improve the quality of professional development at the school level in 2023, but in response to observed fluctuations of PDT/S coordinators, the Department for Continuous Professional Development has prepared **Guidelines for Improving the Quality of Professional** Development at the School/Institution Level.

The guidelines consist of three parts:

- the first part provides the timeline for the preparation and submission of PDTS/K documentation;
- the second part offers a more detailed explanation with concrete examples and recommendations for specific sections of the PDTS/K forms. In this segment, we remind you of the contacts of the advisors from the CPD Department and the lists of schools/institutions for which they are responsible as national coordinators;
- in the third part, as an annex to these Guidelines, updated forms for the Self-Evaluation Report and the PDTS/K Plan form are provided.

Based on the feedback, the Guidelines are considered a useful document, especially for newly appointed coordinators.

2.1. Forms of professional development activities in school/kindergarten

Professional development activities at the school/kindergarten level take place through horizontal learning and include a range of different forms of organized and planned knowledge transfer and experience exchange within the institution and between institutions. They implicitly relate to Standard 3: Professional development mostly takes place within the educational institution, and collaborative learning is the primary mode of learning. It is of particular importance whether the activities are conducted in accordance with the school's Professional Development Plan or are unplanned, i.e., ad hoc, and do not meet the teachers' needs. The process of identifying professional development needs and determining training program priorities at the school/kindergarten level starts from the successfully conducted self-evaluation of the school's work and recommendations from external evaluators, the pedagogical-instructional work of the principal and professional associates, as well as the continuous reflection of each teacher on the level of development of their competencies.

Professional development activities at the school/kindergarten level are diverse, and each school/kindergarten timely plans, implements, and evaluates the effects on the quality of teaching and student achievement of some of the following:

1. Collecting and reviewing information on professional development,
2. Use of professional literature and other sources,
3. Providing advice and support to teachers upon request or based on observations in the institution through mentoring of trainee teachers,
4. Participation in the work of focus groups formed based on different areas/ topics
5. Participation in round tables, panel discussions, poster presentations, debates, etc.,
6. Implementation of seminars in educational institutions that can be conducted by teachers who are authors of accredited training programs or have participated in trainer training,
7. Different forms of learning with the help of ICT: online seminars, web-based seminars (webinars), various distance learning platforms, web conferences...
8. The implementation of open (demonstration and model) lessons/activities is recommended to be carried out on a topic that could be interesting for all teachers or most of them.
9. Conducting action research individually or in groups to examine one's own professional practice for the purpose of self-improvement increases the likelihood of more successful student learning.
10. Participation in professional forums for teachers
11. Providing support to a trainee teacher (mentoring)

The listed forms are presented in the publication as professional development opportunities, and all schools and teachers have the autonomy to choose the activities they participate in, as well as to create others. At the system level, the most common are: collaborative learning, conducting model and exemplary lessons, observations (visiting and watching lessons), participation in and conducting seminars, including online seminars. School management documents these activities in the Report on the Implementation of the Annual School Work Program, and the

School Professional Development Team documents them in the Report on Self-Evaluation of Professional Development, and provides it to the counselors in the Bureau for education services.

2.2. Evaluation of the professional development at the school/kindergarten level

For the successful implementation of professional development at the school level, evaluation is of fundamental importance and should answer two basic questions:

- Does professional development change teaching practice in schools/ kindergartens?
- Based on which sources do we know that the professional development activities carried out have led to better student achievements?

Based on the indicators, the PDTS/K Team, with the participation of the director, conducts an evaluation of the professional development of employees in the institution at one of four levels, at the end of each school year:

Table 2: Example of professional development evaluation at the school level comprising all teachers, Primary School 'Pavle Rovinski' Podgorica

	PDT/SK INDICATORS	LEVEL			
		1	2	3	4
I	**PLANS**				
1.	The school has the PDTS/K plan				x
2.	Quality of the PDTS/K plan				x
II	**TEACHERS**				
3.	Teachers participated in activities				x
4.	The teachers carried out the activities			x	
5.	Teachers have PPDP				x
6.	Teachers have a portfolio			x	
III	**IMPLEMENTATION/QUALITY**				
7.	Choice of activities				x
8.	Implementation of activities from the handbook			x	
9.	Implementation of other activities				x
10.	Exchange of good practice with other schools			x	
11.	Research regarding the results of professional development				x

At the end of each school year, all educational institutions send the Bureau for Education Services a Report on the self-evaluation of professional development. Based on the Report on Self-Evaluation of Professional Development it can be concluded that the best examples of practice are found in schools that combine various forms of horizontal learning, where the principal encourages teachers'

professional development, creates the necessary conditions, and in those institutions that have a developed culture of teamwork. The PDTS/K effects schools establish through the student's achievement on national tests (at the end of the 9th grade elementary school and at the end of the 4th grade secondary school) as well as international tests PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS. Schools analyze the ratio of school votes and the students results on external tests and they plan and carry out activities in the professional development of employees.

This handbook contains four models of professional development evaluation: Kirkpatrick, Gaski, Clarke and Hollingsworth and logical model, accordance to the insight of the reports of the professional development evaluation, institutions usually decide upon the logical model 50% which connect goals of the professional development, result and the expected outcomes as well as the indicators that measure whether the outcomes are achieved. Teacher gained certain knowledge and skills, and the students improved achievements in certain fields:

RESULTS	OUTCOMES
Number of students that are tought by the teacher that underwent training, some activity...	Students that show better results
Number of teachers that participated in activities of professional development	Teacher demonstrates absorbed competences

3. Mentoring teacher trainee

A special segment of the school's professional development is the mentoring of a teacher-trainee. Teachers begin their service after completing a one-year internship under the mentorship of a mentor-teacher. The mentor teacher proposes to the school's professional body, i.e., the teachers' council. Teachers gain the right to work in an educational institution after passing the professional exam before a Commission formed by the Ministry at the request of the institution where the candidate takes the exam. The committee is made up of:

- The principal of the institution where the professional exam is taken -president
- Mentor -member
- School councilor -member
- Representative of the Ministry of Education -member
- Representative of the Bureau for Education Services -member

The teacher takes the professional exam at the institution where he completed his internship. The teacher mentor determines the topic of the professional paper and monitors its development during the second half of the internship.

The professional exam is taken by the trainee teacher during the school year and includes:

1. preparation and defense of a professional paper;
2. conducting a class lesson, i.e., oral presentation of a topic from the teacher's field (hereinafter: practical lesson);
3. oral exam on regulations governing the field of education and upbringing and human and children's rights and fundamental freedoms (hereinafter: oral exam on regulations);

4. oral exam in the pedagogical-psychological, special educational, or andragogical group of subjects for teachers who did not take exams in that field during their schooling.

The purpose of the professional paper is to show how well a teacher, during their initial education and internship, is able to use literature and their acquired teaching experience when dealing with topics related to their profession, and how well they can present and explain their professional work in writing according to modern standards. A practical part of the exam includes preparing a written lesson plan and teaching the lesson in front of a committee and students within one class period. This way, the teacher's ability, gained during their schooling and internship, to conduct lessons or implement other educational and upbringing activities is assessed.

In this area, Bureau for Education Services has developed three important resources that provide professional support to the mentor teacher and the trainee teacher through the process of professional development:

- Handbook for teachers Mentorship (Bureau for Education Services, 2009).
- Mentor's work program with a trainee teacher, (Bureau for Education Services, 2006).
- Guidelines for taking the professional teacher exam, 2022.

The modern mentoring model makes it easier for beginner teachers to transition from studying to practice and improves the quality of work and student skills. In the evaluation process, there is a noted neglect of the importance of mentoring for the trainee teacher, a formal approach by school administrations and mentor teachers, inconsistent application of the regulations, as well as the practice where the professional body proposes mentorship based on a 'key,' rather than on the teacher's competence. To address these weaknesses, guidelines for the work of mentor teachers are being prepared.

3.1. Monitoring and support of PDTS/K by the Bureau for Education Services

One of the responsibilities of Bureau for Education Services is the monitoring and support of PDTS/K by the Department for Continuous Professional Development. Advisors in the Department create a Portfolio on the professional development of the educational institutions they are responsible for. The Portfolio contains:

- Professional development plan of the institution for the period of one school year;
- Collective Personal professional development plans of teachers
- Report of the educational institution on self-evaluation of professional development for the period of one school year;
- examples of good practice – professional development activities, preparations for demonstration and exemplary lessons, workshops. The best examples of practice are published on the website www.profesionalnirazvoj.edu.me
- record of teachers with higher titles.

PDTS/K coordinators prepare and submit to the national coordinators in the Department for Continuous Professional Development: Institution's Professional Development Plan, the Collective Individual Professional Development Plans of teachers, and the Educational Institution's Report on the self-evaluation of professional development for a period of one school year. National coordinators evaluate school documentation and

provide recommendations for improvement, comments and suggestions. In this way, Department for continuous professional development examines school and teachers' needs in the field of professional development and creates action plans for program professional realizations. Within advisory work and school support, advisors periodically conduct consultations and meetings at the regional level with the Professional Development Team, where issues of importance for the professional development of teachers/educators in schools/kindergartens/student homes/resource centers are discussed. In 2025, ten consultations with PDTS/K coordinators were conducted. At the consultations, PDTS/K coordinators were informed about the role of professional development in the Education Reform Strategy 2025-2035, an analysis of the self-evaluation reports of PDTS/K and the plans for PDTS/K was conducted, the template for the Report on Professional Development Activities after the seminar was presented, and the results and findings of the research on teachers' professional development were presented.

Key conclusions the Report on Professional Development Activities:

- Teachers / educators point out the need for more activities at the school/ kindergarten level such as workshops, round tables, lectures,
- better collaboration in terms of professional development with other schools through the exchange of knowledge, skills, and practices;
- online training is more acceptable for teachers from the north, as trainings at the Institute involve certain costs for them (travel expenses, food, refreshments...);
- a strong desire is expressed for more frequent consultations because there are many new coordinators;
- licensing negatively affects motivation;
- they proposed the publication of a larger number of examples of good practice.

At the request of schools/kindergartens, the Bureau for Education Services provides free training for teachers/educators on topics that the principal and the Professional Development Team determine to be weak points, i.e., where teachers need professional development. The largest number of requests in 2025 concerned strengthening competencies in active learning methods, areas of inclusion, assessment, and teachers' socio-emotional skills. The implementation of the acquired knowledge in the institution and the effects of the training on the quality of teaching/learning, student achievements and support, and the institution's ethos are evaluated by the institution.

The website provides users with access to all relevant information, publications, research, guidelines in the field of professional development, forms, the Catalog of professional training programs, notifications about training organized by the Bureau for Education Services, and PP presentations from seminars.

In addition to the goals of the official curriculum (student-oriented and learning-focused), the general goals of teachers' professional development should also be based on objectively identified teachers' needs. There is a gap between the official curriculum, which advocates the development of students' competencies (learning and problem-solving abilities, development of creative and critical thinking, development of responsibility, desire for knowledge, cooperation, empathy, etc.), and teaching practice, in which the dominant goal is still knowledge transfer. Changing this orientation of teachers should be one of the fundamental tasks of professional development and at the level of the school/kindergarten.

4. Teacher professional development evaluations

Evaluation of professional development comprises: teachers self-evaluation, principal and expert collaborators evaluation, and evaluation of the team for the professional development.

4.1. Assessment of teacher work performance (ATWP)

At the school level, teachers' work is evaluated by the principal of the educational institution, who, according to the law, is the pedagogical leader. The principal's role is primarily motivational: he encourages teachers to develop professionally by creating conditions for teamwork, applies praise and rewards for achieved results and successful pedagogical practices, and promotes a culture of success among employees, parents, and the wider public. Through pedagogical-instructive work, the principal evaluates teachers' work based on classroom observation instruments. In order to provide professional support to principals, the Bureau for Education Services and the Center for Professional Education prepared the publication (Manual for Principals on Leading the Continuous Professional Development of Teachers in Schools/Institutions, 2013).

In addition, a team of domestic experts prepared a Handbook for schools (Popović et. al., 2009) with the expert support of an international consultant. In the following period, the assessment procedure will be improved based on an evaluation in which, in addition to the expert team from the Bureau for Education Services and the Center for Vocational Education, teachers, principals, and professional associates will also participate.

The existing procedure consists of three phases:

1. Meeting before the assessment
2. Assessment
3. Meeting after the completed assessment

Principal makes the achievement success in six key areas of teachers' work have been identified in which the assessment of their performance is carried out:

Planning, Teaching, Classroom work organization, Assessment, Interpersonal relations, Professionalism

The evaluation is carried out in accordance with the assessment categories.

ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTORS
85% – 100%	EXCELLENT
75% – 84%	VERY GOOD
65% – 74%	GOOD
55% – 64%	SATISFIES
45% – 54%	DOES NOT SATISFY

In this process principal makes the lesson observation, regular and additional lesson, evaluates the application of acquired knowledge from trainings, makes the insight in teachers documentation and the professional portfolio, and makes the structural interview with teachers.

Conducted evaluations show that in this field principal do not approach continuously and systematically, which negatively affects the planning and guidance of teachers' professional development, the quality of teaching/learning, and the development of a learning culture.

4.2. Self-evaluation of the school/kindergarten's work

Self-evaluation of the work of an educational institution is a key process that stems from the Institution's Development Program, that is, the Annual Work Plan and Program of the school, and the results of external evaluation. Self-evaluation is carried out in accordance with the law (every year in certain areas, and every two years as a whole, based on the Methodology for Improving and Ensuring the Quality of Educational Work in Institutions by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation – key areas, standards, indicators, evaluation methods). The principal and the Self-Evaluation Team play a key role in the self-evaluation, but all teachers (subject departments, school teams) and the Parent Council should be informed about and included in the self-evaluation process.

1. Planning (annual self-evaluation plan) with the selection of key areas and priority goals based on analysis/assessment of the situation;
2. Implementation and monitoring, i.e., the extent to which teachers are involved in improving teaching and learning;
3. Evaluation and reporting, which includes assessing the extent to which the defined goals have been achieved.

A successful self-evaluation is the most effective way to improve the quality of a school's work, which should, based on the collected information, answer the question:

What are we going to do to be even better?

4.3. External evaluation of professional development

External evaluation is carried out every four years or through partial supervision at the request of parents/guardians, MPNI, or the Education Inspectorate. Bureau for Education Services and the Center for Vocational Education determine the quality of work of educational institutions and the fulfillment of defined quality standards, and ensure the provision of a relevant database.

The goal is an objective assessment of the quality of educational work, including professional development. The current Methodology for determining quality includes the standard: The principal organizes and monitors the professional development and advancement of staff in the areas of management and leadership.

The observed shortcomings in the reports of the Department for Quality Assessment (2023) are: Professional development in the school is not planned or guided based on data from pedagogical-instructional work, evaluation, and self-evaluation. The recommendations emphasize further highlighting the importance of pedagogical-instructional work, analyzing observed lessons, proposing measures for improvement, and monitoring the effects of this work (in the Training Program for Principals).

5. Research on professional development

In recent decades, a number of evaluations (analyses, studies) of professional development systems have been carried out, as well as professional development at the institutional level. In 2024, two studies were carried out: one internal and one external. In this paper, we present some of the findings that point to further directions for improving teachers' professional development, especially at the school/kindergarten level. The study by the Bureau for Education Services on 'Professional Development of Teachers/Educators' shows that differences are particularly noticeable between teachers in small (rural) and large (urban) schools. Research shows that the main professional development needs of teachers in Montenegro are digital skills, inclusion, methods that promote the development of higher cognitive abilities and students' socio-emotional skills, outcome-based assessment, and alignment with curriculum goals.

As many as 98% of teachers believe that their school has a Professional Development Plan in place, and 37% of respondents confirmed that they participate in creating the Plan.

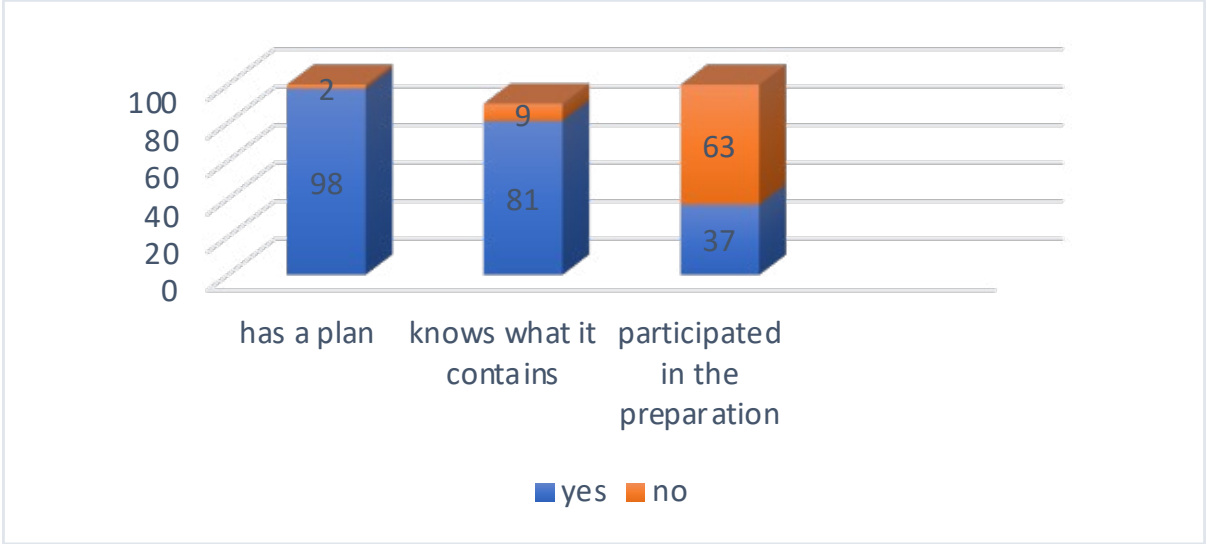


Figure 2. Teachers believe on their school

When these results are compared with the findings of external evaluations, a somewhat different picture emerges: a larger number of schools have Professional Development Plans in place, but about 30% of the plans are characterized by formalism and unclear goals. The evaluation points to a key problem, which is the insufficient or inadequate motivation of teachers to participate in seminars. A significant number of teachers (around 30%) cite renewing their license or the possibility of applying for higher positions as their main reason for attending the seminar, rather than a desire to learn something new.

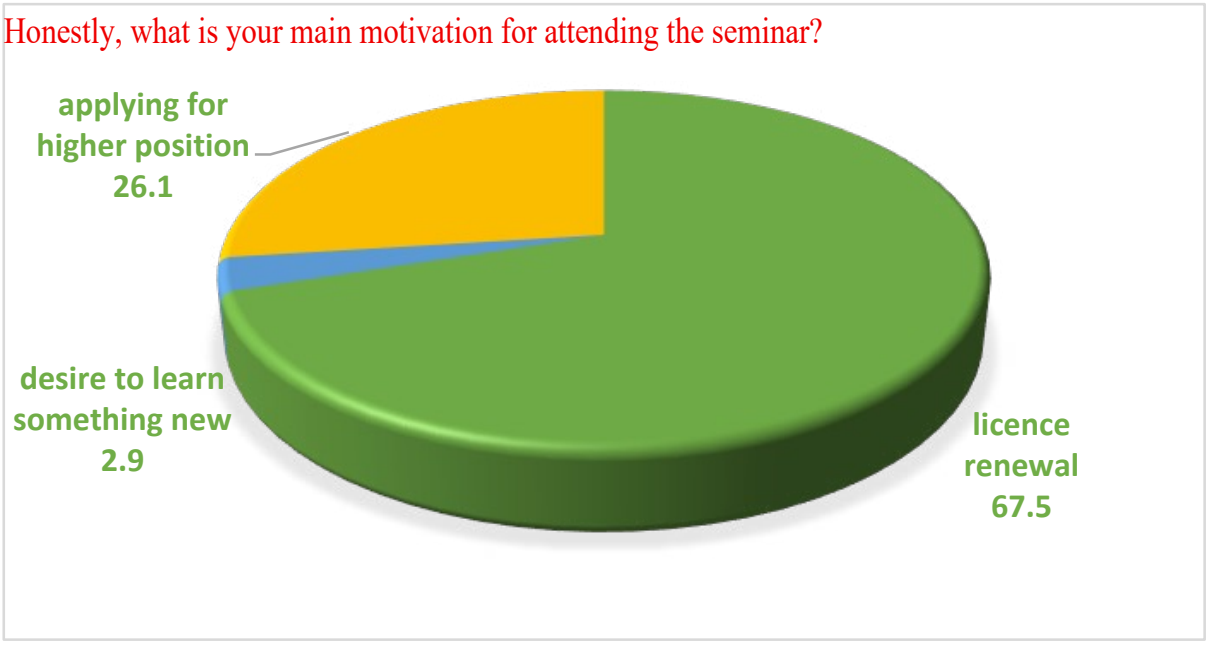


Figure 3. Professional development plans

In order to improve the effects of monitoring (so that teachers' practical experiences influence the improvement of that practice), it is necessary to strengthen the role of teachers in this activity, so that teachers are more in the role of subjects, and not just objects of monitoring and evaluation in the school. It has already been mentioned, it is possible to foresee that self-evaluation and reflection on the application of what was learned in the seminar become part of the teacher's personal portfolio.

The research shows that the most common forms and activities of PDT (Professional Development of Teachers) are: professional meetings where teachers exchange experiences and ideas with colleagues, self-initiated learning using a specific online platform, attending experimental or exemplary lessons with their school colleagues, sharing experiences with colleagues from other schools, participating in school teams, and so on.

Less common PDT activities include: action research, evaluating their own teaching practice based on feedback from students, parents, or colleagues; attending professional gatherings and presenting on professional topics to colleagues, either in school or elsewhere, and so on.

Research indicates that at school, professional associates most often monitor the application of knowledge gained from training.

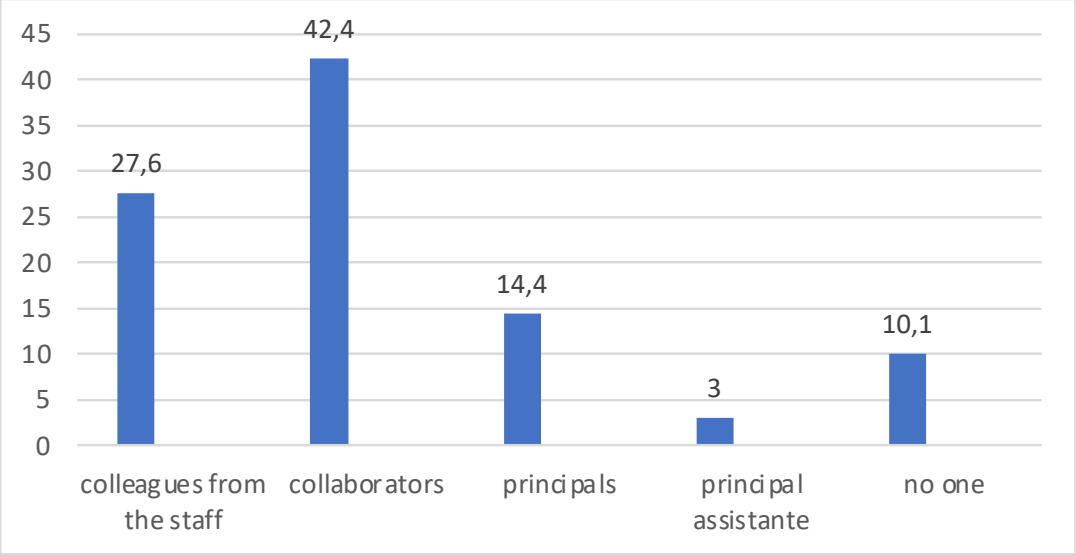


Figure 4. Professional associates monitor the application knowledge

A comparative overview of recommendations for improving professional development at the school/kindergarten level from two conducted studies/analyses:

INTERNAL- Education Institute	EXTERNAL -Gordon College of Education, UNICEF Montenegro
1. Improve continuous monitoring: • preparation of a personal professional development plan (PPDP) and a teacher portfolio in which activities are consciously planned and purposefully guided; • Higher practical value of the portfolio (licensing, work evaluation) and alignment with the goals of PDTS/K **2. Improving the school climate for professional development:** • Creating a supportive atmosphere for the exchange of experiences and ideas as another key factor for teacher professional development • Further develop teacher motivation • Mandatory preparation and updating of the Teacher Professional Development Plan (TPDP) • Strengthen self-evaluation activities and monitoring of changes in teaching practice. **3. A more active role of the director and professional associates in:** • Providing organizational, advisory, and supervisory support to teachers • Significantly improve activities of self-evaluation and evidence-based practices • Special attention to the professional development of beginning teachers and teachers in smaller schools • Increase the number of seminars organized by the school	**1. Improve evaluation and assessment of the CPD's impact** • Besides the existing ones, develop standardized tools for monitoring training effects • Expand the institutional and staffing capacities of Bureau for Education Services and the Center for Vocational Education **2. Use digital technologies for greater access and flexibility:** • Ensure that teachers in rural areas have access to training through digital platforms • Provide basic training in digital pedagogy as a prerequisite for online programs and professional development **3.Strengthen mentoring and collaboration among colleagues** • Establishing an exchange of information between field mentors and teacher education faculties • Forming professional learning communities (PLC) **4. Reform the system of teacher licensing and relicensing** • Licensing through portfolios and individual learning plans, promoting personal initiative

Of special importance is the Analysis of the Education Sector in Montenegro (ESA) 2015-2020, by the UNICEF Office in Montenegro and the Ministry of Education and Science with support from the European Union. The analysis, published in 2022 as a basis for developing a long-term plan for Montenegro's education sector, clearly showed that there is a high level of dissatisfaction among teachers in the Montenegrin education system regarding many aspects of their profession: the status of their work in society, salary, material conditions in schools, teaching conditions in the classroom, teaching materials, equipment, and internet connectivity. Specifically, through a survey with a reference sample of 3,645 teachers, 85.4% of teachers were very dissatisfied with the status of their profession in society, while as many as 92.7% were unhappy with their salary. We see a very similar level of teacher dissatisfaction when it comes to material conditions in schools (73.8% are either not satisfied at all or only slightly satisfied), while 63.2% of respondents are not happy with the teaching conditions in the classroom, teaching materials, equipment, internet connection, etc. Positive responses only prevail when it comes to satisfaction with the profession related to their subject (81.7%) and satisfaction with the teaching profession in general (83.6%). As a result, the vast majority of respondents would choose to become a teacher again if they had the chance to choose again.

In response to the education policy makers of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation, a decision was made to create a comprehensive, long-term Education Reform Strategy 2025-2035, which the Government of Montenegro adopted in June 2025. Among other things, it addresses the issue of making the teaching profession attractive. In Strategic Goal 2, aimed at improving education quality at all levels, teacher competence has a crucial impact: All staff in educational institutions equally and fully support the quality and fairness of education, develop all key competencies for lifelong learning and student skills, and have positive attitudes and high expectations toward all children and young people.

In Operational Goal 2: Systemic measures have been implemented to improve the reputation, safety, and overall well-being of employees. The Ministry and the Government of Montenegro's intention to carry out effective measures is clearly highlighted. The key interventions that ensure the reputation and well-being of employees are defined as follows:

1. Reviewing and updating pay scales to align with labor market trends;
2. Introducing financial incentives for teachers in rural areas and teachers working away from their place of residence;
3. Creating legal opportunities for vertical advancement and professional development for outstanding practitioners in system institutions;

In the Situation Analysis of the Strategy, the issue of the (un)attractiveness of the teaching profession was particularly highlighted as a key factor in hiring and retaining competent staff in educational institutions. Although there is a possibility for teachers to advance through the established system of higher ranks and career progression up to positions such as principal, assistant, and advisor in specialized institutions, findings indicate the need to take efficient and effective measures, some of which have been significantly implemented over the past three years: salary increases, development, construction, and improvement of school infrastructure and technical equipment, including significant investments in the digitalization of the education system in response to digital transformation in education and the development of teachers' digital competencies (Strategy for the Digitalization of the Education System 2022-2027 and the Teacher Digital Competence Framework (MPNI, 2025). Further efforts should be directed at developing a system that establishes a functional link between initial education and teachers' professional

development, ensuring that only the best candidates enter the teaching profession through a selection process that includes a detailed assessment of their teaching potential. With the aim of improving the teacher hiring process and tracking their performance. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation has adopted the Rulebook on the Method of Scoring Criteria for Hiring Teachers. The rulebook stipulates that special importance is given to: pedagogical competencies, professional development, motivation, and teachers' communication skills.

Uneven demographic structure – 60% of the population lives in Podgorica, population migration from the north to the Central and Southern regions over the past 30 years, young people leaving Montenegro ('brain drain') which is also common in other countries in the region, and a significant increase in the number of migrants from other language areas directly affect the education sector and lead to an uneven workload for teachers. In this sense, the Strategy foresees measures/activities to promote the teaching profession and to nurture an environment where teachers, just like students, feel safe, respected, and supported. This way, the education system can provide a motivated workforce dedicated to the development and learning of all children and young people.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

A prerequisite for a successful and effective education quality improvement policy is to establish mechanisms that will enable efficient and effective professional development for teachers, which will have a positive impact on achieving student outcomes and developing 21st-century skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity. It's important to provide systemic conditions for the development of professional psychological, pedagogical, and didactic competencies for future teachers. Monitoring teachers' work should include: pedagogical and instructional activities at school, students' achievements on external and international tests (e.g., PISA), as well as qualitative assessments based on self-evaluation, external evaluation, and surveys of students, parents, and colleagues.

The following lessons from the Montenegrin experience can be useful for other education systems:

- Internal motivation and a well-developed reflective practice among teachers is a necessary condition for successful professional development;
- Focused attention of all educational institutions on the professional development of beginner teachers;
- A more active role of principals, educational specialists, and senior teachers in professional development at the school level;
- Strengthening the functional link between initial teacher education and professional development;
- Increasing the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession in society;
- Introducing financial incentives for teachers in shortage subjects, in rural areas, as well as for teachers working away from home.

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NORWAY

Towards a National System for Continuous Professional Development: Challenges and Opportunities



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Institution profile

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (DET) is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research, and is responsible for kindergartens, primary and secondary education, including VET. The objective of the Directorate is to ensure that all children, pupils and apprentices receive the high-quality education they are entitled to.

The Directorate develop framework plans for kindergartens and after-school programs (SFO), curricula for primary and secondary education, and provide resources to support implementation on local level. The DET is also responsible for exams, national tests and mapping tests. Furthermore, it manages grants to private schools and folk high schools, as well as various national initiatives and programs intended to support learning and well-being. The DET is also responsible for managing and further developing the national support programs for teacher professional development and leadership training.

The Directorate has the overall responsibility for supervising kindergarten, education and the governance of the education sector, as well as the implementation of Acts and regulations.

Responsibilities furthermore includes national statistics about kindergarten, primary and secondary education. On the basis of these statistics the DET initiates, develops and monitors research and development.

NORWAY

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Towards a national system for continuous professional development – challenges and opportunities

Authors: Siv Hilde Lindstrøm, Tove Margrethe Thommesen

Abstract

In this article, we explore how national support schemes for teacher's professional development have evolved over time, and how the measures in the new strategy for competence and career development may support professional development as an ongoing activity for all teachers, and for other staff working in kindergartens and schools. We discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with implementation and examine innovative recruitment projects for teacher education and the teaching profession.

Keywords: career development, continuous professional development, implementing national strategies, mentoring and induction, professional learning, teacher recruitment, teacher education policy, school–university partnerships

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, Norway has made substantial investments in a range of national initiatives aimed at strengthening teachers' competencies and the opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD). These initiatives have been introduced at different times, embedded in different strategies, and based on different rationales. As a result, in some cases these have appeared to lack co-ordination and have posed challenges for local autonomy.

Norway is now implementing a more unified system for CPD set out in a new strategy for competence and career development. The strategy aims to ensure greater coherence, predictability, and consistency in national schemes designed to support local professional development, and is characterised by local autonomy, partnerships between universities and schools, and financial support for partnership efforts and for individual teachers' professional development. In addition, the strategy is linked to a separate strategy for recruiting teachers for kindergartens and schools. Both strategies are anchored with the social partners.

Sections 2 and 3 contain a short description of the educational policy context in Norway and a short historical overview of the development of national measures and programs for teachers' professional development. Sections 4 and 5 examine national mentoring initiatives for novice teachers and national initiatives for recruiting candidates within teacher education and the teaching profession. Section 6 concludes the article by discussing dilemmas and risks related to the implementation of the measures in the strategy. The focus of this article is on primary and secondary education rather than kindergartens, although kindergarten is defined as being part of Norway's formal education system. Several of the national measures for professional development include kindergarten teachers. The article will comment on this where relevant. Norway has a high level of enrolment of children in kindergarten. In 2025, 94.5 percent of children aged 1–5 years attended kindergarten. Kindergarten participation for the group aged 3–5 years has been stable at 97 percent over the past five years (Udir, 2026).

1. Background and context for teachers' professional development in Norway

1.1. Teachers and schools in Norway

In 2025, Norway had 2,663 primary and lower secondary schools and 418 upper secondary schools. Norway's 357 municipalities are responsible for kindergartens and primary and lower secondary schools, while 15 counties are responsible for upper secondary education, including VET. Most students are enrolled in public schools. Compared to most other European countries, a small proportion of Norwegian students, around 5 percent, attends private primary schools (Udir, 2025).

Norwegian municipalities vary substantially in terms of their size, centrality, resources, and quality of service provision. About half of the municipalities in Norway have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. The number of elderly people will grow sharply in the future, which will result in an increased need for services within the health and care sector. At the same time, a declining working-age population will lead to reduced labour supply and greater competition for labour in the future. Challenges relating to the implementation of reforms, quality development, and teacher recruitment are especially pronounced in some rural municipalities. The introduction of national measures and programs to support local responsibilities is thought to be one way of reducing the risk of inequalities between municipalities, in addition to being a tool for implementing national policies.



Formal teacher education is required to be employed as a teacher. Teachers must achieve a specific level of academic credits in their teaching subjects. From 2014, teacher education in Norway is provided at master's level, and usually provides the specialisation to teach two to four subjects. The number of teachers who meet the requirements to teach varies between subjects. In Norwegian, mathematics and English, there has been a positive development in recent years due to large increase in formal CPD in these subjects. At present, 5 percent of the teachers do not meet the qualification requirements for employment, while 12 percent of teachers in Norwegian, 16 percent of teachers in mathematics, and 28 percent of teachers in English lack the formal qualifications for teaching the subject (Udir, 2025).

Norwegian classrooms have become more heterogeneous. TALIS data from 2024 shows that the composition of students in Norwegian schools has changed significantly since 2018. Compared to TALIS 2018, a higher proportion of Norwegian teachers in 2024 report that more than a third of the students in their classes have difficulty understanding Norwegian, are academically weak, have special educational needs, and/or behavioural problems. Traditionally, Norway has been less heterogeneous than many other participating countries in TALIS, also compared to the other Nordic countries. In terms of heterogeneity, by 2024 the composition of students has become more similar to what we find in the other Nordic countries (White et al., 2025).

1.2. Legal regulation of continuous professional development and induction for novice teachers

According to the Norwegian Education Act, municipalities, counties, and boards of private schools are responsible for hiring teachers with adequate competencies for teaching, and to provide CPD for their staff. However, the regulation in the Education Act concerning CPD is formulated in general terms, and leaves considerable scope for local variation in terms of what is considered necessary to "keep up with developments in the school and society":

> **Professional and educational development: Municipalities and county authorities shall ensure that teachers, head teachers, and other school personnel are provided with opportunities for professional and educational development in accordance with developments in schools and society.**
> **(Norwegian Education Act, § 17-8)**

The collective agreement between employers and employees does not regulate CPD for teachers in any more detail. Consequently, Norwegian teachers have no statutory right to have a specific type (formal or informal) or a defined amount (hours or days per year) of CPD.

Nor do Norwegian teachers have a statutory right to an induction program when they start their career as a new teacher. According to the collective agreement, "teachers have the right to have their teaching time reduced by up to 6 percent from the beginning of the school year during their first professional year after completing their academic and pedagogical education. Newly graduated teachers may use the freed-up time for preparation, follow-up work, and professional updating during scheduled working hours, unless otherwise agreed" (Agreement SFS 2213). Although this regulation provides the scope for organising induction and mentoring activities for novice teachers, it is not mandatory.

The overarching curriculum framework sets out clear expectations for systematic

and professional collaboration between teachers, which aims to develop practice in subjects and cross-disciplinary pedagogical issues, as well as adapt curriculum goals to the local context. These expectations are expressed in general terms and are not connected to a specific use of time.

In sum, these regulations leave considerable scope for local autonomy and variation between municipalities and between schools in the same municipality when it comes to priorities, planning, and the practice of CPD and induction of novice teachers.

1.3. Norwegian teachers' participation in professional learning activities

Norway has participated in the OECD TALIS surveys since they began in 2008. According to TALIS, Norwegian teachers participate less in CPD activities than their colleagues in other OECD countries. The findings from TALIS have provided an important knowledge-base for developing the national schemes for individual competency development (granting ECTS/study points) and schemes for collective professional development in schools (NOU: 2022:13).

A large share of teachers participates in CPD in the countries that take part in TALIS. On average, about 90 percent have taken part in some form of professional development in the 18 months prior to the survey. In 2008, Norway was slightly below the OECD average in terms of the number of teachers who had participated. Norwegian teachers had, on average, less time (fewer days) for CPD than teachers in other countries. Norwegian teachers were among those who most strongly expressed a desire to participate in more CPD, and at the time they reported a need for professional development in teaching students with special needs, ICT in teaching, and student assessment. Teachers reported spending little time updating themselves by reading professional literature.

These findings were supported by other studies indicating that although Norwegian teachers are motivated to participate, there are structural shortcomings linked to professional development (Vibe et al., 2009). The results from 2008 were followed up with several concrete measures from Norwegian education authorities during the period 2009–2013. TALIS results provided an important knowledge-base for further developing continuing education and professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders, the provision of better support for novice teachers, and increased attention on classroom management (Carlsten et al., 2014).

Researchers reported the same findings when analysing the results from TALIS 2013. Although the share of teachers in Norway participating in professional development was about average for the OECD, Norwegian teachers spent less time than their colleagues in other countries. For example, while Norwegian teachers only spent 3.5 days on courses and workshops in 2013, the average for teachers in TALIS was 8.5 days (Carlsten et al., 2014). The results from TALIS 2018 and TALIS 2024 were consistent with the results from the surveys in 2008 and 2013 and showed that Norwegian teachers still participated slightly below the average for OECD countries (OECD 2019, OECD 2025).

2. National policies for developing the teaching profession

2.1. A short historical introduction

Norway has a long tradition of introducing national schemes and programs for supporting school development and CPD for teachers. The programs have focussed either on specific subjects like reading, mathematics and science, or on more pedagogical themes such as assessment for learning, safe school environment, or class management. Some programs have been aimed at certain levels in the school system, such as upper secondary school or kindergarten. The programs have normally been linked to curriculum reforms and other political priorities, and included financial support for implementation at the local level.

For the past 20 years, several national programs targeted to specific subjects and themes have coexisted in parallel, at the same time as the local government's legal responsibility for school development and professional development have been underscored. Consequently, one of the tensions that exists is between the local priorities, developed through local processes of quality assessment and the national priorities, including financial support. Although local needs and national priorities are often aligned, this is not always the case. In some cases, local needs have been "outcrowded" and displaced by national programs, and local authorities have been using resources on applying for and reporting on national programs. This can be especially challenging in smaller municipalities with limited capacity and resources, at the same time as national programs have provided necessary structure and financial support for participation in school development programs.

2.2. Teacher Education 2025 – National Strategy for Quality and Cooperation in Teacher Education

Improving the quality of the Norwegian teaching profession was a political priority for the Conservative-led government during its two terms in office from 2013 to 2021. A key reform was the expansion of teacher education from a four-year program to a five-year master's degree with stronger academic content. Alongside the introduction of new teacher education programs in 2017, the government adopted a long-term strategy aimed at strengthening teacher competencies and professional development.

In June 2017, the Ministry of Education and Research launched **Teacher Education 2025 – National Strategy for Quality and Cooperation in Teacher Education**. The overarching ambition of the strategy was to establish a permanent strengthening of the Norwegian teaching profession. The strategy emphasised collaboration among all stakeholders involved in teacher education and outlined four main objectives to be achieved by 2025:

- Academically challenging and rewarding study programmes.
- Academically strong and well-organised teacher education institutions.
- Knowledge-based and engaged partners in early childhood education and schools, including professional learning communities that systematically support professionalisation and ensure effective induction for newly qualified teachers.
- Stable and mutually beneficial cooperation between teacher education institutions, kindergartens, and schools.

A central concern of the strategy was the quality of student practicums and the need to strengthen collaboration across different levels of the education system. The strategy explicitly called for the development of partnerships between teacher education institutions and the ECEC and school sectors (MOE, 2017).

To support the implementation of the strategy, the government established two national bodies. **The National Forum for Teacher Education and Professional Development (NFLP)** is a national arena for consultation, dialogue and policy development. It is chaired by the two Ministers of Education and brings together stakeholders, including teacher unions, school leader unions, the teacher student organisation, the organisation representing teacher education institutions, and The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) as employers of teachers and school leaders. The forum meets regularly to discuss key issues and contribute to the development of teacher education and the teaching profession. Its primary role is to facilitate dialogue, ensure co-ordination between stakeholders and provide input on how to move forward in implementing the strategy.

The Advisory Council for Teacher Education 2025 (FRLU) was established as an independent expert body to support the work of the ministry and the NFLP. The council consists of a broad range of expertise, including students, teacher educators, researchers, administrators, and representatives from local authorities. Unlike the NFLP, whose members represent stakeholders and interest groups, the members of the FRLU are appointed in a personal capacity to provide independent, professionally grounded advice. The FRLU was also granted a degree of autonomy in defining its own agenda within the broader goals of the strategy and it has been led by key actors from universities and university colleges with teacher education programs.

Although FRLU's analyses and recommendations are primarily directed at the Ministry of Education and the NFLP, they are also intended to inform teacher education institutions and the broader education sector. Its working approach combines engagement with practice-based perspectives and the systematic use of research and existing knowledge. FRLU has published reports on partnerships in teacher education, bachelor's and master's thesis work, and an expanded concept of practice in teacher education programs: https://nettsteder.regjeringen.no/frlu/in-english/.

FRLU was tasked with proposing a new national framework for all teacher education programs in 2025. Its proposals were submitted to the Ministry of Education in early 2026 and are scheduled for public consultation in autumn 2026.

FRLU was discontinued by the end of the strategy period. The NFLP will continue its work and is currently addressing issues related to recruitment and the follow-up of novice teachers, as well as considering the development of a new strategy for teacher education.

In addition to the creation of these bodies, several other schemes were introduced and linked to the Teacher Education Strategy 2025. Several existing national school development programs were merged into a new scheme with earmarked funds for local school development, based on partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools and municipalities. Consultation structures were established at the local level to develop long-term plans for CPD priorities. This new model for professional development in partnerships introduced a dual purpose: to develop professional practice based on research in schools and to develop more practice-informed teacher education. An important goal was also to establish structures to facilitate access to partnerships and networks for collective professional development for all municipalities and schools, not just for municipalities with sufficient resources to form partnerships on their own. The scheme was therefore an important measure for inclusion and equity.

At the same time, the government introduced a pilot scheme for teacher career pathways, aiming to ensure quality development and give motivated teachers responsibility for professional and quality development in schools in order to motivate teachers to remain in teaching and not seek work outside of the teaching profession. Although the pilot showed some promising results, it received criticism especially for using terms such as "teacher specialists" and for unclear criteria regarding the recruitment for the positions. The evaluation also showed large variations in how the role was carried out and found that sufficient time was not provided for carrying out the work expected in the role. The pilot was discontinued in 2021 when Norway had a change of government, one week before the final evaluation of the pilot was published. Although the incoming government aimed to reestablish a scheme that was better aligned with the demands of the teacher profession and the social partners, this has yet to be realised.

2.4. The case for introducing new requirements for teaching and mandatory formal continuous education

A specific part of the work related to the Teacher Education Strategy 2025 has had a major impact on the development of national policies in this field, and on the relationship between national policies and the teaching profession and social partners: the introduction of new requirements for teaching in 2014, following the decision to expand initial teacher education from a four-year program into a five-year master's program.

In order for existing teachers to meet the same academic requirements for teaching specific subjects, the government significantly expanded the program for formal continuous education for teachers and introduced a retroactive effect period of ten years within which all teachers who had completed their teacher education prior to 2014 had to undergo formal continuous education in order to remain qualified to teach. This can be seen as a parallel to a model of recertification, which has previously not been a part of the teaching profession in Norway.

In the following years, the government significantly increased the financial support in order to cater for the number of teachers who were obliged to fulfil their mandatory formal continuous education. The capacity for formal continuous education places at universities and teacher education institutions was increased to cater for demand and was funded accordingly. Although the Teacher Union had taken part in negotiating the terms for the individual teachers, the introduction of this ten-year deadline was heavily criticised by teachers who felt that they were suddenly deemed unqualified to teach. A very active public debate followed in the years to come. In general, the introduction of the new requirements received support, it was the introduction of the retroactive effect of the requirements that received criticism.

As part of the election campaign for the parliamentary elections in 2021, the Labour Party and coalition parties announced the abolition of this retroactive requirement if there was to be a change of government. After the new government took office, work started to legally re-exempt teachers who completed their education prior to 2014 from needing to fulfil the qualification requirements in order to teach their subjects. This formally came into effect in 2023.

2.5. Implementing a new and coherent strategy for competence and career development

A public commission was established by the outgoing Conservative government in 2021, with a mandate to suggest new CPD models for teachers. The commission consisted of representatives from the social partners, as well as researchers and experts. Following the public hearing process for the commission's report and a consultative process with the social partners, the **Strategy for competence and career development for kindergartens and schools** was launched in 2025 (MOE, 2025).

The strategy builds upon existing schemes and programs, as described in the sections above, as well as suggestions from the commission and results from the public consultation process. The strategy aims to further develop and redesign existing schemes, to obtain more coherent and targeted national initiatives designed to support local authorities in providing teachers and other staff in ECEC and schools with the necessary, relevant and practice-oriented CPD throughout their careers.

A central element in the strategy is to expand the target groups and introduce the same level of support (freed-up working time and/or grants) for formal continuous education also for teachers and assistants in kindergartens, as well as for staff working in other professions in kindergartens and schools, such as SNE teachers, social workers, and child welfare officers. This support has previously been reserved for teachers in schools. Local needs assessments for professional development shall replace earlier strict national priorities for subjects, thus reinforcing and supporting the local responsibility for quality and professional development.

The strategy has three primary objectives:

- to provide good opportunities for competence and career development for leaders, teachers, and other staff in kindergartens and schools throughout their working life
- to strengthen the professional learning communities in and between kindergartens and schools
- to make kindergartens and schools attractive workplaces that can recruit and retain teachers and other professional groups (MOE, 2025).

The following principles form the basis of the comprehensive system for competence and career development:

- Competence development shall be long-term and predictable.
- Competence development shall meet local competency needs in kindergartens and schools and safeguard employees' co-determination.
- Ensure better alignment between individual and collective professional development.
- Competence development shall be based on equal partnerships.
- Competence development shall be knowledge-based (MOE, 2025).

The principles shall help to ensure that the various measures are better aligned at the local level.

The strategy contains the following key measures:

- An earmarked grant for formal continuous education for teachers and other staff working in kindergartens and schools, distributed to municipalities, counties, and private schools. This earmarked grant replaces the former system where the individual teacher applied directly to the Directorate for Education and Training for a study place, and the principal approved or declined the teacher's application.
- Two schemes for collective professional development: one for kindergartens and schools, administered by the county governors in each county, and based on long-term partnerships between higher education/teacher education and kindergartens, schools and municipalities, and one scheme for upper secondary education, including VET, administered by the counties.
- Frameworks for specialised teacher roles and functions/career pathways for teachers. This measure has not yet been realised and will be considered a matter for social partners at the local level. This work no longer has earmarked funding after the pilot for teacher specialists was discontinued in 2022 (see section 3.2).
- Mentoring of novice teachers (see section 4).
- A follow-up scheme, intended to provide additional support to municipalities which have had consistently weak results in key indicators such as literacy, numeracy, and bullying in schools (MOE, 2025).

In addition to the measures in the strategy, some thematic national initiatives exist that are of relevance in the support of CPD, such as the national program for improving school environment.

3. National initiatives for mentoring and induction of novice teachers

Professional mentoring for novice teachers is a measure in the strategy for competence and career development, as noted above. The development of mentoring for novice teachers in Norway has progressed steadily since the 1980s. From 2003, regional initiatives and networks within teacher education were established and received some state funding. The purpose of this funding was to enable teacher education institutions, in collaboration with municipalities, to establish high-quality mentoring schemes in schools. Corresponding formal training programs were developed in some teacher education institutions. What began as a small field, driven by academics and with only a limited number of novice teachers receiving mentoring, gradually expanded. Several evaluations throughout the 2000s and 2010s steered further improvement.

A milestone was reached in 2017, when the Norwegian parliament (the Storting), as part of the then comprehensive work on improving quality and teacher competency, requested that the government work more actively on developing these initiatives in collaboration with the social partners, with the aim that all novice teachers should receive high-quality mentoring and be able to participate in induction programs.

The NFLP (see section 3.2) was given the responsibility to develop **Principles and commitments for the mentoring of newly qualified teachers**. In 2018, a national framework for mentoring novice teachers was developed in collaboration with the social partners, aimed at ensuring the mentoring of all novice teachers. The national framework consists of the following elements:

- Principles and commitments for mentoring novice teachers in kindergarten and school.
- Guidelines for designing and implementing good-quality mentoring schemes at the local level.

The guidelines outline the key characteristics of effective mentoring schemes and provide examples of how such schemes can be established and further developed locally. The content of the guidelines aims to support a smooth transition from education to professional practice, which in turn contributes to:

- increased confidence and mastering of the work situation and interactions with children/pupils
- greater awareness of the value of one's own competence
- increased motivation and a desire to remain in the profession
- the development of the professional community in kindergartens and schools through the involvement of both novice teachers and their experienced colleagues (Udir, guidelines for mentoring novice teachers).

Several teacher education institutions have developed formal qualification programs for mentors, intended to support the use of mentoring as a quality-improvement strategy in kindergartens and schools. The programs are at master's level (normally granting 30 ECTS) and intended for experienced teachers who will take up a role as mentor. The programs qualify participants to provide mentoring individually and in groups for student teachers, novice teachers and groups of colleagues.

In 2019, an earmarked state grant was allocated in the annual budget for municipalities to enable them to apply for funding for the mentoring of novice teachers. The primary objective was to ease the transition from teacher education into the teaching profession and to increase the retention of novice teachers in schools. An important principle is that novice teachers should receive mentoring from an experienced colleague with formal education in mentoring, and the grant should be used to pay to free up the mentor's work time away from teaching and towards mentoring.

The earmarked grant was increased in the annual budget for 2025, and the government suggested a further increase in the annual budget for 2026. The scheme was expanded to include teachers in kindergartens as well as upper secondary schools. The work has been broadly supported by professional communities and social partners, and the number of novice teachers who have received mentoring from qualified mentors has increased significantly. The results from TALIS 2024 show that among teachers with less than two years of experience, about nine out of ten have participated in either a formal induction program or informal induction activities intended to support them in the transition from education to practicing as a teacher. This is a significant change from TALIS 2018, which showed that the follow-up of newly graduated teachers was limited. Among the newly graduated teachers who were followed up on upon their employment, 80 percent report that they received guidance from the principal or experienced teachers (White et al., 2025).

However, changes in governance and challenges facing the public sector in general has recently affected this work. Municipalities are responsible for fulfilling a range of rights and duties under several welfare acts. Many municipalities experience challenges relating to demographic changes and will need to restructure to cater for future demands. Consequently, work is ongoing in Norway to reduce the steering pressure on municipalities from ministries and government agencies to allow for the local restructuring of public services. This work has consequences for several parts of the public sector, including education, since reducing the steering pressure also includes reducing the number of earmarked state grants. In the final parliamentary negotiations for the annual state budget for 2026, the earmarked state grant for mentoring novice teachers was therefore transferred to the municipalities' general budgets. This implies that an important lever for developing this field further has now been discontinued, and that municipalities are now free to use this grant as they see fit in order to fulfil legal obligations and prepare for demographic changes.

Stakeholders now express concern about the long-term sustainability of the work for mentoring novice teachers. Without a corresponding earmarked grant and a lack of concrete regulations in this field as shown in section 2.2, there is uncertainty regarding how mentoring can be further scaled up and institutionalised to ensure that all novice teachers are guaranteed access to high-quality mentoring.

4. Recruitment for teacher education and the teaching profession

The shortage of teachers in Norway is particularly pronounced in certain parts of the country. Access to qualified teachers varies significantly between municipalities, both in kindergartens and in schools. The situation is most challenging in rural municipalities and in Northern Norway, where the recruitment base is often weak and staff turnover high. At the same time, applications to teacher education programs have declined in recent years, with an especially marked drop in applications to early childhood teacher education. In addition, many teachers choose to leave the profession, further exacerbating recruitment and staffing challenges.

These challenges are not new, and they have been the focus of attention for some time. To reverse the negative trend and address the challenges related to teacher recruitment, the government, together with the NFLP, launched a new recruitment strategy in 2024. The strategy **More Teachers in Early Childhood Education and Schools – Strategy for Recruitment to Teacher Education Programs and the Teaching Profession 2024–2030** sets out four objectives to guide the work:

1. Teacher education programs are perceived as attractive fields of study.
2. Teacher education programs are of high quality and relevant to the profession.
3. All newly qualified teachers experience a good transition from education to working life, including mentoring and support.
4. Kindergartens and schools are attractive workplaces that recruit and retain teachers.

Previous recruitment initiatives and campaigns have primarily been focused on increasing applications to teacher education programs. While these measures have resulted in slightly higher applicant numbers in the short term, they have not led to lasting improvements. The current strategy takes a longer-term and a broader perspective by looking ahead to 2030 and addressing important issues such as the transition from education to professional practice, and how kindergartens and schools can become more attractive workplaces.

A national teacher recruitment project has been established at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) as part of the strategy. The project collaborates with stakeholders to develop national and regional measures to recruit and retain teachers. Several possibilities for applying for stipends and to have student loans written off have also been introduced.

Various recruitment measures have been initiated within the national project and at individual teacher education institutions. A key initiative from Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) is Where are my brothers, which is described in more detail below.

4.1. Case study: Where are my brothers

Using role models to inspire higher education among young people from a multicultural background

Where are my brothers is an outreach and recruitment initiative led by Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet). The project encourages boys and young men from a multicultural background to pursue higher education, particularly in care, education, and social service professions by connecting them with relatable role models. These role models, including current students in relevant programs, visit

schools and community arenas so pupils can more easily envision themselves following similar study paths and careers. This initiative is being delivered in close collaboration with local schools.

Background

In Norway, professions such as early childhood education, teaching, and child welfare remain heavily female dominated and have low participation among men from a multicultural background. At the same time, many young people from minority groups are at greater risk of dropping out of school and have limited exposure to higher education pathways. **Where are my brothers** responds to these challenges by increasing the visibility, relevance, and accessibility of higher education in multicultural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

Objectives

The initiative aims to strengthen diversity and representation in care and education-related professions by encouraging more men from a multicultural background to enter professional degree programs. Its main objectives are to:

- Increase the enrolment of men from a multicultural background into professional degree programs at OsloMet
- Strengthen representation, cultural competency, and trust within care, education, and social service professions
- Build sustainable partnerships between higher education institutions, lower and upper secondary schools, and local communities.

Community-based approach

The project is closely connected to OsloMet's satellite campus in Holmlia, an area with a high proportion of residents from an immigrant and multilingual background. By locating education and research activities closer to the community, OsloMet aims to reduce barriers to participation and strengthen local engagement.

In 2022, the project received funding through the Area Initiative (Områdesatsingen) in Søndre Nordstrand and is part of **Storbybarn**, an interdisciplinary network with a focus on children and young people in urban contexts. In 2026, the project is funded by the Ministry of Education and OsloMet / OsloMet-Holmlia.

Activities and methods

Grounded in lived experience and peer-to-peer engagement, the initiative mobilises male students and professionals from a multicultural background as ambassadors and positive role models. Through an annual activity plan and ongoing collaboration with schools and community partners, the project:

- shares personal stories about pathways into education, overcoming barriers and developing a sense of belonging;
- delivers presentations and seminars in schools and community settings;
- facilitates mentoring, practical training, and placement opportunities for pupils and students;
- builds local networks through social and academic activities;
- collaborates closely with lower and upper secondary schools;
- produces recruitment videos and targeted social media content; and
- hosts workshops and dialogue forums with young people.

Long-term impact

By meeting young people where they are, socially and geographically, the initiative contributes to a more inclusive and representative higher education sector. Over time, increased diversity among professionals is expected to:

- enhance trust between public services and diverse communities;
- strengthen inclusion and cultural competency in kindergarten, school, and child welfare services; and
- improve representation in professions that play a central role in children's and young people's lives.

In recent years, the project has expanded its scope to include girls and young women. By encouraging them to explore non-traditional study paths such as engineering, IT, and other STEM-fields, the initiative is now working to challenge gendered expectations in both directions and promote broader educational diversity.

Conclusion – implementation challenges and opportunities

Global challenges, rapid development in technology, and increased awareness of young people's mental health are examples of trends shaping the demand for CPD in kindergartens and schools. As we have shown in this article, a range of national strategies and initiatives have been established to strengthen the teacher profession. The process of developing and implementing the new strategy has given renewed attention to the importance of CPD and lifelong learning for teachers and other staff working in kindergartens and schools.

Society faces some general challenges in terms of demographic changes and strained human resources within welfare services. Combined, these impact efforts to recruit and retain teachers, as well as the ability to prioritise resources and capacity for CPD at the local level. Although the statutory requirements are the same for all municipalities and schools, the conditions vary significantly in terms of the scope, capacity, centrality and quality of services. Except for the follow-up scheme, which targets municipalities with the weakest results with extra support, the national schemes for CPD are structured uniformly, regardless of local capacity. This creates a risk that larger and more resource-rich municipalities, often located close to teacher education institutions, are better positioned to make use of the available measures than smaller and more decentralised municipalities. Fossestøl et al. (2026) show that local challenges, limited capacity, and a lack of stability in personnel filling key positions are affecting both the pace and quality of development work.

The largest scheme in the strategy consists of an earmarked grant to municipalities, counties and private schools to support teachers' formal continuing education in subjects, general pedagogical themes, SNE or digitalisation. This support can be given as freed-up working time and/or as a grant to the individual teacher. The local processes of quality assessment shall form the basis for prioritising staff, subjects, or themes. Although this scheme is designed to provide CPD opportunities for all municipalities and schools, it will be a challenge to free up working time and get qualified substitute teachers in some areas and subjects in order to replace those who participate in formal continuous education. Several municipalities have a pressed financial situation and have cited difficulties in covering the corresponding mandatory contribution. There is therefore a risk that this scheme will contribute to amplify differences between municipalities and between schools. This scheme has

previously been more centralised with national priorities for subjects and fields of study, and study programs acquired by the Directorate for Education and Training from universities and teacher education institutions. The decentralisation of this scheme gives greater flexibility to meet local needs, and for universities and teacher education institutions to develop new and more flexible formal CPD programs in line with local needs. Its success will depend on well-developed processes at the school and municipality levels for quality assessment and for well-developed dialogue between stakeholders at the local and regional levels.

Together with the scheme for supporting formal continuous education for individual teachers, the strategy also contains support for forming long-term partnerships between schools, municipalities and teacher education institutions. Although the principle of forming partnerships for professional development is strongly supported, research shows substantial variations in the quality of collaboration in professional communities (Fossestøl et al., 2026). Experiences show that the partnership model can provide solid frameworks for targeted professional development. At the same time, the model's effectiveness largely depends on local conditions, in particular active leadership that follows up on results and contributes to a clear direction and continuity.

In 2025, proposals for new framework regulations for teacher education programs were developed in Norway. One of the proposals is to make partnerships a formal part of the regulation. As described above, work on partnerships is already well underway. The proposal to formally regulate partnerships in teacher education has been largely well received and would help to align formal regulations and measures in support of partnerships, if adopted. The proposal for the framework regulations will be circulated for formal consultation in autumn 2026.

Earmarked grants and pedagogical means such as guidelines are "softer" modes of governance than legal duties. As we have outlined in section 4, stakeholders have expressed concern regarding the long-term sustainability of developing good-quality mentoring and induction activities for novice teachers, following the decision to include the previous earmarked grant in the municipalities' general budgets. Many municipalities will continue to prioritise the induction of novice teachers according to the principles and commitments for the mentoring of novice teachers as an important part of recruitment and retention of teachers. However, a reduction in the number of novice teachers receiving mentoring could be expected due to the strained financial situation in many municipalities and the need to prioritise the fulfilment of legal obligations in other welfare areas.

Nevertheless, although we are facing challenges and risks in the implementation phase of the new strategy for competence and career development, there is a high degree of commitment to this work among stakeholders, as well as several well-established processes and partnerships that can be built upon and developed further at the local level. National authorities need to be mindful of reducing complexity and administrative costs, as well as follow up on and make necessary adjustments to the different measures as they are implemented.

An important part of the Directorate's responsibilities is to follow up on and evaluate how the schemes in the strategy will work at the local level and evaluate the outcomes of the strategy. We are currently in the process of designing an evaluation model, where social partners and researchers are an integral part of the evaluation process.

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SLOVAKIA

In-Service Teacher Professional Development in Slovakia: Current Practices, Challenges, Trends and Opportunities

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Institutional profile

The National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVaM) carries out a broad range of activities, including professional development and advisory services for pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff, methodological guidance and support for schools and school facilities, applied educational research, the organisation of subject Olympiads and competitions, external assessment and testing in schools, non-formal education for young people, and the management of library collections.

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In-Service teacher professional development in Slovakia: Current practices, challenges, trends and opportunities

Authors: Vladimír Laššák and Rastislav Rosinský

Abstract

The system of teacher professional development in Slovakia has undergone several changes over the last 20 years. In the paper, we present Slovakian policies and programmes for teacher induction. Further, we present professional standards for teachers and describe strategies of professional development related to them, including the career ladder and attestation process. The school-based professional development is presented, including various new forms at national, local, and school levels, reflecting challenges and changes under ongoing curricular reform. The teacher appraisal performance system is described, including policies, procedures, and tools. Teacher shortages are briefly mentioned in relation to professional development and teacher motivation in Slovakia.

Keywords

Educational policy; Professional development; Teacher induction; Professional standards; Career system; Attestation process; School-based professional development; Teacher performance appraisal; Teacher shortages; Curricular reform.

Introduction

This paper examines the Slovak system of teacher professional development, focusing on national educational policy, professional standards and career progression, teacher appraisal, national and regional development strategies and emerging model of school-based professional learning, monitoring and evaluation of professional development and teacher motivation. Attention is given to the transition from a predominantly individual, course-based model towards a more needs-based, practice-oriented and school-embedded approach to continuous professional learning.

The Slovak system combines several mutually interconnected components. These include professional standards and competencies, career progression and professional attestation, teacher appraisal, formal and school-based professional development, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating professional development outcomes.

A significant strategic shift in recent years has been the growing emphasis on school-based professional development. Updating education, mentoring, collaborative learning and other forms of professional support are increasingly expected to respond to the specific needs of teachers and schools and to contribute directly to improvements in classroom practice. National and regional initiatives have focused particularly on curriculum reform, inclusive education, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and pupils' well-being and mental health.

Despite these developments, the system continues to face challenges concerning the quality, relevance, and practical impact of teacher professional development. Participation in training does not automatically result in changes in teaching practice or improved student outcomes. Key challenges include teacher motivation, the transfer of teachers' training into classroom practice, improving the quality of education, and better student results.

In the paper, for each topic, we describe the present situation, relevant legal issues, and strategies, policies, and procedures applied to solve present challenges.

1. National policies and programs for teacher induction

Professional development of teachers in Slovakia has undergone a fundamental transformation since November 1989, reflecting political, social, and legislative changes aimed at the professionalisation of the teaching profession. The originally ideologically determined role of the teacher as a "socialist educator" gradually evolved into the concept of an "autonomous professional" responsible for developing the competences of children and pupils. These changes were reflected in the development of education legislation, most notably Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees, which established a comprehensive, competence-oriented system of teacher professional development (Zákon č. 138/2019 Z. z., 2019).

In the post-revolutionary period between 1989 and 2000, there was no systematic framework for continuing teacher education. Teachers predominantly participated in one-off seminars, lectures, and short-term courses organised by the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre. There were no systematic financial or career-based incentives for teachers to engage in professional learning. Participation depended

largely on teachers' individual initiative, the initiative of school principals, or pressure exerted on schools by the State School Inspectorate. As a result, substantial disparities emerged in the quality and intensity of teachers' professional growth.

The main **factors driving changes** in the approach to professional development included, in particular: the need to improve the quality of teachers' work; improve pupils' educational outcomes; increase teachers' motivation to engage in professional learning; improve the remuneration of active and high-performing teachers; shift the focus from passive participation in training towards the development of professional competences; and engage teachers in long-term, systematic professional development. An important enabling factor was also the opportunity to finance implementation of the professional development system through European Structural and Investment Funds.

The overall professional development system encompasses various types of professional development programmes and is complemented by self-directed learning, creative and scholarly activities (including research, publications, and the development of methodological materials), professional placements and internships, and systematic reflection on professional practice.

At present, the incentive structure has shifted towards higher salary tariffs associated with career stages and the attainment of professional attestations, as well as salary supplements for professional development resulting from the completion of innovation education programmes (3% for 50 hours of training, up to a maximum of 12%).

1.1. National policies for development of school system in Slovakia

At the beginning of the 21st century, an attempt was made to introduce a measurable professional development system through the credit-based model of continuing education, anchored primarily in Act No. 596/2003 Coll. on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government and subsequently in Act No. 245/2008 Coll. (the Education Act). Teachers were required to accumulate a prescribed number of credits over five years—typically 150–300 credits—by completing accredited professional development programmes. The accumulation of credits was linked to an entitlement to a financial salary supplement.

This system generated a substantial quantitative expansion of teachers' participation in professional learning activities and contributed to the development of a broader market of teacher education providers, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private educational institutions. At the same time, however, the system became subject to criticism because of the quantity of professional development over its quality and relevance to classroom practice. Teachers increasingly focused on accumulating credits and often participated in superficial seminars that had little or no demonstrable impact on their teaching practice. Analyses confirmed the limited effect of the credit-based model on the quality of teaching and learning, contributing to the gradual abandonment of this approach. Evidence of these shortcomings was also highlighted by the "Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku (2019)" investigation (2019), studies of the Institute of Education Policy, and OECD reports (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

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1.2. System and programs for teacher induction

Recruiting new teachers into schools remains one of the major challenges facing the Slovak education system. The Ministry of Education has adopted, and continues to implement, a range of measures aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, including proactive communication and public awareness activities through national media and social media platforms. Interest in studying at faculties of education and teacher-training programmes has remained persistently low and continues to decline for years. Moreover, a significant proportion of graduates from teacher education programmes do not enter the teaching profession, instead pursuing employment in other, more attractive jobs.

There are several factors underlying the lack of interest in the teaching profession. These include the relatively low remuneration of beginning teachers, the low social status and prestige of the teaching profession in Slovak society, and the increasing complexity of teachers' work resulting from changing expectations, needs, and behaviours among new generations of pupils and parents. Other contributing factors include inadequate physical working conditions in schools; insufficient access to appropriate educational resources, teaching materials, and modern educational technologies; limited opportunities for continuing professional development and career progression; insufficient collegial support and mentoring; a lack of an inclusive and supportive working environment; and, in some schools, a dysfunctional organisational culture characterised by interpersonal tensions and toxic workplace practices. Together, these factors may negatively affect both the recruitment and retention of new qualified teachers and lead to persistent teacher shortages within the Slovak education system.

1.3. Standards, policies and induction programmes

In Slovakia, induction training of beginning pedagogical staff is legally regulated by Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees in sections 31, 51 and 52. Its purpose is to facilitate the gradual integration of a beginning teacher into the professional practice of teaching and support the development of those competences required for independent performance of teaching.

Slovakian school legislation uses the term "beginning pedagogical employee" for newly recruited undergraduate or postgraduate teachers. A beginning teacher "inductee" does not initially perform their professional duties entirely independently. The legislation stipulates that a beginning teacher performs their educational activities under the supervision of an induction teacher serving as an induction mentor. Induction training represents an important transition mechanism from the career stage of beginning teacher to the career level of independent teacher. The legislation establishes several fundamental principles for new teacher induction:

- a beginning teacher is included in an induction programme and training immediately after entering their first employment relationship.
- The school principal must incorporate the beginning teacher into induction training no later than five days after the employment relationship has been established;

- induction training is usually provided in the school;
- induction training is organised as a simple developmental programme approved by the school principal, who is also its professional guarantor.

Key stakeholders in teacher induction in Slovak schools are the principal, the induction teacher as a mentor, other teachers who support the inductee in teaching subjects or educational areas, and members of the examination committee.

1.4. Professional development requirements for teacher induction

The objective of induction training is to enable the inductee to acquire the professional competences required to perform professional activities individually at the second career stage as an independent teacher. From a pedagogical perspective, this objective can be further specified into three areas:

- The first is professional orientation, in which the beginning teacher becomes familiar with the organisation of the school, the school's educational programme and internal school regulations and policies.
- The second relates to the development of teaching practice concerning the ability to plan teaching and learning; conduct lessons effectively; select and apply appropriate teaching methods; differentiate instruction; respond to students' individual educational needs; create a positive and supportive learning environment; address behavioural and disciplinary situations; and assess students' learning and progress.
- Third, foster the ability to reflect systematically on one's own teaching practice; receive and use professional feedback; identify one's professional strengths and areas for improvement and plan one's continuing professional development.

A typical school-based induction programme may include the following areas: orientation within the school; lesson planning; teaching practices; classroom management; student assessment; meeting individual educational needs; communication in school; professional reflection and ethics. A beginning teacher must complete and successfully pass induction training no later than two years after entering their first employment relationship in a school.

The induction teacher is an experienced colleague whose primary purpose is to support the beginning teacher in his/her continual progress towards independent professional practice. Importantly, the induction teacher is not a controller or evaluator of the beginning teacher. From a contemporary teacher education perspective, the role is better understood as that of a mentor and professional learning facilitator, whose work is based on trust, professional dialogue, formative feedback, and collaborative reflection.

1.5. Performance appraisal system for beginning teachers

In practice, induction training may be completed substantially earlier if the beginning teacher demonstrates the required professional competences and passes the approved induction programme. It is therefore important to emphasise that two years does not represent the mandatory duration of induction training. It represents the maximum statutory period for its completion. In practice, induction training may be completed substantially earlier if the beginning teacher demonstrates the required professional competences in line with professional standards and expected school competences and criteria.

The induction teacher plays an important role in the induction process, because his/her recommendation provides the basis for the final appraisal. The induction teacher does not recommend completion if the beginning teacher: (1) has completed less than 75% of the programme, or (2) has demonstrably failed to acquire required professional competences.

Induction training is completed when the induction teacher recommends closing it. A final exam is conducted by a three-member examination committee, in accordance with the approved induction training programme. No special standards and criteria are set for examination day generally. Induction is completed when the beginning teacher successfully conducts a class activity observed by the examination committee and passes a discussion focused on self-reflection of teaching and learning performance. Best schools expect the professional development portfolio to be prepared by the beginning teacher to demonstrate abilities and competences defined by professional standards and school expectations.

Newly recruited teachers also receive specific financial support to increase their low salaries during the induction training programme in the amount of 6% of their basic tariff salary. If they are classified as independent teachers in the career system, their salaries increase by 2%, and they lose the aforementioned financial stimulus for beginning teachers.

2. Standards and strategies for career development of teachers

The teacher professional development system in Slovakia also incorporates a career system, including professional attestation. The core of the career system is the definition of professional standards for all categories and subcategories of teachers. The career system is structured around four career stages, each requiring an increasingly higher level of demonstrated professional competences. Attainment of a higher career stage through attestation results in improved teacher remuneration. The career system was first established in education legislation in 2009 and has subsequently undergone several revisions and reforms aimed at strengthening its alignment with teachers' professional competences and career progression.

2.1. Professional Standards and Competences of In-Service Teachers

The Ministry has approved 32 professional standards, developed separately for each category and subcategory of pedagogical and professional employees. Professional standards define the required professional competences of teachers working in school settings and specify how these competences are to be demonstrated and evidenced at each career stage. They provide a mandatory reference framework for the planning and implementation of teachers' professional development and for attestation. Under Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees, professional standards serve four principal purposes:

1. Defining the graduate profile of teacher education programmes aimed at obtaining the required teaching qualification.
2. Defining the objectives, content, and competences that teachers are expected to acquire through selected professional development programmes, including managerial, specialised, and qualification education.

3. Defining the professional competences that teachers are expected to acquire and demonstrate as part of their individual professional development and its planning.
4. Defining the requirements for the formal demonstration of professional competences in the attestation process leading to the career stage of teacher with first attestation or teacher with second attestation.

The attestation is a state-regulated process involving the assessment and defence of a teacher's attestation **portfolio**, followed by an attestation examination. The process provides formal recognition that the teacher has achieved and demonstrated the professional competences required for the relevant higher career stage.

2.2. Structure of professional standards and profile of teachers' competences

The structure of all professional standards is uniform and comprises the following components:

- Definition of the relevant category and subcategory of pedagogical or professional employee;
- Description of the level of professional competences expected at each career stage, namely independent pedagogical employee, pedagogical employee with first attestation, and pedagogical employee with second attestation;
- A competence profile comprising defined areas of professional practice and corresponding professional competences;
- Each professional competence is defined in terms of the expected knowledge and skills required for its effective application;
- For each career stage, progressively differentiated indicators are specified to demonstrate the acquisition and application of the relevant professional competence in school practice.

Professional competences are defined across all three areas of the professional standard. To attain a higher career stage through professional attestation, the applicant must demonstrate the acquisition and effective application of these professional competences through an attestation portfolio.

Table 1: The framework of a teacher's competence profile in professional standard

Domain	Professional competences
Learner (pupil or student)	Identify developmental and individual characteristics of the learner. Identify learners' internal and external learning conditions and his/her educational needs. Identify the sociocultural environment and its influence on the learner's development, upbringing, and education
Educational Process	Plan educational process Realise educational process Evaluate educational process
Teacher	Identify with the teaching profession Collaborate with stakeholders of upbringing and education Contribute to the development of the school

Source: https://www.minedu.sk/profesijne-standardy-pedagogickych-zamestnancov-a-odbornych-zamestnancov/

Table 2: Example of Teacher's Professional Competence (simplified)

Competence 1.1: Identify developmental and individual characteristics of the learner		
Teacher has appropriate knowledge concerning: Laws of psychological development, age-specific characteristics of learner and relevant pedagogical diagnostic methods and tools. **Teacher is able to (skills):** Apply methods and tools of pedagogical diagnostic and identify individual learner's traits.		
Indicators:		
Independent Teacher:	**Teacher with 1st Attestation:**	**Teacher with 2nd Attestation:**
Uses proven methods to identify cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychological and motoric specifics.	Modifies tools for pedagogical diagnostics and innovates the educational process based on results.	In the context of changing conditions, needs and trends: analyses diagnostic findings concerning learners; creates new diagnostic tools for teachers; evaluate their effectiveness and proposes changes on how to provide pedagogical diagnostic processes at school and institutional level.
Interprets results of pedagogical diagnostics and formulates recommendation for educational process.	Interprets results of pedagogical diagnostics and formulates recommendation for innovation of one's educational process.	

Source: https://www.minedu.sk/profesijne-standardy-pedagogickych-zamestnancov-a-odbornych-zamestnancov/

2.3. Professional development and career advancement system (career ladder)

The career system in Slovakia comprises four career stages for teachers: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first attestation, and teacher with second attestation. Progression through these career stages entails progressively higher requirements concerning teachers' theoretical knowledge, professional skills, competences, and practical experience.

It is assumed that attested teachers will be better will be better equipped to manage more complex educational situations and address diverse learning needs in the classroom. They are also expected to contribute to the professional learning and development of their colleagues, as well as to school improvement and the enhancement of the overall quality of education.

In practice, however, these expectations are not consistently realised across Slovak schools. In many cases, attainment of a higher career stage does not necessarily translate into a corresponding increase in teachers' leadership responsibilities, contribution to colleagues' professional learning, or measurable impact on teaching quality and school development.

Table 3. Career Stages for Teachers in Slovakia

Career Stage	Expectations
Beginning teacher	A graduate of a secondary school or university teacher education programme. Upon entering the teaching profession, the teacher is enrolled in an individual induction development programme, which is approved by the school principal. During the induction period, the beginning teacher is supported by an induction teacher (mentor), whose role is to facilitate the teacher's orientation and adaptation to the school environment, provide professional support, and assist the beginning teacher in addressing their individual professional needs.
Independent teacher	Independently applies evidence-based and established approaches when addressing routine situations and problems arising in pedagogical practice. In educational assessment and diagnosis, as well as in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the educational process, the teacher uses established and recommended methods and instruments. The teacher is expected to attain the level of competences described above upon successful completion of the induction process.
Teacher with 1st attestation	Expands their theoretical knowledge and professional skills and innovates their own classroom teaching based on pedagogical assessment and diagnosis, reflection on the educational environment, and systematic self-reflection and self-evaluation of their pedagogical practice. The teacher evaluates and validates these innovations and shares and disseminates them among colleagues and the wider professional community.
Teacher with 2nd attestation	Innovates their pedagogical practice based on increasingly advanced theoretical knowledge. In implementing innovations, the teacher responds to the changing needs of pupils, the school, and society, while considering evolving conditions and emerging trends in education. The teacher contributes to the development of the school's development strategies, programmes, and projects and participates in processes aimed at improving the quality of education and teaching. The teacher shares and disseminates their best practices and professional expertise at the school level and, where appropriate, more broadly within the education system.

2.4. Monitoring and evaluation of professional development outcomes

The monitoring of professional development is carried out by the Ministry, school founders, school principals, and teachers. The system is intended to ensure that professional development is aligned with the needs of teachers and schools, as well as with the Ministry's priority areas, which include the ongoing curriculum reform, strengthening inclusive education, digital transformation, and improving pupils' mental health and well-being. The **Ministry** approves professional development programmes offered by teachers' training providers through the Professional Development Commission. Providers are expected to collect feedback from programme participants upon completion of professional development activities and are required to publish the results of this feedback on their websites. The feedback focuses on the extent to which the programme objectives were achieved, the development of participants' competences, the practical applicability of the acquired knowledge and skills in school practice, and participants' satisfaction with the programme.

At present, the Ministry has published the Catalogue of innovations on its website and is preparing the National catalogue of professional development programmes bringing together provision from all recognised by teachers' training providers.

The role of **school founders**, particularly local and regional authorities, is to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of funding allocated to school-based professional development. The school founder is responsible for reviewing and approving the school's annual professional development plan.

Each **school** is required to evaluate the implementation of its approved professional development plan. This is carried out through discussion of the results of plan implementation by the school pedagogical council at the end of the school year. The evaluation generally includes an overview of completed professional development activities and teachers' career progression through attestation.

The school principal monitors the implementation of professional development activities and assesses their impact on teachers' professional practice, particularly by examining the extent to which knowledge and skills acquired through professional development are translated into innovations in teaching and learning.

At the individual **teacher** level, the outputs and outcomes of professional development are typically documented through the teacher's professional portfolio, which provides evidence-based documentation of professional growth through records and artefacts demonstrating the teacher's professional activities and achievements. Such evidence may include certificates of completed professional development programmes, records of self-directed learning, examples of innovative lessons and their evaluation, evidence of supporting colleagues' professional learning and disseminating best practices, and examples of professional collaboration with colleagues and school partners.

2.5. National-Level Professional Development Strategies

At the national level, the Ministry defines key priority areas for teachers' professional development, which include **current legislative changes, curriculum reform, inclusive education, mental health and well-being, and the digital transformation of education**.

At the national level, teacher development is supported primarily through initiatives of the Ministry and the National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVaM). The Ministry's support focuses particularly on web-based resources, video courses, and online learning programmes available 24/7, addressing topics such as legislative changes, the transformation of education, digitalisation, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into education (minedu.sk).

The Ministry of Education is also actively engaged in the digital transformation of education through the DigiEdu project, which has supported schools by providing high-speed internet connectivity and supplying them with digital hardware and software, including Microsoft 365 licences for schools, teachers, and pupils. The Ministry has placed strong emphasis on supporting the adoption and effective use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, as well as the development of teachers' digital competences. In relation to AI in education, the Ministry has established a dedicated information platform and publishes a newsletter providing up-to-date information and guidance on the use of AI in schools (ai.iedu.sk).

Within the DiTEdu (Digital Transformation of Education and Schools) project, intensive training is being provided for school digital coordinators and schools to support the implementation of School Digital Transformation Strategies. The project has also developed hundreds of innovative teaching methodologies and resources designed to support teachers in integrating digital technologies and AI into classroom instruction. In addition, Future Classroom Lab (FCL) learning environments are currently being established. These facilities are intended to provide teachers with opportunities to develop their capacity to use emerging and advanced educational technologies and to strengthen their competences in STEAM education.

The NIVaM has developed and provides a range of online professional development courses for teachers and to support **school-based updating education**. These courses cover topics such as the development of teachers' digital competences, modern approaches to early childhood education, curriculum reform, and the provision of support measures for pupils with health-related disabilities and special educational needs (edu.nivam.sk).

The NIVaM also provides teachers and schools with extensive information and professional support for **curriculum reform** and the transformation of educational practice. It publishes new national educational programmes, model school educational programmes, methodological and support materials, videos and podcasts, case studies, and practical recommendations for implementing curriculum reform. These resources are disseminated through the portals (vzdelavanie21.sk) and (ucime.vzdelavanie21.sk), which serve as the principal official information and support platforms for the ongoing curriculum reform in Slovakia.

2.6. Support for Professional Development at the Regional Level

At the regional level, teacher professional development and support for schools are provided by several key actors. These include the regional offices of the NIVaM and the Regional Centres for Teacher Support (RCPU), which are expected to continue operating as "EduHab centres" from 2026. In addition, a range of regional providers of professional development, training, and consultancy services support schools, particularly NGO and non-profit organisations. The NIVaM implemented a wide range of professional development activities at regional level aimed at enhancing teachers' understanding of changes to the national curriculum framework and supporting schools in the development of their school educational programmes. A new form of support for teachers and schools participating in curriculum reform was provided through a series of nationwide conferences and best-practice exchange events known as "EDUKAFEST". These events enabled schools that had successfully implemented elements of curriculum reform to share examples of modern, innovative lessons with schools preparing to enter the reform process.

The Regional Centres for Teacher Support (RCPU), funded by the Ministry, provided schools involved in curriculum reform with mentoring, professional development, facilitation, advisory and consultancy services. Mentoring services received highly positive evaluations because of their targeted, practice-oriented, and individualised support for teachers. At the local level, schools also cooperate through school principals' networks and professional school networks, where they exchange information and experience and participate in professional development activities focused on current educational priorities.

3. School-Based professional development

A fundamental change in the professional development strategy in Slovakia has been the gradual shift away from the traditional model in which "teachers attend external courses of their own choice" towards a school-based development model, in which learning takes place directly within the school and may target teachers or the entire teaching staff.

This approach is needs-based and context-sensitive, drawing on the specific development needs of the individual school and being broadly aligned with its approved professional development plan. The underlying expectation is that participation in professional development will have a direct impact on classroom practice, with teachers transferring newly acquired knowledge and skills into teaching strategies that promote active learning, learner engagement, and improved educational outcomes.

Over the past four years, intensive professional development has been provided to individual teachers, groups of teachers, and entire school staff teams, focusing particularly on curriculum reform, the implementation of inclusive approaches and support measures in schools, and the digital transformation of education.

3.1. Legislative Framework for School-Based Professional Development

The legislation establishes an obligation for every teacher to engage in professional development. Responsibility for facilitating and implementing teachers' professional development is also assigned to school principals and school founders. In Act No. 138/2019 Coll. professional development is defined as a process of developing, deepening, enhancing, and extending professional competences. Professional development is not limited to participation in formal education and training programmes. It may also be pursued through professional placements and internships, creative and scholarly activities, self-directed learning, and the actual performance of teachers' professional duties and responsibilities.

For school-based professional development, the legislation establishes a specific form of training known as **updating education** (aktualizačné vzdelávanie). Its main objectives are:

1. Maintaining and renewing teachers' professional competences;
2. Acquiring new knowledge in response to changes in legislation, educational programmes, and pedagogical documentation; and
3. Acquiring new knowledge and skills in specific areas of professional practice.

The provider of **updating education** is the school itself or the relevant school founder. It is organised as a relatively simple training programme comprising 10 to 24 hours per school year. The school principal formally approves the programme. The school determines the theme of training according to the current needs of its teachers and the school priorities.

3.2. Processes for Identifying Individual Development Needs

The identification of teachers' individual professional development needs is essential for establishing an appropriate professional development plan at both the individual teacher and school levels. In the majority of Slovak schools, however, teachers' development needs are not explicitly and systematically identified. Professional development planning often consists primarily of selecting an appropriate training course, subject to approval by the school principal. The aggregated training needs expressed by teachers then provide the basis for developing a relatively simple school professional development plan.

A different approach is taken by teachers who are actively engaged in career progression and who develop individual professional development plans. Their planning is based on the fundamental question: "What competences do I need to develop, and what do I need to change in my practice to improve my students' learning and educational outcomes?"

The planning process may begin with a personal SWOT analysis and the formulation of professional development objectives. An important component of this analysis and self-reflection is the identification of professional competences that, according to the relevant professional standard, the teacher is currently unable to demonstrate or has not yet developed to an adequate level.

The analysis may also incorporate findings from the teacher appraisal interview, feedback from pupils, parents, and colleagues, as well as evidence obtained through classroom observation and mentoring. Teachers may also identify their development needs in response to emerging trends and current changes in education, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation, changes to national educational programmes, developments in students' assessment, and other emerging priorities.

3.3. Forms of School-Based Professional Development

Professional development in Slovak schools takes various forms and depends largely on the approach of the principal and the financial resources available. Some schools provide only a minimal level of professional development to meet the given requirements.

The process typically begins with the identification of individual teachers' professional development needs, which are analysed at the school management level and serve as the basis for developing the school's professional development plan. In many schools, however, this process is largely limited to teachers selecting individual training programmes from an available catalogue. In other schools, only broad professional development needs and priority training topics for the following school year are identified. The school principal is responsible for preparing the school's professional development plan, which must be submitted to the school founder for approval by 15-th September. School founders approve the proposed professional development plans, considering their budgetary capacities and strategic priorities. Professional development activities are then implemented in accordance with the approved plan, typically through participation in programmes provided by various external providers. A major weakness of this model is the limited transfer of knowledge and skills from professional development into school practice, resulting in relatively limited application in the classroom, insufficient critical reflection, and inadequate evaluation of newly introduced approaches at both the teacher and school levels. At the national level, this model has therefore been repeatedly assessed as having limited effectiveness, particularly because participation in training does not necessarily lead to sustained changes in teachers' pedagogical practice or measurable improvements in students' teaching and learning.

4. Teacher performance appraisal

4.1. Purpose of teacher appraisal

The primary purpose of teacher appraisal is to provide teachers with clear, formal feedback on the outcomes and quality of their work and their professional conduct during the school year. The appraisal process should identify areas for improvement and deficiencies requiring attention, while also increasing teacher motivation by recognising selected aspects of high-quality professional performance.

Another important function is the identification of professional development needs and the development planning for the subsequent period. Appraisal outcomes provide evidence for remuneration decisions, planning for the following school year, and the formulation of an individual teacher's professional development priorities.

From the perspective of the school principal, appraisal also helps to develop a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' professional practice and to strengthen professional relationships and communication within the school.

4.2. Teacher appraisal system in Slovakia

The teacher appraisal system in Slovakia is mandatory and is regulated by Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees, particularly Section 70. Each school is required to establish its own system of individual teacher appraisal, which must comply with the policies and procedures established by national legislation. Under the Act, teacher appraisal focuses on the following areas:

- outcomes of work performance;
- complexity and demands of the work performed;
- quality of work performance; and
- acquisition and application of professional competences.

The Act specifies that work outcomes are assessed at **the level of the class or group,** whereas the quality of work performance is assessed at **the level of the individual child or pupil**. Teacher appraisal is therefore intended to assess the quality and outcomes of pedagogical performance while considering the complexity of the work and the level of professional competences attained by the teacher. The appraisal system should be linked to professional standards and to schools' and teachers' continuing professional development needs.

Act No. 138/2019 Coll. requires schools to set out the **principles** of teacher appraisal in their internal work regulations. **Appraisal criteria** should be derived from the state educational programme, educational programme, the school educational and extracurricular programme, and the specific characteristics and needs of the school. Each school develops an internal management document, usually referred to as a **Teacher Appraisal Policy**, which defines the fundamental principles, criteria, procedures, and instruments used to evaluate teachers. Appraisal procedures and approaches may vary considerably between schools. The responsibility of each school is to translate the requirements established at national level into a specific teachers' appraisal system appraisal system appropriate to its institutional context and developmental priorities.

4.3. Frequency of appraisal

The legislation requires schools to conduct annual teachers appraisal, no later than the end of the school year (31 August). A **beginning teacher** is appraised continuously by the induction teacher (mentor) and formally assessed at the end of the induction period. The school principal or deputy principal appraises **teachers**. The **school principal** is appraised by the school founder. The principal is also evaluated once a year by teachers through an anonymous questionnaire focusing on the quality of his or her managerial and leadership performance. Where concerns arise regarding a teacher's professional conduct or low quality of work, the school principal may conduct an **extraordinary appraisal interview**.

Schools may use various forms of ongoing assessment and evidence gathering throughout the school year, including classroom and lesson observations, feedback, documentation reviews, and other monitoring activities, which provide evidence for the annual appraisal.

4.4. Link between teacher appraisal, remuneration, and professional development

Teacher appraisal is partially linked to the systems of **remuneration and professional development**. Under the applicable legislation, appraisal outcomes may inform:

- remuneration for high-quality work performance;
- the allocation of a personal salary supplement in recognition of sustained high-quality performance;
- the provision of an extraordinary performance award for activities exceeding normal job responsibilities;
- the planning of teachers' professional development for the subsequent period, usually the following school year; and

- the identification and implementation of innovations and changes in teachers' pedagogical practice.

From September 2026, Slovakia introduced a requirement to use a five-level scale when expressing teacher appraisal outcomes:

1. Excellent level and quality;
2. Very good level and quality;
3. Standard level and quality;
4. Satisfactory level and quality; and
5. Unsatisfactory level and quality.

The introduction of this framework makes it possible to express appraisal outcomes more clearly and to explicitly **differentiate levels** and **quality** of teachers' work performance. The framework is linked to the **remuneration system** and creates scope for **differentiated recognition** of teachers demonstrating high-quality performance. For high-quality work and an excellent appraisal outcome, a teacher may receive a supplement of up to 100% of the applicable tariff salary.

4.5. Appraisal processes, procedures, and instruments

Teacher appraisal procedures, forms, and instruments vary considerably across schools. National legislation does not prescribe in detail how the appraisal process should be organised at school level, nor does it establish a uniform set of appraisal principles, criteria, or instruments. At the national level, the Ministry has provided a recommended appraisal form, but this instrument is not necessarily appropriate for all schools. Individual schools therefore need to develop appraisal procedures and instruments that reflect their specific institutional context and development needs.

Schools use a range of instruments to collect evidence for appraisal. One of the principal approaches is observation of teachers' classroom practice followed by a professional feedback discussion. Preparation for an appraisal interview generally includes teacher self-assessment, analysis of feedback, and, where applicable, questionnaires completed by students, parents, or colleagues. Other sources of evidence may include an analysis of teachers' activities and projects and evidence of students' learning outcomes.

Teacher self-assessment may also include a review of progress against the professional development plan and proposals for professional learning and development activities for the following school year.

Appraisal procedures typically involve setting dates for appraisal interviews, preparing teachers through self-assessment, conducting the appraisal, and synthesising appraisal findings in relation to teachers' professional development. The appraisal interview usually takes the form of an open professional dialogue, during which the teacher presents his or her self-assessment. The appraiser subsequently presents the school leadership's perspective on the teacher's professional performance. The final stage involves a discussion of the appraisal findings and agreement on professional development priorities for the following year.

Aggregated appraisal findings are used primarily as an input into the development of the school's professional development plan and the identification of school-wide professional learning priorities.

5. Teacher shortages and motivation to further professional development

5.1. Barriers and expectations to professional development

Slovakia has established a relatively comprehensive statutory framework for teachers' continuing professional development. However, the key challenge is not simply teachers' participation in professional development. The more important issue concerns the quality, relevance, practical applicability, and sustainability of professional learning.

According to TALIS 2024, only approximately 53% of Slovak teachers report that the professional development they participated in during the previous 12 months had a positive impact on their teaching practice. Major barriers include:

1. lack of time
2. financial costs and
3. conflicts between professional development activities and teachers' working schedules.

Among beginning teachers, lack of time is an especially significant barrier. These findings suggest a need to move from a **course-based model** to a more sustained **school-based model** and to stress **practice-oriented professional learning**. The system of professional development should be practically oriented and school-based, emphasising mentoring and coaching activities; lesson observation, structured feedback and peer-learning activities, collaborative lesson planning and team teaching in school professional learning communities. Many basic schools involved in curricular reform in 2023 already successfully applied the described developmental activities.

OECD report (2025) identifies several areas in which Slovak teachers report particularly strong professional learning needs. The most prominent include:

1. teaching students with special educational needs (29 %);
2. classroom management and student behaviour (25 %);
3. the use of artificial intelligence in education (22 %).

Among beginning teachers, classroom management and student behaviour are especially important areas of professional learning need. These findings have direct implications for the design of school plans and individual professional development plans.

5.2. Impact of professional development on students' outcomes

When starting the system of teachers' professional development in 2009, we assumed a simple causal relationship that extensive professional development should lead to improvement of student achievement. More than 15 years of experience and thousands of teachers' trainings shown that the relationship between teachers professional development and students achievements should be interpreted carefully. The impact depends on whether professional learning results in a sustained change in teachers' classroom practice.

Shewbridge in OECD reviews (2014) reports that only around 53% of Slovak teachers report a positive impact of their recent professional development on their teaching practice. This indicates the need to strengthen the transfer of professional learning into classroom practice.

Present experience has shown that training activities with limited opportunities for implementation and follow-up are less likely to produce sustained changes in teachers' teaching practice. To improve students' achievements, the system of professional development in Slovakia should emphasize active strategies for teachers' development based on active learning experience, reflecting students' needs and school context, rather than only taking part in format teachers' training and education.

5.3. Teacher motivation to professional development

Teacher motivation to engage in professional development in Slovakia is a **key factor influencing the quality of education**. However, several systemic shortcomings continue to constrain the effectiveness of teacher professional development. According to the "Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku" (2019), 92.2% of lower-secondary school teachers participated in various forms of continuing professional development, while as many as 42.9% of teachers in the regional education system had not completed any professional development programme during the preceding year. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey **(TALIS, 2018)** confirms a substantial improvement compared with 2013, with participation increasing from 39% to 92%; nevertheless, the proportion of teachers who remain professionally inactive is still relatively high, particularly among teaching assistants (68.4%) and professional staff.

The National Programme for the Development of Education (Národný program rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania) (2018-2027) considerable emphasis on strengthening teachers' professional competences. However, its implementation remains predominantly formalistic in some contexts, with schools often planning teachers' professional development without sufficiently addressing the actual needs arising from classroom practice and the specific developmental priorities of the school.

The main **motivational factors** influencing participation in professional development are diverse. Intrinsic motivation predominates: 64.4% of teachers and 84.8% of professional staff identify intrinsic interest as their primary reason for engaging in professional learning. Teachers participate in professional development because of their interest in particular subject areas (e.g. subject-specific pedagogy and didactics), opportunities for personal growth, or the desire to introduce innovations into their professional practice.

A survey conducted by the **Slovak Chamber of Teachers** (2014), however, indicates that 71% of teachers participated in professional development programmes primarily for financial **benefits rather than for professional growth**. External motivational factors include financial incentives, particularly salary supplements associated with professional development, which can amount to up to 12% of salary and motivate 43.6% of participants.

Attestation (first and second attestation) provides opportunities for career progression and higher remuneration, with salary increases of approximately 10–24%, motivating 28.7% of participants. Other motivational factors include improved working conditions (e.g. reduced working time) and recognition and appreciation from school leadership.

The main challenge is the **distortion of motivational incentives**. Pedagogical and professional staff tend to prioritise the quantity of professional development

over its quality, relevance, and applicability to professional practice. At the same time, the quality of available programmes may vary considerably, with a lack of standardised and comparable participant feedback and insufficient links between professional development and classroom practice.

Schools tend to favour free of charge professional development programmes provided by the National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVAM), which account for approximately 90% of participation, while non-formal forms of professional learning, such as conferences and job shadowing, account for only 11.2%, compared with an OECD average of 31% (OECD; 2019, 2025).

Additional barriers include **time constraints**, particularly additional work without adequate compensation; **financial barriers**, including participation fees; and institutional barriers, such as limited opportunities for collaborative and team-based professional learning. Teacher turnover, estimated at approximately 10–15% annually, is also associated with low levels of teacher motivation. A Ministry of Education study (2020) identified low salaries and high administrative workload as key factors contributing to low teacher motivation.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased teachers' interest in strengthening their digital competences and participating in online professional development. At the same time, however, it exposed significant gaps in institutional support: only approximately 20% of teachers had access to adequate training in the effective use of digital technologies.

Discussion

The Slovak system of teacher professional development has undergone significant development over the past two decades. It currently faces, however, a fundamental challenge: the need to move from a predominantly quantitative model of participation in professional development towards a qualitative, impact-oriented model. Although the current legislative framework has established a competence-based system, the transfer of knowledge and skills acquired through professional development into everyday school practice remains limited. Available evidence indicates that only approximately 53% of teachers perceive completed professional development activities as beneficial to their teaching practice, suggesting the diminishing effectiveness of traditional course-based approaches (OECD, 2014).

A further area requiring reconsideration is the use and function of professional standards. In practice, professional standards are frequently used primarily as formal reference points for the preparation of attestation portfolios and for career progression linked to salary increases. Their potential as instruments for continuous self-development, quality assurance, professional learning and the design of relevant professional training programmes remain insufficiently utilised. Moreover, attainment of a higher career stage does not necessarily translate into demonstrable improvements in teaching quality or greater professional responsibility for school improvement. This suggests the need to reconsider the relationship between professional development, career progression and professional impact, with greater emphasis on the demonstrable contribution of teachers to quality and school improvement.

The induction and support of beginning teachers also remain critical areas. Persistent barriers include the relatively low social status of the teaching profession, unattractive remuneration, and high administrative workload. Ensuring access to high-quality mentoring for every beginning teacher and strengthening systematic

support within schools should therefore be regarded as essential components of teacher retention and professional learning.

Teacher appraisal represents another area for development. In some schools, appraisal remains predominantly formal and administrative, with insufficient focus on professional dialogue, classroom practice and improvement. Future approaches should strengthen the relationship between appraisal, professional learning and evidence of improvements in teaching quality and educational outcomes, while avoiding excessive administrative requirements.

The strategic direction should ultimately be towards the development of professional learning communities, in which teachers continuously collaborate, engage in peer feedback and reflection, share effective practice, and integrate emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), into teaching and learning. The success of the ongoing curriculum reform will depend, to a significant extent, on whether professional development can be transformed into a practice-based, evidence-informed and school-embedded system, while simultaneously reducing the administrative burden placed on teachers.

Conclusions and Lessons learned

The information above suggests that Slovakia already has many of the formal policy instruments and institutional mechanisms required to support teachers: professional standards, induction education, continuing professional development, career system, teacher appraisal, teachers' support in each region, ongoing curriculum reform of basic schools, extensive number of training programmes and measures aimed at improving teachers' remuneration. The challenges are not due to the absence of formal mechanisms, but to the quality of implementation and their impact on everyday practice and school improvements.

The strategic shift should therefore be towards a model in which schools operate as professional learning communities where teachers continuously learn, collaborate, reflect on their practice and use evidence of student learning to improve teaching. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of curriculum reform and the increasing use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in education. The key policy objective should not simply be to increase the amount of professional development, but to ensure that professional learning leads to measurable improvements in teaching practice, teacher well-being, student engagement and student learning outcomes. Therefore, the improvements in educational policy should be more focused particularly on:

1. Ensuring access to qualified mentoring for every beginning teacher, strengthening school-based induction programmes and improving the remuneration for beginning teachers;
2. Linking teacher appraisal to students' learning outcomes, making professional development needs-based and practice-oriented rather than a formal administrative duty;
3. Implementing new approaches to teacher development in school, such as peer observation, feedback, and collaborative learning;
4. Strengthening teachers' digital and AI-related pedagogical competences;
5. Strengthening multidisciplinary school support teams supporting curricular reform and inclusion in school.

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Institution profile

The National Education Institute of Slovenia (NEIS; Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo) is the central public institution responsible for the development of professional expertise and support in the field of education in Slovenia. Its activities cover preschool education, primary education, and general secondary education. The Institute plays an important role in connecting national education policy, educational research, and pedagogical practice. Its key responsibilities include developing professional documents and guidelines that support the systematic development of education, contributing to curriculum development, and monitoring and evaluating innovations in education. The Institute also provides professional support to preschools, schools, teachers, school leaders, and other education professionals. An important part of its work involves the development of curricula and subject-specific didactics, as well as supporting the implementation of effective teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, the Institute promotes the in-service professional development of teachers and school leaders through training, counselling, professional networks, projects, and other forms of professional support. It also participates in national and international projects and cooperates with the Ministry of Education, educational institutions, universities, and other professional organisations.

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In-service Professional Development of Educational Professionals at the System and School Levels in Slovenia

Authors: Mihaela Zavašnik, Tatjana Ažman, Branka Likon

Abstract

Professional development of educational professionals is widely recognised as a key factor in improving the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. This paper examines in-service professional development of educational professionals in Slovenia from both system- and school-level perspectives, focusing on professional development needs, opportunities, practices, and effects. At the system level, the analysis draws on data from the Slovenian National Catalogue of In-service Teacher Education and Training Programmes (KATIS) and findings from TALIS 2024. At the school level, a small-scale empirical study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches and is based on a content analysis of papers prepared by the candidates for the principal qualification examination. Three educational institutions were additionally examined as case studies to explore the identification of professional development needs, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The findings reveal several discrepancies between the availability, participation, and perceived impact of professional development. Although the number of in-service training programmes and participants has increased, more than half of the programmes are short, lasting up to eight hours, while 24-hour programmes are rare. Furthermore, despite high programme evaluation ratings in KATIS, TALIS 2024 data indicate a considerably more moderate perceived impact on teaching practice. At the school level, educational professionals participate most frequently in seminars, workshops, knowledge sharing, and professional group activities, whereas more intensive forms of professional collaboration and in-depth learning, such as peer observation and team teaching, remain less common. The case studies further identify monitoring and evaluation of professional development effects as the weakest elements of the professional development cycle at the school level. The findings highlight the need for a more systematic identification of professional development needs, greater provision of sustained and collaborative learning opportunities, stronger school-level leadership, and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of professional development on educational practice.

Keywords: educational professionals, teacher professional development, in-service teacher training, school leadership, principal, system level teacher professional development, school level teacher professional development

Introduction

Professional development of educational professionals (in Slovenia according to the Law on Organization and Financing of Education comprising pre-school teachers, teachers, school counsellors, librarians, laboratory technicians, and other professional staff) is widely recognised as one of the most important factors influencing the quality of teaching, educational improvement, and student learning outcomes. As educational systems face increasingly complex challenges, ensuring high-quality opportunities for in-service professional development has become a key policy priority. In Slovenia, the professional development of educational professionals is supported through a comprehensive legislative framework and a nationally coordinated system of in-service development activities related to the career ladder system. At the same time, recent developments have raised important questions regarding the adequacy of existing opportunities, the alignment of professional development with needs, and the actual impact of in-service professional learning activities on educational practice (Taštanoska, 2026). Although data on participation in professional development activities in Slovenia are increasingly available, less is known about how in-service professional development is planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated at the level of individual educational institutions (Zavašnik, 2026a).

The aim of this paper is to examine in-service professional development of educational professionals in Slovenia from both system-level and school-level perspectives. Particular attention is given to identifying current needs, opportunities, and effects of professional development at the system level, as well as to exploring how key elements of professional development processes are implemented within educational institutions. The paper is organised into four main sections. Following this introduction, the first section presents the legislative and organisational framework of in-service professional development of educational professionals in Slovenia. The second section provides an overview of the current state of professional development at the system level, drawing on data from a recent study (Zavašnik, 2026a). The third section presents the results of a small-scale empirical study conducted among candidates for the principal qualification examination, focusing on professional development practices in schools and kindergartens. Finally, the discussion and conclusion integrate the findings from both levels of analysis and identify key challenges, implications, and recommendations for strengthening in-service professional development of educational professionals in Slovenia.

1. General Information on In-service Professional Development of Educational Professionals in Slovenia

In Slovenia, the right and duty of educational professionals to engage in professional development are specified by the Law on Organization and Financing of Education (2007) and the Collective Agreement for the Educational Activity (1994), as well as with the relevant Rules on the Promotion of Educational Professionals to Titles (2025). Throughout their careers, educational professionals are expected to pursue their professional development, as successful completion of in-service training programmes is also a requirement for career advancement to higher professional titles. Educational professionals in Slovenia may advance to one of four different titles: Mentor, Advisor, Counsellor, or Senior Counsellor, which are permanent. With regard to professional development, they receive points for participating in in-service programmes and performing additional professional development work, which count towards the awarding and recognition of points for career advancement, as set out in the Rules on the Promotion of Educational Professionals to Titles (2025). The professional development activities of educational professionals related to career advancement are divided into two broader areas, i.e. **in-service training** and **additional professional work**. In-service training relates to professional training programmes, thematic conferences, extraordinary programmes, project programmes, as well as training for the principal examination and publicly valid study programmes for further training in accordance with the law governing higher education. Additional professional work is related to any other additional professional development activities of educational staff, e.g. writing professional articles, membership in school project groups, mentoring, conducting workshops/seminars, contributing at (inter)national conferences, etc.

The Collective Agreement (1994) specifies the right of educational professionals to at least 5 days of in-service training or 15 days over three years. The ministry responsible for education issues calls for in-service training for educational professionals and co-finances them, i.e. sets up a network of providers and programmes on offer. It also allocates funds to cover the cost of participation in in-service training programmes. The call for in-service programmes is published in the Catalogue of In-service Training Programmes for Educational Staff, named short as KATIS (hereinafter: KATIS). It is an information system of the ministry responsible for education providing information on in-service training programmes and their basic organisational and content-related characteristics. It is intended for providers (for organising and evaluating completed trainings) as well as for educational professionals, enabling them to register for training, while principals can monitor the organisation of training for individual staff members as well as for the entire staff. Responsible persons within institutions assign passwords to employees in education for the use of KATIS. With the assigned password and by logging into the system, each educational professional can exercise his/her right to in-service training, as well as their right to access information contained within the system. The system includes all in-service training programmes, completed in-service training evaluations (based on participants' evaluation questionnaires), and other relevant related data (e.g. number of hours of training, lecturers, content). In most cases, educational professionals can also print the certificates of completion of training programmes from KATIS.

Kindergartens and schools plan in-service professional development for their educational staff in the annual work plan. Educational professionals decide which in-service training programmes they wish to participate in. The training for changes of major curricular or other reforms is either compulsory or recommended. The majority

of in-service training programmes are state funded, and the state and municipalities provide funds to cover the material costs of participation. With the principal's approval, education professionals may also choose to participate in training programmes that do not receive state funding. Educational professionals may undertake training during their regular working hours, in which case they are entitled to paid leave of absence. They are also reimbursed for travel and accommodation expenses incurred in connection with the training.

It should also be noted that the shortage of educational professionals in Slovenia is becoming an increasingly serious issue. Educational institutions are facing growing difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified staff in order to ensure the continuity of instruction. This situation contributes to the overburdening of current staff, the deterioration of working conditions, and a decline in the quality of teaching. Challenging working conditions, a perceived loss of professional autonomy, and comparatively lower salaries than those offered in similar professions also affect the status and the prestige of the teaching profession. Consequently, these factors reduce interest in pursuing a career in teaching. A recent analysis (Schmuck et al., 2025) shows a shortage of professionals, particularly in the subject areas of mathematics, science, physics, engineering and technology, computer science, special needs education, and the teaching of vocational and professional modules in vocational and technical education. The findings also reveal a significant increase in staff shortages in the subjects of English and Slovenian.

Therefore, the ministry responsible for education has already implemented measures aimed at attracting new educational professionals, retaining those already employed within the education system, and expanding opportunities for their further mobilization and engagement in educational work. These measures include (Schmuck et al., 2025): scholarships for students enrolled in teacher education programmes, student employment opportunities, reintroduction of teaching internships (induction placements), mobilisation of retired educational professionals, faster career ladder progression, broadening of qualification requirements, study support measures, recognition of short-term training and professional development programmes, supplementary employment opportunities, addressing housing-related challenges.

Recently, special attention has also been paid to the induction programmes for new educational professionals. In Slovenia, formal induction into the teaching profession is not mandatory. Educational professionals enter the profession through two main pathways: by obtaining an internship position or by being recruited directly through an open vacancy. In the context of shortages of educational professionals, the latter option has become the more common choice for educational institutions, resulting in many professionals being deprived of formal induction into the profession. For this reason, the National Programme for Education 2023-2033 (Ministry of Education, 2025) and the National Quality Report on Education in Slovenia (Taštanoska, 2026) identify the need to introduce a mandatory one-year induction period for all educational professionals and school leaders at the beginning of their careers with appropriate support from mentors. It is also necessary to provide educational professionals with training for mentoring responsibilities and to ensure that mentoring work is appropriately recognised and valued. With that in mind, many in-service induction training programmes have been offered and co-funded by the European Social Funds or other (inter)national funding mechanisms.

2. State of the Art of In-service Professional Development of Educational Professionals at the System Level: Needs, Opportunities, Impact

As part of the preparation of the first ever National Quality Report on Education in Slovenia (Taštanoska, 2026), an overview of the state of in-service professional development among educational professionals was conducted from the perspectives of needs, opportunities, and effects (Zavašnik, 2026a). The review included an analysis of two major system-level data sets: data from the KATIS system for the school years 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024, and data on the professional development of Slovenian educational professionals participating in the TALIS 2024 study. Based on the conducted analysis, the following findings were identified (Zavašnik, 2026a).

2.1. Needs

- At the systemic level, no formal mechanism exists for identifying the needs of educational professionals; consequently, in Slovenia, insights into actual needs can only be derived from international studies (e.g. TALIS). Every year, the ministry responsible of education announces a public call for proposals and co-financing of in-service training programmes. The ministry outlines priority topics and fields. The Council of Experts for general education defines priority themes based on the recommendation by the ministry. The programmes are then selected by the tender commission and approved by the minister's decision.
- An analysis of educational professionals' needs based on the TALIS 2024 study indicates that those in Slovenia currently express the greatest need for content related to: methods supporting students' social and emotional learning; classroom management, particularly with regard to student behaviour; understanding students with special educational needs; and pedagogical as well as technical competencies for the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Conversely, educational professionals report the lowest need for knowledge and skills in the areas of school management and administration, subject content knowledge and understanding, and teaching in multicultural and multilingual environments.
- The needs of principals were addressed exclusively within the TALIS 2024 study. The findings indicate that principals express the greatest need for competencies related to: the use of data to enhance school quality; school management (e.g. human resource management and finance); and the promotion of staff well-being. For certain identified needs (e.g. the use of data to improve school quality), the findings are consistent with other analyses, as they relate to specific systemic policy measures, such as quality assurance through self-evaluation (see Zavašnik, 2026b). Areas perceived by principals as currently least needed include knowledge and understanding of national and local education policies, as well as the promotion of equity and diversity.

2. 2. Opportunities

- A positive trend can be observed in the increasing number of in-service programmes offered, the proportion of programmes implemented, the number of participants, and the number of certificates of completion issued. At the same time, the data reveal a discrepancy between the total number of participants attending in-service programmes and the number of certificates actually awarded for completed in-service training programmes. The proportion of participants who complete the evaluation questionnaire and obtain a certificate of completion has increased substantially across school years, rising on average by more than 10 percentage points (from 79% to 92%) (Zavašnik, 2026a). This trend may be attributed to the availability of financial resources for various professional development activities (e.g. European Social Funds, Recovery and Resilience Plan funding), as well as to the gradual integration of all in-service training programmes into the KATIS system. An additional systemic factor likely contributing to this increase is the Regulation on Selection and Co-financing of In-service Training Programmes (2017), which conditions the issuance of certificates on the fulfilment of all programme requirements and completion of the evaluation questionnaire. This trend may also be partially explained by the introduction of the new professional title "senior counsellor" under the new Rules on the Promotion of Educational Professionals to Titles, effective from 1 September 2023.
- More than 50% of in-service training programmes recorded in the KATIS system are of short duration (up to 8 hours), which represents a potential weakness, as research consistently demonstrates that longer programmes yield greater impact on practice. These are followed by programmes lasting up to 16 hours and up to 24 hours, while programmes exceeding 24 hours are least represented. Notably, the proportion of programmes longer than 24 hours has remained stable at approximately 4% over the years, while the share of programmes up to 24 hours has declined.

2. 3. Effects

- The average ratings of in-service training programme content and instructional methods, organisational quality, and perceived usefulness (based on evaluation questionnaires) are relatively high, with mean values not falling below 7.54 on a 9-point scale across school years. No substantial differences between years are observed. Among the three domains assessed (content and methods, organisation, and usefulness), the lowest average ratings are consistently associated with in-service programme usefulness. However, findings from the international TALIS 2024 study, which also examined the impact of professional development activities on teaching practice, present a less favourable picture. On average, educational professionals report that such activities have influenced their work only to a moderate extent; slightly more than one-third perceive a considerable impact, while fewer than one in ten report a strong impact.
- Educational professionals identify as most valuable those professional development activities that provide opportunities to experiment with and apply new ideas and knowledge in the classroom, build on participants' prior knowledge, and promote active learning. In contrast, activities involving the majority of colleagues from the same school/kindergarten and those of longer duration (e.g. several weeks or more) are perceived as least important.
- Overall, the data indicate that the average evaluation ratings of in-service training programmes (as recorded in the KATIS system) are significantly higher than the perceptions reported by educational professionals in the TALIS 2024 study.

3. In-service Professional Development of Educational Professionals at the School Level: Small-scale Empirical Research

In accordance with the Slovenian legislation, the principal is responsible for organizing, planning, and managing the work of the kindergarten or school, preparing the development programme, drafting the annual work plan, and ensuring its implementation. In line with these legal provisions, the principal promotes the professional development of educational staff and plans, monitors, and evaluates activities related to their professional learning and practice within the institution. The principal prepares the annual work plan in cooperation with educational professionals. The teaching staff council or preschool teachers' council provides its opinion on the plan, as does the parents' council, while the school council formally adopts it. A component of the annual work plan is the programme of continuous professional development, which may include in-service training programmes of educational professionals intended either for the individual, entire or for specific groups of staff within or outside the institution. Important professional development activities also include participation in professional subject groups, grade-level teacher teams, classroom observations, interdisciplinary collaboration, and various forms of (in)formal mentoring. Educational professionals may choose which professional development programmes and activities they wish to attend. Such decisions are usually made in consultation with the principal.

It has to be noted that in Slovenia, there is a notable scarcity of studies examining in-service professional development of educational professionals at the level of educational institutions (schools and kindergartens). The latest research findings (Brejc et al., 2022) indicate that principals and other educational professionals generally perceive that, within their educational institutions, principals predominantly employ a collaborative leadership approach, ensure the necessary conditions and opportunities for professional learning and collaboration within the institution, and actively promote such learning and collaboration beyond it. On average, the existing practices of professional learning and collaboration among educational staff were also evaluated positively. However, educational professionals assign lower ratings to the actual extent or frequency of professional learning and collaboration among staff, both within the institution and in external contexts. In another recent study, analysing the impact of Erasmus+ projects on educational institutions and their integration into school documentation for the period 2014-2021 (Zavašnik and Brejc, 2024) it was found that educational institutions primarily adhere to the legal requirements for planning and evaluating annual work plans; current planning focuses on content and scope of professional development rather than on needs, objectives, and strategies. Thus, reports often lack information on the concrete impacts of Erasmus+ projects and suggestions for improvement.

In order to obtain a more precise insight into the situation, a small-scale empirical study was conducted for the purposes of this paper, focusing on the examination of professional development activities at the level of educational institutions. The study forms part of a content analysis of papers written by candidates sitting for the principal qualification examination in school year 2025/2026. The empirical research was designed as a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and was conducted in March 2026.

1. The quantitative part was based on the analysis of a subset of papers that included completed checklists of professional development activities in 36 different institutions (4 kindergartens, 19 primary schools, 6 secondary schools, 2 music schools, 1 student dormitory, 3 institutions for children with

special needs, and 1 higher education institution). Candidates for principal qualification examination were required to complete a checklist comprising 27 different professional development activities carried out either within or outside their institution, assesing the proportion of educational professionals involved. The focus was on the analysis of collaborative professional development activities.

2. The qualitative part included three case studies selected by the authors through a rational analysis of the aforementioned papers. Two criteria were used for selection: the type of institution (one kindergarten out of four, one primary school out of nineteen, and one secondary school out of six) and the inclusion of those papers in which candidates' findings were based on a more detailed analysis of documented data (e.g. annual work plan, report on the implementation of the annual work plan, quality committee report, self-evaluation report, minutes of meetings). In the three case studies, four areas were analysed: identification of professional needs, planning of activities, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of professional development activities (Le Fevre et al., 2020; Bubb & Early, 2007).

3. 1. Analysis of checklists

Analysis of the checklists from 36 different educational institutions was conducted by first categorizing the responses according to three main groups based on the proportion of educational professionals involved in specific professional development activities: (1) less than 25%, (2) approximately 50%, and (3) more than 75%. The analysis showed that in more than one half of the analysed institutions, less than 25% of educational professionals are involved in the following professional development activities:

- active participation in conferences in Slovenia (with a presentation),
- active participation in conferences abroad (with a presentation),
- participation in conferences abroad (without a presentation),
- peer/collegial classroom observations within the institution,
- peer/collegial classroom observations between different institutions,
- formal mentoring of novice teachers and trainees,
- action research,
- team teaching / co-teaching,
- active involvement in coaching, supervision, and peer supervision (intervision),
- active involvement and participation in (online) communities and networks related to education,
- participation in peer reviews and external evaluations.

In more than one third of the analysed institutions, more than 75% of educational professionals participate in the following professional development activities:

- participation in seminars and workshops in Slovenia,
- reading professional and scientific literature,
- active participation of educational professionals in professional group meetings/discussion in kindergarten/school,
- sharing/exchanging materials, teaching resources, and tools,
- sharing knowledge at special events and school/kindergarten pedagogical conferences.

In the subsequent analysis, those professional development activities in which the majority of educational professionals participated were examined in greater depth (i.e. more than 75%), focusing exclusively on the dimension of collaboration. The analysis was grounded in the theoretical and empirical assumption that more intensive forms of collaboration generate greater added value than less complex forms of collaborative engagement (e.g. Livingston, 2025; Le Fevre et al., 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Darling Hammond et al., 2017). For the purposes of this analysis, four clusters of collaborative professional development activities were identified, namely:

1. no collaborative professional development activities at all;
2. activities without collaborative learning in educational institutions (e.g. workshops and seminars in Slovenia, reading scientific and professional literature, attending conferences in Slovenia without presenting);
3. activities involving collaborative learning and practice in educational institutions and/or knowledge sharing (e.g. professional working groups, classroom observations or mentoring, sharing knowledge at special pedagogical conference days, and exchanging materials, teaching resources, and instructional aids);
4. more intensive forms of collaboration and in-depth learning (e.g. peer classroom observations or team teaching, as well as multiple forms of collaboration, such as the joint co-creation and improvement of materials).

The analysis of collaborative activities (Table 1) revealed that the majority of the educational institutions included in the study implement activities involving collaborative learning and practice and/or knowledge sharing. However, it should be noted that only slightly more than one third of the institutions included in the analysis fall into this category (13 educational institutions). At the same time, fewer than one third implement more intensive forms of collaboration and in-depth learning (9 educational institutions). In four educational institutions, none of the collaborative activities are implemented, which is a cause for concern.

Table 1: Collaborative professional development activities in analysed educational institutions

Collaborative professional development activities	Number of educational institutions
No collaborative professional development activities at all	4
Activities without collaborative learning in educational institutions (e.g. workshops and seminars in Slovenia, reading scientific and professional literature, attending conferences in Slovenia without presenting)	10
Activities involving collaborative learning and practice in educational institutions and/or knowledge sharing (e.g. professional working groups, classroom observations or mentoring, sharing knowledge at special pedagogical conference days, and exchanging materials, teaching resources, and instructional aids)	13
More intensive forms of collaboration and in-depth learning (e.g. peer classroom observations or team teaching, as well as multiple forms of collaboration, such as the joint co-creation and improvement of materials	9
TOTAL	**36**

These results are also consistent with the TALIS 2024 results, which reveal that activities related to intensive professional collaboration (e.g. team teaching, providing feedback based on classroom observations, participation in joint activities across departments, and engagement in collaborative professional learning) are implemented less frequently. On average, slightly more than one-fifth of Slovenian educational professionals report engaging in these types of in-service professional development activities (Japelj Pavešić et al., 2025). According to TALIS 2024 (Japelj Pavešić et al., 2025), more educational professionals engage in general activities of collaboration (e.g. exchanging materials and teaching resources), which also aligns with the small-scale research above.

3. 2. Three case studies

The empirical study further conducted three case studies aiming to explore practices and processes related to professional development activities in educational institutions: one kindergarten (with 144 children and 22 educational professionals), one primary school (with 442 students and 45 educational professionals) and one secondary school (with 635 students and 70 educational professionals). The case studies explored the description of the phases of the professional development cycle (Le Fevre et al., 2020; Bubb & Earley, 2007), i.e. the identification of professional development needs, planning professional development, implementation of professional development activities, and evaluation of professional development activities.

With regard to the **identification of needs** for professional development of educational professionals, the candidates for principal examination reported various ways of identifying these needs. In the kindergarten, it was stated that the institution identified the professional development needs of staff in nine different ways, i.e. through annual appraisal interviews, classroom observations, self-evaluation, children's achievements, post-training evaluations, staff proposals at professional meetings, surveys, and conversations with parents. In the primary school, needs identification was reported to be conducted in seven ways, i.e. discussions in professional groups, annual and informal conversations, annual survey – selection of training areas for all staff, classroom observation and analysis, student feedback, analysis of written assessments, and student national assessment data. In the secondary school, needs were also identified in seven ways, i.e. through student surveys, self-evaluation report, classroom observations and learning walks, evaluation meetings of professional groups, analysis of student achievement, and formal and informal conversations with the principal.

In relation to **planning**, the most content-rich planning of professional development activities for educational professionals was observed in the kindergarten (35 hours of training per staff member, with 10 hours of mentoring for newly employed staff, 15 presentations of good practices within the kindergarten, an annual appraisal interview every three years, collaborative learning within professional groups – planned five peer observations). In the primary school, the plan was rather general (without specific data), while in the secondary school they planned up to 20 observations and training both within the school as well as three days per staff member outside the school. The content of the in-service training programmes was not specified in any of the case studies.

As already stated in above, the authors of the examined papers completed a checklist of 27 activities listed to indicate the **implementation** of the professional development activities. For each activity, they indicated the proportion of educational professionals within the participating institution (less than 25%, around

50%, and more than 75%). The highest number of activities was implemented in the kindergarten, fewer in the primary school, and even fewer in the secondary school. The largest proportion of educational professionals (more than 75%) participated in activities in the kindergarten (16 out of 27 activities), followed by the primary school (5 out of 27 activities), and then the secondary school (2 out of 27 activities). In all three institutions, the most prominent forms of participation were attendance at seminars and workshops outside the school, followed by peer observations, observations conducted by the principal, and collaboration within professional groups. Around 50% participation among educational professionals was recorded in 5 activities in the kindergarten, 8 in the primary school, and 16 in the secondary school. Low participation (less than 25%) was observed in 7 activities in the kindergarten, 15 in the primary school, and 10 in the secondary school. The case studies also showed that educational professionals rarely participate in longer in-service training programmes, conferences with their own contributions, inter-school visits, as well as international projects and mobility programmes.

All three institutions performed weakest in the **monitoring and evaluation** of the professional development activities. They rarely listed the monitoring methods and did not report any data (e.g. the number of implemented training activities). No evaluation of the effects of professional development activities was observed.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the conducted review of needs, opportunities, and impacts, it can be concluded that, at the system level, no formal mechanism exists for identifying the needs of educational professionals, which is a systemic shortcoming. At the same time, the findings from the small-scale research indicate that the schools included in the case studies are capable of identifying needs at the school level. However, given the limited scope of such small-scale research, it remains unclear how these processes are actually carried out across the majority of educational institutions in Slovenia.

Regarding opportunities, the findings indicate that the trend in the number of in-service professional development programmes offered, as well as the proportion of implemented programmes, has been gradually increasing. In parallel, the number of participants and the number of certificates issued have also risen, which can be assessed as a positive development. Evidence from the present paper small-scale empirical research further shows that educational professionals most frequently participate in such forms of professional development, namely participation in seminars and workshops in Slovenia. However, as indicated by the data presented in the introductory section of the paper, which provides an overview at the system level, more than 50% of in-service professional development programmes recorded in the KATIS system are delivered in a duration of up to 8 hours, while programmes exceeding 24 hours are the least represented (only 4%). This represents a systemic limitation for two main reasons. First, empirical evidence suggests that longer-duration programmes are more effective in influencing classroom practice, pointing to the need for systemic efforts to increase their availability.

Second, due to restrictions related to access to public information, data from the KATIS system cannot be linked with data on the career advancement of educational professionals. Furthermore, a key limitation of this analysis lies in the exclusion of data on so-called additional professional development activities undertaken by educational professionals, which constitute a significant component of Slovenia's professional development system, as defined by the Slovenian Rules on the

Promotion of Educational Professionals to Titles (2025). As noted earlier, in-service training (and the KATIS system) captures only formal professional development activities (e.g. programmes, seminars, workshops, conferences) and does not include other forms of professional development activities widely recognised in research and practice—arguably equally or even more critical for improving classroom practice—such as peer observation, research and development activities, participation in professional networks and associations, project work, mentoring, coaching, and supervision. Within the Slovenian system, these activities are classified as additional professional work. However, data on these activities (e.g. scope and outcomes) are not systematically collected, and access to such data is further restricted due to procedures related to career advancement and the Slovenian Access to Public Information Act (2006). This lack of data constrains the potential for more comprehensive analyses and for identifying impact, thereby potentially weakening the overall quality of the professional development system. The findings of this study further indicate that, although collaborative activities do take place in educational institutions, more intensive forms of collaboration and in-depth professional learning (e.g. peer classroom observations, team teaching, and multiple forms of collaboration such as the joint co-creation and improvement of teaching materials) are present in only approximately one quarter of the analysed institutions. This is a cause for concern, as more intensive forms of collaboration are known to yield greater transfer into practice and stronger effects on children's and students' learning outcomes. An additional issue concerns educational professionals' perceptions of the characteristics of professional learning activities. Educational professionals tend to rank among the least important those activities that extend over a longer period of time (e.g. several weeks or more), that is, precisely those activities which, from a professional perspective, tend to generate the greatest added value. The reasons for such perceptions warrant further investigation, particularly in light of both established professional evidence and recent changes introduced by the Slovenian Rules on the Promotion of Educational Professionals to Titles (2025), which stipulate, as a mandatory condition for promotion to the highest professional title, the completion of at least one longer-duration training programme (minimum 24 hours).

With regard to effects, the collected data indicate that the average evaluation scores of in-service training programmes (as recorded in the Slovenian KATIS system) are significantly higher than the opinions expressed by educational professionals participating in the TALIS 2024. This discrepancy raises questions about the discriminatory power of the evaluation instrument, or of its individual items, within the KATIS system at the systemic level. It should also be emphasised that participants in in-service professional development programmes complete the evaluation questionnaire (within the KATIS system) no later than within one month after the programme has been delivered. This implies that, as a rule—particularly in the case of shorter programmes—they have not yet had the opportunity to apply, implement, or reflect on potential innovations, changes, or improvements in their practice. Moreover, they may encounter various barriers when attempting to implement these changes at the level of the educational institution. Consequently, perceptions of the usefulness of a programme may change over time. In this regard, longitudinal measurement of programme usefulness would provide a more valid and realistic assessment. At the same time, the findings from the small-scale empirical part of this study confirm that the weakest component in establishing and implementing the cycle of professional development at the school level is precisely the monitoring and evaluation of effects. Across all three case studies, this was identified as the most underdeveloped element, with no systematic evaluation of the effects of professional development activities observed.

The first National Quality Report of the Education System in Slovenia (Taštanoska, 2026), in the field of professional development of educational professionals (Indicator: **Educational professionals are provided with high-quality professional development**), identified the following baseline benchmarks, which serve as a starting point for defining strategic goals and strategic development planning:

1. The proportion of educational professionals who participated in at least one professional development activity in the 12 months prior to the TALIS 2024: 98%.
2. The proportion of educational professionals who reported that the professional development activities in which they participated in the 12 months prior to TALIS 2024 had a generally "quite" or "very" positive impact on their teaching: 43%.
3. The proportion of implemented in-service professional development programmes with a duration of 24 hours or more: 4%.
4. The establishment of a multi-stakeholder body for assessing quality aspects of in-service training and other professional development activities of educational professionals.
5. The establishment of a system for identifying the needs of educational professionals, types of professional development activities and their content (Taštanoska, 2026).

In order to strengthen the quality of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of professional development activities among educational professionals at the school level, public institutions in the field of education (e.g. the National Education Institute Slovenia) will need:

- to place greater emphasis on training school principals in this area,
- to define clearer operational guidelines for schools and kindergartens,
- to ensure greater accessibility of materials for principals and other educational professionals,
- to raise awareness of the importance of high-quality professional development activities,
- to expand and promote the provision of longer-duration in-service training programmes with opportunities for interim application in practice,
- to strengthen the use of data in schools and kindergartens, and
- to enhance the monitoring and evaluation of professional development activities at the school level.

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Implementing a National Professional Program in Sweden: Balancing Disparate Views and Opinions on Professional Development



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Institution profile

Skolverket (The Swedish National Agency for Education) is the central administrative authority for the public school system in Sweden, publicly organised preschool, school-age educare and adult education.

Skolverket is responsible for ensuring that all children and pupils have access to education and activities of consistently high quality in a safe and secure environment. The mission of Skolverket is to create the best conditions for the children's development and learning and to help improve the students' learning outcomes.

Skolverket develops knowledge requirements, regulations, general recommendations and national tests. It is also responsible for official statistics on education and conducts national monitoring and evaluation. In addition, it oversees Sweden's participation in international assessments of education.

Skolverket issues certification to teachers and preschool teachers and has sectoral responsibility for matters relating to disability and the right of newly arrived pupils

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in Sweden to receive education of the same high quality as other pupils. It is also responsible for the Teachers' Disciplinary Board.

Skolverket supports the quality of Swedish education through national development programmes and continuing professional development. It also administers government grants and organises professional development programmes for head teachers.

Another part of Skolverket's remit is to contribute to the national supply of skills and to support young people's transition into the labour market. It therefore works with school organisers, employers and other organisations to improve the quality of vocational education in upper secondary schools.

Skolverket disseminates information about current education research and shares knowledge and expertise in the field both in Sweden and internationally. As part of this work, it serves as a national reference centre providing information on vocational education in Sweden, other EU Member States and EEA countries. It also serves as a national reference point for quality assurance in vocational education and is responsible for the national councils for upper-secondary vocational programmes. Skolverket is responsible for official statistics on the school system and school-age educare as part of Sweden's Official Statistics (SOS). Official statistics provide an important basis for the development of society.

Authors



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Implementing a National Professional Program in Sweden – balancing disparate views and opinions on professional development

Authors: Laila Guvå, Mats Lindh

Abstract

This article examines the development and implementation of the National Professional Program (NPP) for teachers, preschool teachers and headteachers in the Swedish school system. It traces the development of the programme, from both legal and policy perspectives, and examines it in the context of the government's stated ambition to provide education professionals with an active and influential role in the development of the school system. The article analyses the assessments and choices made during the development process, as well as the interactions between the stakeholders involved, highlighting both key factors contributing to successful implementation and the challenges that have emerged.

In Sweden, legislation and other regulations are developed through a formal system of government inquiries that supports national policymaking. The Swedish Government establishes the terms of reference for an inquiry and appoints an inquiry chair to lead the work and submit proposals to the government. The government then prepares bills, which provide the basis for decisions by Parliament or the government. Government agencies are responsible for implementing these decisions within their respective areas of responsibility. Skolverket (the National Agency for Education) is the principal government agency responsible for implementing regulations relating to the school system.

The development and implementation of the NPP can therefore be understood as the outcome of interaction between the government and Skolverket, shaped by existing legislation and the proposals and recommendations emerging from previous government inquiries. At the same time, the NPP is intended to provide scope for professional influence and to support profession-led professional development. Skolverket therefore must balance national policy objectives and regulatory requirements with the perspectives and needs of the different professions within the school system.

The article also examines the dialogue and interaction between Skolverket and other stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the NPP. These include employers' organisations and trade unions, which play an important role in determining the framework and conditions for the continuing professional development of head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers.

The main objectives of the NPP are to provide head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers with equitable access to high-quality professional development and to recognise the professional competence of highly skilled teachers through a national qualification system. Achieving these objectives, while ensuring the legitimacy and relevance of the NPP, requires different perspectives and interests to be considered and balanced. The article highlights the complexity involved in implementing the

NPP and draws attention to challenges that may also arise in the implementation of similar professional development reforms.

Keywords: National Professional Programme, continuing professional development, structure for continuing professional development, qualification system, Career Teacher System, certification, induction period, mentoring, teacher retention, teacher attrition, collaborative professional learning

Introduction

This article examines the development and implementation of a National Professional Programme (NPP) in Sweden and explores how different policy objectives, stakeholder perspectives and regulatory decisions shape the interpretation and implementation of the programme in practice. The introduction of national standards and strategies for career development and teacher performance appraisal in Sweden is of interest because it illustrates the challenges involved in balancing national policy-making and professional-driven development. Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education) is responsible for developing and implementing the government's decisions concerning the NPP.

The degree of state control over the Swedish school system has varied over time. Today, responsibility for and governance of schools are shared between the national and local levels (SOU 2022:53). This has contributed to substantial differences in access to professional development across the school system. For example, the quality and availability of continuing professional development have depended to a considerable extent on individual employers. The establishment of the NPP for head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers reflects an increased assumption of state responsibility for professional development within the Swedish school system.

International assessments such as PISA and TIMSS identified an unfavourable trend in pupil attainment in Swedish schools as early as the 2000s. They also indicated a deterioration in equity in educational outcomes. In response, the Swedish Government commissioned the OECD to analyse Sweden's PISA results. The resulting OECD report emphasised that a school system needs the capacity to respond to changes in society and that education professionals need sufficient capacity to meet the challenges arising from such changes. The OECD recommended that Sweden develop a long-term human resource strategy to support high-quality teaching and learning (OECD, 2015).

Over the past two decades, the Swedish Government has introduced several reforms in response to teacher shortages, inequalities in educational opportunities and declining student performance. The NPP represents a further step towards achieving these policy objectives, while also seeking to refine and adapt previous government initiatives.

The NPP came into force in autumn 2025 and represents a strengthening of state responsibility for the professional development of head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers, following a prolonged period of decentralisation and a wide range of local initiatives and arrangements for continuing professional development. These arrangements have not always corresponded to the needs and preferences of education professionals.[1] The programme aims to provide high-quality continuing

1 Talis 2024 Teachers' learning opportunities: 34% of teachers report that the professional learning activities they participated in during the 12 months preceding the survey had a positive impact on their teaching (lower than the OECD average: 55%). The share of novice teachers who find professional learning impactful is 10 percentage points higher compared to what experienced teachers report (Source: OECD, TALIS 2024 Database, Tables 4.3, 4.7, 4.10 and 4.24).

professional development throughout the careers of educators, and to create opportunities for career progression within the profession. Other objectives include promoting greater equity in education, supporting professional development, and developing and recognising teaching expertise. The NPP also seeks to refine and adapt previous government initiatives (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2021b).

The NPP consists of two main components:

- A national framework for continuing professional development
- A national qualification system

Major reforms to the school system generally require thorough investigation, careful preparation and broad engagement throughout the policy process, from the initial proposal to the adoption of legislation, to establish legitimacy. There is broad agreement among stakeholders on the importance and value of the NPP. At the same time, stakeholders differ in their views on how its objectives should be achieved. Following the entry into force of the regulations governing the NPP, new questions have emerged concerning how the programme should be implemented. In some cases, stakeholders also disagree on how the regulations should be interpreted and how they relate to the objectives of the reform. This article examines these different perspectives and interpretations among school organisers, head teachers, teachers, preschool teachers and other stakeholders.

The governance of the Swedish school system

To understand the current emphasis on state responsibility for professional development, it is necessary to consider the historical development of governance in the Swedish school system. Responsibility for the school system has varied over time and has been divided between the state and local government. Sweden's 290 municipalities have historically been responsible for a number of functions, while the state has retained responsibility for others. The school system has therefore never been governed exclusively at either the national or municipal level.

The post-war period was characterised by relatively strong central state governance. The ambition was to make education geographically accessible, raise overall educational standards and bring together different forms of education within a more coherent system. During the 1970s, a process of decentralisation and deregulation was initiated. This continued during the 1980s and culminated in the extensive municipalisation of the school system in 1991. Among other things, this involved a substantial transfer of responsibility from the state to municipalities, including responsibility for school organisers and education staff. At the same time, the state retained responsibility for the overall regulatory framework and national objectives. The Swedish school system is therefore governed at both national and local levels (Bill 1988/89:4).

However, decentralisation continued during the 1990s beyond what had initially been intended. This resulted in changes to several of the instruments used to govern the school system and promote equity. In some areas, existing forms of state control were discontinued.

From the late 1990s onwards, the state began to reassert its role in governing the school system. The objectives included promoting greater equity in education, improving the quality of teaching, improving student performance and increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession (Jarl, 2012).

Despite the increased role of the state since the late 1990s, there have continued to be calls for stronger state governance of schools, or of specific functions within them, to safeguard national interests in education (Molander, 2017). The implementation of the NPP, together with several earlier reforms, can be understood as part of this continuing shift towards stronger state governance of the school system.

1. Motivational approaches to address teacher shortage

Before the introduction of the NPP in 2025, several reforms had been undertaken to address teacher shortage, lack of equity in education and declining student performance. Since July 2011, teachers and preschool teachers in Sweden have been required to hold certification under the national teacher certification system. The requirement was intended, among other things, to establish eligibility to teach in certain subjects. Teacher training programmes are available at many higher education institutions in Sweden, but there are significant differences between programmes. This reform was intended to strengthen legal certainty, improve the quality of teaching, enhance the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession, and help to address teacher shortage (Bill 2010/11:20).

Initially, the teacher certification system required both a qualifying teaching degree and completion of an induction period for newly graduated teachers. In the spring of 2014, however, the requirement to complete an approved induction period was removed to allow newly qualified teachers to enter the labour market without delay, as certifications were not being issued at the required rate.

The teacher certification system therefore did not fully achieve all its intended objectives, particularly with regard to quality assurance (RiR 2025:12). It did, however, contribute to a growing recognition of the need for national responsibility for the quality of teaching.

Another reform that paved the way for the NPP was the Career Teacher reform introduced in 2013 (Bill 2012/13:136). Its objective was to provide highly qualified teachers with opportunities for career progression while allowing them to remain primarily engaged in teaching and teaching-related activities. The reform established a career structure for teachers, including the roles of Senior Teacher and Senior Subject Teacher for particularly skilled teachers, with the latter requiring a postgraduate qualification.

To qualify for government funding when appointing a teacher as a Senior Teacher or Senior Subject Teacher, certain conditions must be met. The teacher must have four years of well-regarded teaching experience, have demonstrated a particularly strong ability to improve students' academic performance and a strong commitment to developing teaching, and be considered by the head teacher to be particularly well qualified to teach and undertake teaching-related activities (Regulation 2019:1288). However, the reform has not resulted in a broad consensus on the role of Senior Teachers, and the criteria for qualifying as a Senior Teacher have remained unclear (Bill 2010/11:20). This has affected the legitimacy of the reform. In addition, the Career Teachers reform has only to partly achieved its objective of enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

In January 2023, the Swedish Government submitted a bill to the Swedish Parliament to introduce a National Professional Development Program for head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers, through an amendment to the Education Act (Bill 2022/23:54).

2. In-service teacher professional development and performance appraisal

The decision to introduce the NPP followed several government inquiries addressing the teacher shortage, lack of equity in education equivalence and declining student performance. In 2017, a government inquiry concluded that a prerequisite for a school system of consistently high quality is that all students have access to qualified, competent and committed teachers, as well as skilled school leaders who base their practice on scientific research and proven experience (SOU 2017:35). The inquiry identified inadequate opportunities for the professional development of teachers as one of several systemic weaknesses in the school system. These weaknesses included limited capacity and insufficient responsibility among head teachers, an inadequate supply of qualified teachers and school leaders, and insufficient opportunities for professional development. The inquiry therefore submitted an initial proposal for the NPP for teachers and school leaders.

A year later, this proposal was further developed with the aim of establishing a coherent system for developing teachers' and school leaders' competence and making strategic use of that competence (SOU 2018:17). The proposed system was intended to address several challenges, including the broader question of how to enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession and other education professions. It also sought to refine and adapt previous government initiatives, including the Career Teachers reform. The proposed programme focused on developing and strengthening professional competence, as well as recognising and formally acknowledging such competence.

In October 2022, another government inquiry emphasised the importance of national responsibility for the professional development of teachers and head teachers within an overarching system (SOU 2022:53). The inquiry concluded that responsibility for enabling professional development should remain with head teachers, alongside an increased national responsibility for the professional development of teachers and head teachers.

In 2021, Skolverket was commissioned by the government to prepare for the introduction of the NPP (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2021). Among other things, the assignment involved developing mentor training to support a high-quality induction period, in line with proposals put forward by the 2018 inquiry (SOU 2018:17). The inquiry emphasised the importance of a high-quality induction period both for the development of the profession and for retaining newly qualified teachers in the profession. At this stage, mentor training was therefore identified as an important component in strengthening the teaching and preschool teaching professions.

2.1. The mission to develop a National Professional Development Programme

In June 2022, Skolverket was commissioned by the government to propose how the NPP should be designed (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2022). The assignment included developing a national framework for continuing professional development and a national qualification system. The proposals were to be developed in consultation with practitioners through a newly established Council for Professions in Education.

Members of the Council are appointed by the government and represent preschool teachers, teachers, head teachers, school organisers and academics from universities and university colleges. Skolverket has two representatives on the

Council, including the chair. Representatives of the teaching professions constitute the majority and include the vice-chair. The Council is tasked with supporting Skolverket in developing the NPP. Its members are nominated by trade unions and employers' associations but are primarily expected to represent their respective professions. The Council is therefore an advisory body rather than a forum for negotiation.

In May 2024, Skolverket reported on the assignment and presented proposals for a national framework for professional development and a national qualification system to be introduced the following year (Skolverket, 2024). The report concluded that professional development for head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers should be based on the needs of children and pupils and support their learning. Continuing professional development should also contribute to education based on scientific research and best practice.

Skolverket proposed that the NPP should be open to teachers and preschool teachers with a qualifying degree, which was regarded as an important prerequisite for the legitimacy of the programme. In addition, participation was to be limited to practising head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers.

Skolverket concluded that the content of the national framework for continuing professional development needed to be sufficiently broad to be relevant to teachers and preschool teachers across the profession, while also enabling participants to deepen or broaden their knowledge and develop specialist expertise, for example in the areas of special educational needs or leadership. The proposed framework included university courses, practice-based research and collaborative professional learning. University courses would provide opportunities for both broadening and deepening knowledge, as well as specialisation, while collaborative professional learning could support the further development of professional expertise (Figure 1).

The proposed framework was to consist largely of courses provided by universities and university colleges. This was justified, among other things, by the fact that higher education is subject to quality assurance, is based on scientific research, and provides opportunities to obtain postgraduate academic qualifications.

Practice-based research was defined as research conducted collaboratively by education professionals and researchers and based on knowledge needs identified by schools and preschools. Participation in practice-based research projects was proposed as a qualifying activity within the framework.

These principles outlined above were considered when the government subsequently issued the regulations, although certain aspects of Skolverket's proposals were amended. Some of these changes are described below.

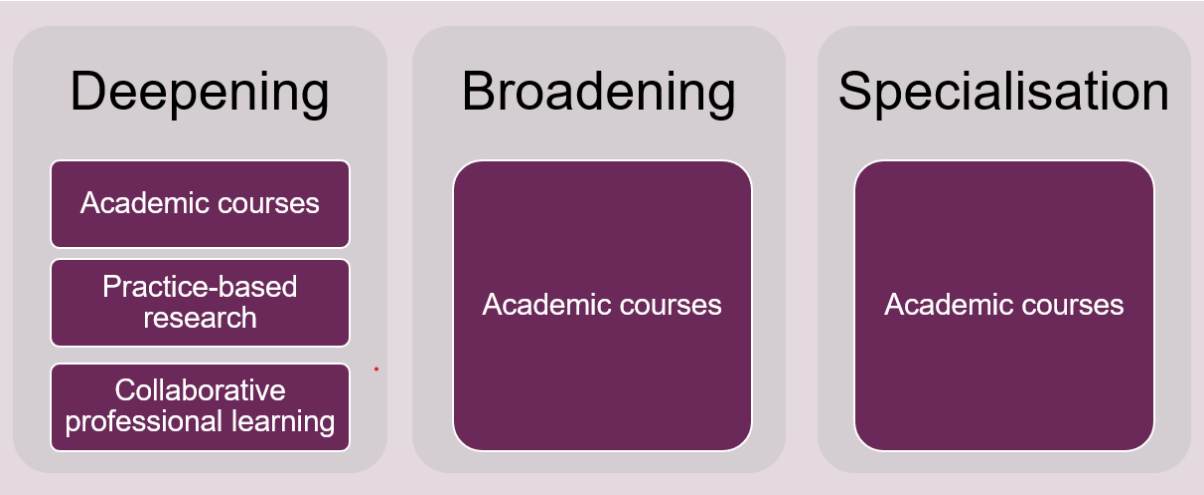
The Swedish concept of **collegial learning** draws on international research traditions including Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Communities of Practice and collaborative inquiry models such as Lesson Study. In the Swedish education system, however, the concept has developed into a broader framework for systematic, research-informed collaboration among teachers, linked to school improvement and student learning.

Regarding the content of the national framework for continuing professional development, Skolverket proposed an interaction between collaborative professional learning and individual professional development. In the Swedish educational context, collaborative professional learning refers to systematic, research-informed collaboration in which teachers jointly analyse and improve teaching and learning practices.

The government's regulations, however, state that continuing professional development within the NPP "shall mainly be individual". Consequently, collaborative

professional learning cannot, under the regulations, constitute the principal form of professional development. In some contexts, this wording has created uncertainty among stakeholders. Skolverket nevertheless has the authority to issue more detailed regulations, which specify that practice-based research and collaborative professional learning are included alongside individual continuing professional development in the form of university courses (SKOLFS 2025:431).

Based on current research, Skolverket identifies both practice-based research and collaborative professional learning as important to the development of teaching (Blossing, U. & Wennergren, A.-C., 2019). Systematic collaboration with colleagues to develop teaching practices has the potential to be one of the most effective ways of improving the quality of teaching and supporting children's and pupils' learning (Hirsh, Å. & Segolsson, M. (eds.), 2019). Collaborative professional learning can also enable organisations to make use of knowledge acquired through teachers' and preschool teachers' individual continuing professional development (Wennergren, A.-C. & Carolsson Godolakis, H., 2022).



Source: Skolverket, 2024.

Figure 1: Deepening, broadening and specialisation

2.2. A national qualification system

The assignment given to Skolverket also included developing a proposal for a national qualification system for certified teachers and preschool teachers; head teachers were not included. Skolverket concluded that the system should, as far as possible, provide equal opportunities for all teachers and preschool teachers. Other key principles were validity and reliability. Against this background, Skolverket concluded that it would not be feasible to assess individual pedagogical competence, as this would require impartial assessment by a specialised, qualified and independent body, for which no suitable authority currently exists.

Skolverket proposed a qualification system comprised of three levels. Rather than assessing individual teaching competence, Skolverket proposed a mandatory university course designed to further develop teachers' and preschool teachers' ability to analyse and improve the quality of teaching. To qualify, teachers and preschool teachers would be required to:

- hold teacher or preschool teacher certification;
- have at least six years of professional experience;
- be working as a teacher or preschool teacher at the time of application; and

- have completed deepening, broadening and specialised university-level studies amounting to specified numbers of credits, including the mandatory course.

The proposal also provided for teachers and preschool teachers who had participated in practice-based research to receive credit for this participation when applying for a qualification. Collaborative professional learning, however, was considered more difficult to assess and validate within a formal qualification system. It therefore forms part of the national framework for continuing professional development, but not of the national qualification system.

One significant departure from Skolverket's proposal as described above, is the government's decision to restrict qualifying university studies to six specific fields:

1. Subject studies
2. Subject didactics
3. Preschool education
4. Cognitive science
5. Special education
6. Leadership

The purpose of these six fields is, according to the government, to guide teachers' professional development toward areas that the government has identified as priorities. This delimitation is consistent with planned changes to teacher education, under which greater emphasis is placed on subject studies, subject didactics and cognitive science, while less emphasis is placed on pedagogy and general didactics.

In addition to falling within one of the six specified fields, qualifying studies must, under the regulations, be relevant to teaching within the Swedish school system. This relevance requirement is an important addition, as some of the six fields lack an established definition (SUHF REK 2026:2), while others encompass areas that may not be considered directly relevant to teaching in general.

The government also introduced an additional qualification level between the proposed Levels 2 and 3. Attainment of Level 1 is a prerequisite for progressing to a higher qualification level. Beyond this requirement, the levels may build on one another, but they do not necessarily have to be completed sequentially (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Qualification levels can build on one other but do not have to be completed sequentially

Figure 3 shows Levels 1 to 4 in the current qualification system established by the government. Only university-level studies completed after teacher education count towards a qualification, except in the case of applicants who hold a doctoral degree and are applying for Level 4.

Qualification level 1	Qualification level 2	Qualification level 3	Qualification level 4
At least 6 years of experience in the profession Qualifying studies of at least 15 credits *	Qualifying studies of at least 45 credits ** of which: 15 credits can be transferred from qualification level 1 7.5 credits from the mandatory course at least 22.5 credits must be at advanced level	Meet the conditions for qualification level 2 Have completed the mandatory course Have obtained an advanced degree of at least 60 credits ***	Have completed the mandatory course Have obtained a postgraduate degree (licentiate or doctorate)

* During a transitional period of four years, it is sufficient to have obtained 7.5 credits, if you have worked as a teacher or preschool teacher for at least 12 years.

** For those who have actively participated in a practice-based research, it is sufficient to have obtained 37.5 credits.

*** At least half of the credits must be within the six qualifying fields and half of courses required to obtain a degree.

Figure 3: The current qualification system

The additional qualification level introduced by the government, Level 3, requires applicants to meet the requirements for Level 2 and to hold an advanced degree comprising at least 60 credits obtained after teacher training. The requirements for Level 3 therefore combine the principles underpinning the national qualification system with those governing academic degrees (Regulation 1993:100), which calls for careful planning and consideration in the implementation of the system.

2.3. Prior to the implementation of the NPP

Before the NPP was implemented, Skolverket conducted a survey to assess school organisers' awareness of, preparations for and attitudes toward the NPP (Skolverket, 2025). The survey was intended to provide a baseline for future monitoring and evaluation of the NPP. The questionnaire was sent to a representative sample of municipal and independent schools and preschools and was addressed to 401 respondents in administrative roles. A total of 250 responded, corresponding to a response rate of 62%.

The survey found a high level of awareness of the forthcoming NPP; 88% of respondents reported having read about the NPP on Skolverket's website. Expectations were also generally positive. When asked about the main potential benefits of introducing the NPP, 75% of respondents answered that it could make a major contribution to strengthening opportunities for professional development throughout their careers, while 72% believed that it could substantially improve the quality of teaching.

The survey also indicated that school organisers generally had an understanding of the professional development needs within their organisations. However, financial and human resources varied between schools, and many school organisers did not yet have a strategy for allocating resources to professional development, either generally or specifically within the NPP. Several school organisers expressed

uncertainty about how the reform would be financed and noted the absence of dedicated government funding. Some findings from the survey are highlighted below:

- 74–88%, depending on the type of school, answered yes to the question: "Have you assessed the need for continuing professional development initiatives over the past three years?"
- 61% answered no to the question: "Have you discussed how to prioritise participation if interest in continuing professional development within the NPP proves to be high or low?"
- 59–63%, depending on the type of school, considered staff shortages to be an obstacle to participation in the NPP, citing insufficient financial and human resources to enable participation (Skolverket, 2025).

2.4. After the implementation of the NPP

To date, Skolverket has not conducted any systematic surveys among the target groups following the implementation of the NPP. Skolverket does, however, regularly engage with groups of teachers, preschool teachers, head teachers and school organisers in various contexts and gains an understanding of their views and experiences through the questions and comments they raise.

Employers' associations and trade unions also provide Skolverket with information about how the NPP is being received by their members. School organisers, school leaders and teachers often turn to these organisations for information about the NPP in practice. Dialogue between Skolverket and these organisations is therefore important in promoting consistency in the information communicated about the NPP.

Based on information received from the organisations, together with questions and comments submitted by stakeholders to Skolverket, the introduction of the NPP does not appear to have generated particularly strong reactions overall. Attitudes appear to be cautiously positive, although there is also a degree of wait-and-see sentiment. Questions from teachers and preschool teachers generally concern their individual opportunities to obtain a qualification. Those who contact Skolverket are often experienced and highly qualified teachers, many of whom hold career positions as Senior Teachers or Senior Subject Teachers. They express a desire to maintain or strengthen their current professional position and therefore have a strong incentive to obtain a qualification.

School organisers and school leaders also contact Skolverket. Their questions often concern practical framework conditions, such as funding for professional development and access to substitute teachers. As there is no government funding specifically earmarked for professional development within the NPP, many school organisers report difficulties in planning for individual teachers' continuing professional development. They point to a lack of resources to employ substitute teachers and note that, even where funding is available, the supply of replacement staff is limited. There is also concern that the quality of teaching, and consequently children's and pupils' learning, could be adversely affected if substitute teachers are required for extended periods of time.

School organisers operating very small preschools or schools face special challenges (Skolverket, 2026). The fewer the employees, the greater the impact on the organisation when staff participate in continuing professional development through university courses or practice-based research. Opportunities for collaborative professional learning may also be more limited. This highlights structural differences in the capacity of different types of school organisers to support participation in continuing professional development.

Schools in sparsely populated areas located a long distance from the nearest university campus report a greater reliance on distance learning than schools in metropolitan areas. Distance learning enables universities to reach participants across the country and to offer courses to smaller groups of students (UKÄ, 2023). However, evaluations of university courses designed for practising professionals indicate that both participants and lecturers prefer on-site tuition (Skolverket, 2026b). Many NPP courses are delivered in a hybrid format. Skolverket and higher education institutions therefore need to find ways of balancing quality and accessibility in a country with relatively large geographical distances.

The current design of the NPP does not include compensatory measures for schools and preschools in either socioeconomically disadvantaged areas or sparsely populated areas. Given that one of the objectives of the NPP, as well as of several previous reforms, is to promote greater equity in education, further measures to address these structural differences remain possible, provided that Skolverket, the Council and other stakeholders can agree on appropriate solutions.

It has also become apparent that school organisers are concerned about their ability to plan and organise professional development where there are differing interpretations of what is meant by "individual professional development". While some head teachers and school organisers have established guidelines governing employees' participation in qualifying courses, others are still seeking solutions that are acceptable to all stakeholders, particularly with regard to the following:

- funding
- who should determine what constitutes "relevant" continuing professional development
- the criteria to be used in making such assessments.

Some school organisers have introduced digital platforms to map employees' professional development. These platforms can help identify professional development needs in prioritised areas, make better use of existing expertise and encourage teachers to participate in qualifying courses. To encourage teachers to apply for a qualification level, some school organisers have decided to cover the application fee and, in some cases, additional costs such as course literature. In some cases, funding is conditional on teachers choosing specific courses.

School organisers and head teachers also direct questions to Skolverket about the role of qualified teachers and preschool teachers and how staff with different qualification levels should be utilised. The questions are therefore primarily practical in nature, but they also concern the interpretation of the regulations.

Skolverket maintains close dialogue with higher education institutions regarding continuing professional development for practising teachers, preschool teachers and head teachers. Collaboration with universities and university colleges forms part of Skolverket's mandate in relation to the NPP. Higher education institutions identified several potential risks before the NPP came into effect, including insufficient funding, constraints on academic freedom, and the possibility that established regional partnerships between higher education institutions and school organisers could lose importance as national governance is strengthened.

Continuing professional development for practising teachers and preschool teachers has to some extent already been incorporated into courses offered by higher education institutions, including commissioned courses delivered on behalf of Skolverket. However, this provision has not previously been available on the scale now required under the NPP. Courses must now be available to all teacher categories and include provision at advanced level. There is also demand for course packages and programmes, as well as opportunities for teachers in all categories to obtain advanced academic qualifications.

Providing courses for practising professionals requires them to be scheduled at times compatible with full-time employment. To be considered relevant by teachers and their employers, courses may also need to have a more practice-oriented approach than conventional university courses. Universities and university colleges generally welcome this development, while recognising the challenges it presents.

Skolverket is responsible for the NPP and has been allocated funding to commission training from universities and university colleges. In dialogue with higher education institutions, Skolverket must therefore identify and prioritise the need for courses for different teacher categories to supplement the regular course provision. The structure of the government funding system can entail that higher education institutions have relatively little time to prepare and plan for new courses, which can also constrain their ability to plan over the longer term. This issue is frequently raised by universities and university colleges.

Regarding continuing professional development for headteachers within the NPP, Skolverket and higher education institutions had established collaborative arrangements even before the NPP was introduced. Head teachers in Sweden have diverse educational backgrounds, and some have no previous experience of teaching. Their professional development needs therefore vary considerably. A framework continuing professional development for head teachers has existed for many years and has provided a foundation on which the NPP could build. According to several higher education institutions, however, the NPP also requires this framework and established ways of working to be revised and renewed.

Higher education institutions and organisations involved in practice-based research – that is, research conducted collaboratively by education professionals and researchers – have pointed to both benefits and risks associated with including practice-based research within the NPP. They emphasise the need to safeguard the incentives for participation in such research. There is concern that making practice-based research a condition for qualification could undermine or devaluate its intended purpose.

2.5. Teachers' and preschool teachers' interest in qualification

Since the NPP was implemented on 1 September 2025, applications from 2,420 teachers for a qualification have been received as of 8 June 2026 (Figure 4). Most applications are for Level 1, as the requirements for Levels 2, 3 and 4 are more demanding and include the completion of a mandatory course. Most applicants are awarded a qualification. The main reason for unsuccessful applications is that they do not meet the requirement to be practising teachers or preschool teachers.

Those who are awarded qualifications are predominantly women, with men accounting for less than one fifth. The typical qualified teacher or preschool teacher is a woman, has extensive professional experience, and the majority are aged 50 years or older. Both when it comes to gender and age, the figures are statistically representative for teachers and preschool teachers in general in Sweden.

Teachers and preschool teachers have shown considerable interest in applying for qualifying courses. However, school organisers and head teachers have so far often been hesitant to approve their participation.

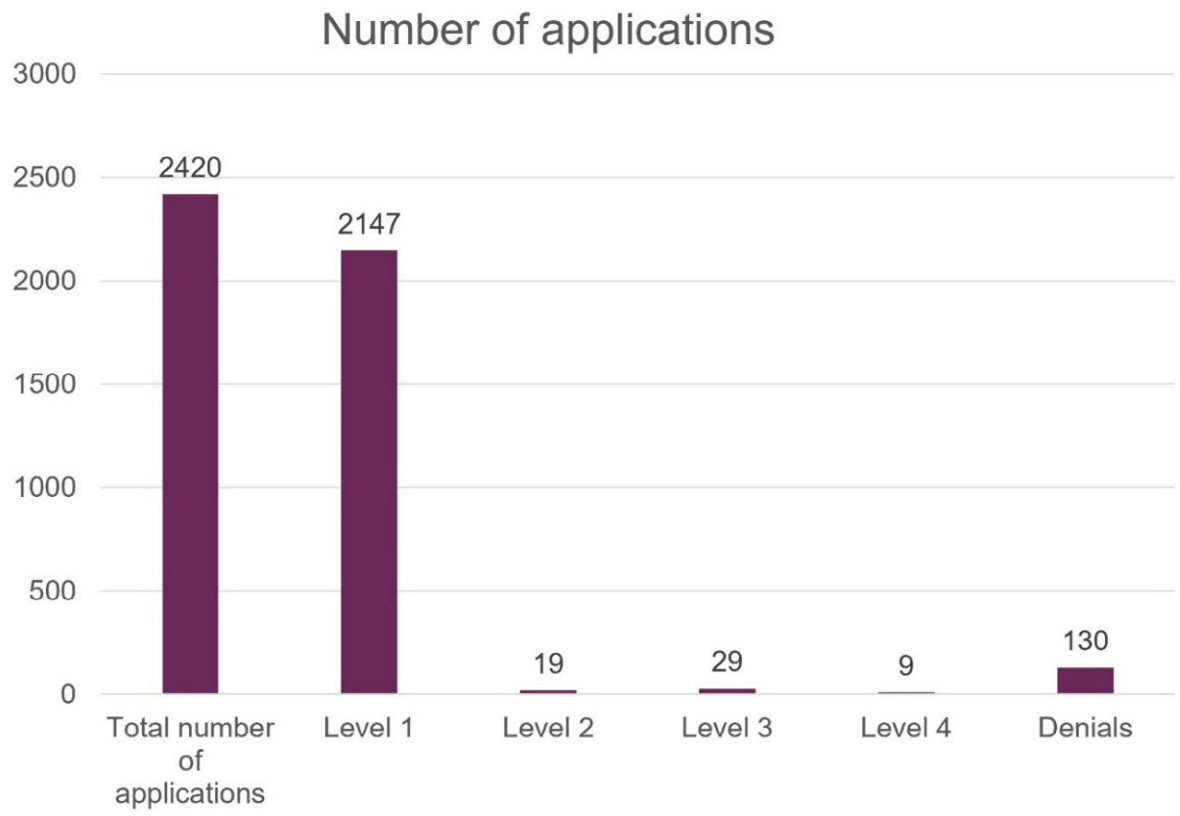


Figure 4: Number of applications for the different qualification levels by June 8, 2026

Discussion

When the NPP was introduced, the Education Act was amended to provide that certified teachers and preschool teachers **shall** be given the opportunity to participate in professional development within the NPP that contributes to the development of professional skills and may lead to a qualification (SFS 2010:800). The amendment entered into force on 1 September 2025. However, questions concerning the interpretation and application of the regulations remain.

One such question is whether the provision implies that the most highly qualified teachers should be prioritised when professional development opportunities are allocated, rather than those with less experience or expertise. Another concerns the requirement that professional development within the NPP **"shall mainly be individual"** (SFS 2025:280). Stakeholders have interpreted this provision in different ways. One interpretation is that continuing professional development within the NPP should not primarily take the form of collective or collaborative professional learning. At present, collaborative professional learning forms part of the national framework for continuing professional development but does not qualify toward a qualification level within the NPP. Several stakeholders have identified this as a potential limitation.

Another interpretation of **"mainly individual",** expressed by some stakeholders, is that professional development should primarily reflect the individual's own wishes and needs. This interpretation is significant since responsibility for continuing professional development remains with municipal and independent school

organisers and head teachers. This responsibility is stated in the Education Act and was not changed by the introduction of the NPP. Many stakeholders perceive the regulations as giving individuals greater freedom to choose the content and form of their continuing professional development. School organisers and head teachers, however, have expressed concern that this interpretation creates uncertainty about their mandate to plan and organise professional development in accordance with the aims and objectives of their schools.

Further clarification is therefore needed regarding the respective responsibilities of the state, school organisers and individual professionals, and the extent to which the state should exercise governance over the continuing professional development of head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers.

The "Swedish model" refers to a long-established system of negotiation between trade unions and employers' organisations in the Swedish labour market. It is central to the negotiation of collective agreements between trade unions and employers' associations, including agreements on wage-setting and other employment conditions, such as opportunities for professional development. In international comparison, the Swedish model entails a relatively limited role for the state in areas governed by collective bargaining. This is relevant to the NPP because stakeholders can, through collective bargaining and other forms of negotiation, influence the framework and conditions for the professional development of head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers. At the same time, differences in negotiating positions and disagreements between stakeholders may affect the further development and implementation of the NPP.

As noted above, local interpretations of the NPP and its application are already emerging through Skolverket's contacts with representatives of municipalities and independent school organisers. School organisers are seeking to interpret and operationalise the programme in ways that reflect local circumstances and needs. These efforts can be viewed either as legitimate adaptations of the programme to specific contexts or as evidence of ambiguity in the regulatory framework. The local approaches identified to date have generally focused on addressing needs identified within individual schools and preschools.

The implementation of the NPP is still in an early stage, and it remains too soon to assess the effectiveness of the system. The government has announced an ambition to link the qualification system to the previously introduced Career Teachers reform. If implemented, this would mean that only qualified teachers can be appointed to career positions such as Senior Teacher and Senior Subject Teacher. Such a change could make the requirements for career positions more predictable and consistent than they are at present, which is seen as a positive development by many stakeholders.

At the same time, the qualification system may be perceived as complex or difficult to access. The qualification requirements may make long-term planning of continuing professional development more challenging for teachers and preschool teachers, as well as for school leaders and careers advisers. This is particularly the case because professional development needs to be aligned with both academic structures and the practical conditions of individual organisations.

The approach to continuing professional development outlined in the inquiries preceding the NPP was rooted in a broader discussion about the professionalisation of teaching. This included, among other things, collaborative professional learning and an explicit responsibility for supporting newly qualified colleagues. These elements are less prominent in the current NPP regulations. Combined with the emphasis on professional development being **"mainly individual",** this suggests that, while the formal objectives of the NPP have not changed, its design has to

some extent evolved in a different direction from that envisaged in earlier policy documents.

It therefore cannot be assumed that activities previously identified as important to the development of the teaching profession – for example, mentor training as part of a high-quality induction period – will have a distinct status within the NPP compared to other forms of professional development.

The right to an induction period for newly qualified teachers is established in legislation, and school authorities are required to ensure that newly qualified teachers can complete such a period. However, there are currently no statutory requirements concerning the content of the induction period or the qualifications required of mentors.

The NPP is based on the principle that it should be largely driven by those in the profession, and that professional influence therefore should be substantial. As noted above, the Council for Professions in the School System supports Skolverket in monitoring and developing the NPP. According to the government's inquiry, professional influence is intended to be secured through the Council (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2022). Collaboration between the Skolverket and the Council has consequently been central to the development of the NPP and requires responsiveness and openness on both sides. There is also an ongoing need for dialogue and exchange with other stakeholders, including trade unions and employers' organisations, universities and university colleges.

The challenges described above reflect a broader international tension between top-down policy design and development driven by those in the profession, which has also been identified in research on teacher professional development. This suggests that the continued development of the NPP will need to consider how the programme's original objectives can be maintained while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to professional and local needs.

Conclusions

The title of this article, **Implementing a National Professional Programme in Sweden – balancing different perspectives on professional development,** reflects both the opportunities associated with implementing the NPP and the challenges involved in reconciling different perspectives on professional development. A fundamental principle emerging from the government inquiries is that a professional development programme should be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to changes in society and evolving professional needs. Views on how the NPP should develop continue to emerge among target groups and other stakeholders, while further proposals can also be expected from future government inquiries.

The current arrangements for continuing professional development and qualification within the NPP require teachers and preschool teachers to take leave from their regular duties to participate in relevant activities. Moreover, the current qualification system recognises academic qualifications but does not formally take acquired professional experience or professional skills into account. Both Skolverket and the Council have therefore identified a need for further consideration of how teaching expertise could be given greater weight within the qualification system.

The government has previously expressed an ambition to link the qualification system to the existing Career Teachers reform. Such a link could provide a clearer incentive for teachers to undertake continuing professional development and pursue qualification within the NPP.

Finally, there is a need to consider the introduction of compensatory measures within the NPP to promote equitable access to professional development for head teachers, teachers and preschool teachers. The current design provides no such mechanisms for schools and preschools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas or sparsely populated areas. Given that one of the objectives of the NPP is to promote greater equity in education, further measures may therefore be needed to ensure that opportunities for professional development are not unduly affected by local socioeconomic or geographical conditions.

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Institution profile

The Welsh Government (Welsh: Llywodraeth Cymru) is the devolved government of Wales, established in 1999 **following** the Government of Wales Act 1998. It is responsible for key areas of public life, including health, education, the environment, and economic development. The government is led by the First Minister of Wales, who selects ministers (Cabinet Secretaries) to lead policy, all of whom are accountable to the Senedd (Welsh Parliament). The Welsh Government Education Department is the body responsible for the devolved policy area of education, training, and children's services in Wales. It operates under the vision of education as a "national mission," prioritizing high standards and the mitigation of poverty's impact on attainment.

Cardiff Metropolitan University (Cardiff Met) is a public university located in Cardiff, Wales, with a history tracing back to 1865. It is known as a modern, career-focused institution, offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with a strong emphasis on employability, applied research, and industry partnerships. The Cardiff School of Education & Social Policy (CSESP) at Cardiff Metropolitan University is a major UK centre for Initial Teacher Education and wider education studies, with a history of pedagogic development dating back to 1962. Located at the Cyncoed campus, it offers a range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and research opportunities with a focus on practice-based learning.

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DR. MICHELLE JONES - Dr. Michelle Jones is currently Professor of Education and Co-Director of the Centre for International Research into Leadership in Education at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Prior to this, she held the position of Head of the School of Education at Swansea University, where she played a pivotal role in expanding the range of education programmes offered and securing research grants across the department. She is the academic lead for the Welsh Government's Postgraduate Programmes, which are delivered collaboratively by seven universities across Wales. This national role, funded by the Welsh Government, includes leading the National MA Education and National EdD (Wales).

Her professional experience also includes collaboration with government agencies in England, Singapore, Australia, and Malaysia. Additionally, she is the co-editor of the esteemed international journal 'School Leadership and Management', that publishes articles, reports, and information on all aspects of the organisation and management of schools and colleges.



KEVIN PALMER - Kevin Palmer is an adviser to the Welsh Government, specifically in relation to the Strategic Education Workforce Plan. Until recently he was Deputy Director for Pedagogy, Leadership and Professional Learning in Wales, a role that encompassed all aspects of Professional Learning for the school workforce and support for school leaders, pay and conditions of service for all staff, and the Education Directorate's international work.

Kevin's background includes teaching and leadership in Further and Higher Education, innovation in pedagogy and technology, and working across a range of industries to support remodelling of Training and Development. He has worked with universities, broadcasters and the voluntary sector to design and transform professional learning, and continues to be interested in how organisations can optimise their investment in people.

In addition to his work in education, PL and T&D spaces, Kevin's research interests include Strategic Foresight (SF) and the application of SF tools to a range of areas of education, including curriculum transformation and pedagogy, workforce configuration and development and innovation in infrastructure.

Supporting Reform Through Professional Learning

Authors: Dr. Michelle Jones, Kevin Palmer

Abstract

The context of the developments explored in this paper is the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales between 2018 and 2023. Alongside this, under the heading of Our National Mission, the Welsh system undertook reform of provision of support for learners with Additional Learning Needs. Amongst the challenges of this process were practitioners' capacity to realise the changes implied by the new curriculum, especially in respect of school-level curriculum making and the changes to pedagogy and practice that came with this. New developments were required across the professional landscape, focused in large part on pedagogy, leadership and professional learning.

The paper explores the role played by a number of aspects of policy development and realisation in relation to practitioners' readiness to engage with the changes that came with reform. It looks at: changes to professional standards and the induction of newly qualified teachers; changes to professional development review (formerly appraisal); the introduction of a National Approach to Professional Learning and the development and delivery of higher level qualifications to support practitioners at all levels, and; the current infrastructure for professional learning. The paper will conclude by discussing the lessons learnt in the areas in which the Welsh system developed measures to support reform.

Keywords: Professional Learning, Induction, INSET, Appraisal / Professional Development Review, Professional Standards

Introduction and context

The focus of this article is the range of measures taken in Wales to provide support for practitioners across the system in their realisation of the new Curriculum for Wales. The topics explored are the key structural aspects of Professional Learning (PL) in many education systems, and some of the key processes through which our teachers and leaders go in addressing the challenge of enacting reform. These include national approaches to PL and the realising of PL in the system, the context of PL in professionals' lives in practice, the professional standards we use to frame professional growth and development, and some of the processes we use to realise PL in the system. We take a multi-perspectival approach to PL in order to show how important it is to align policy, strategy and practice, and draw a line of sight from the highest levels of policy imperatives to the daily lives of our schools and the professionals who serve in them. We hope readers will recognise some of the challenges and opportunities we discuss, and take from the paper some new insights into the factors that need to be taken into account in formulating system-wide responses to the challenges of reform.

The Context, 1 - Our National Mission, The Curriculum and Pedagogy

In the CIDREE yearbook of 2025, Roberts-Ablett and Singh describe how 'The Curriculum for Wales (CfW) marks a transformative shift from traditional content-based approaches to a purpose-driven, progression-focused model, guided by four clearly articulated purposes for all learners' (Welsh Government, 2021a). (Fallon, and Hammond, (Eds.), 2025). This is the context for this paper, in which we will explore some of the measures taken by the Welsh system in respect of teachers' and leaders' capacity to realise the new curriculum. We will first describe the context from three perspectives: what the Welsh system called 'Our National Mission' (ONM) (Welsh Government, 2017); three of the key pedagogic characteristics of the new curriculum; and three implications of this for curriculum making at school level.

ONM was set out as an integrated and comprehensive reform programme, driven by four enabling objectives…

- Developing a high-quality education profession.
- Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards.
- Strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being.
- Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system. (Welsh Government, 2020).

All of these objectives required a degree of change and even transformation in the Welsh system. Taken together as an integrated programme, it was clear that all aspects of the workforce would be impacted - from Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and professionals supporting learning to experienced leaders at school and system level. (Evans, 2025).

At the level of practice in schools, the three pedagogic characteristics we would point to as distinctive and critically different in the new curriculum are:

- The organisation of the curriculum into Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) (Donaldson, 2015) with their implications for interdisciplinary planning and the merging of traditional subjects a into integrated domains
- The focus on experiential learning implied by the AoLE nomenclature, and the shift from the delivery of the curriculum to the realisation of experiences as vehicles for learning (Power, Newton, and Taylor, 2020).
- Individuated learning and progress (Donaldson, 2015) with the implications of this for preparation, planning, classroom activity and assessment.

When it comes to the implications of these changes for curriculum making, teaching, learning and assessment at school level, we would again look at three aspects of the process and how they imply a Professional Learning (PL) need. First, it's obvious that less direction or granularity at the national level creates space for interpretation and creativity at the school level - what some call the principle of subsidiarity (Donaldson, 2015). Second, this shifts the role of the teacher from delivery worker to creative collaborative professional (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012). And third, the distinctive interpretation of the concept of authenticity culturally, socially and geographically localises what is learnt and reframes its connections with the world beyond school. (Donaldson, 2015).

The Context, 2 - Learning, Teaching, Leading, Capacity

So we can see that an integrated reform programme focused on a purposes driven, holistic and progressive conceptualisation of the curriculum could bring challenges to teachers and leaders in a system that had not undertaken this level or range of reform in decades (Donaldson, 2016). What follows is a need for enhanced Professional Learning and even a degree of re-thinking of some of the architectural elements of the system - including Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Furlong, 2015), Induction (Waters, 2020), Professional Standards (Welsh Government, November 2017), leadership, system leadership, and the infrastructure underpinning pedagogy, research and enquiry. To appreciate this context more fully, we should look at learning, teaching and leading as altered forms of activity in the system, then at the capacity challenges faced by these three areas.

We have already said that teaching and learning shift in the context of the new curriculum, with learning becoming purposes rather than outcome driven (Donaldson, 2015), progression rather than level or attainment focused (Donaldson, 2015) and individual and experiential. These characteristics all require changes to thinking and practice compared with operating under the old curriculum.

The corollary of shifts in learning is of course shifts in teaching - we would not expect learning to change if teaching did not, and here the key shifts are toward constructivist, innovative, reflective, iterative, creative forms of practice. These terms are reflected as expectations in the Professional Standards for teachers and leaders (Thomas, Duggan, et al., 2023), and in the curricula for ITE (Welsh Government, 2018 and 2023), Induction (Welsh Government, August 2024) and the Welsh Headteacher qualification, the NPQH (Welsh Government, December 2025).

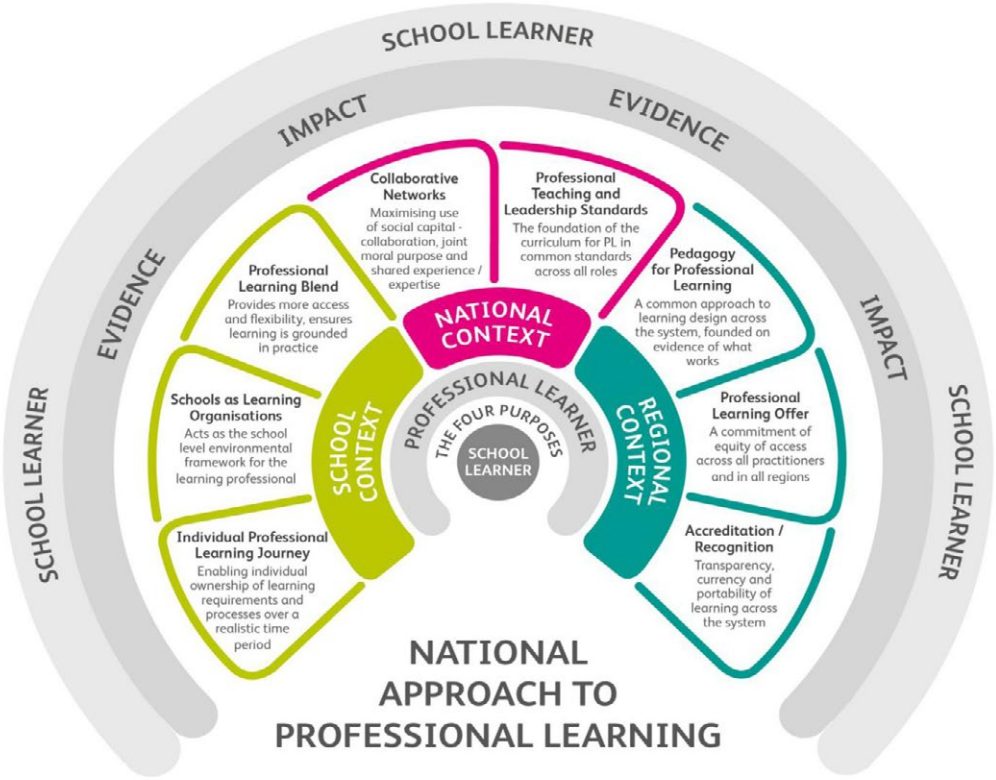
The critical aspect of the leadership of the system that is relevant to this discussion is transformation risk. There is no doubt that all schools, their Local Authorities (LAs) and the agencies supporting them to improve faced the need to manage the risk of transformation during the period of curriculum realisation - especially when this collided with COVID19 in March 2020 (Wales Centre for Public Policy, February 2021). This was more acute for secondary schools, who had to balance transformation in the first part of the secondary phase with the need for stability in years 10 and 11 in the face of unchanged qualifications (Michael Dauncey, Senedd Research, Welsh Parliament, 2024). There was also more transformation risk in the later years of primary than in the early years, where the Foundation Phase in Wales was largely seen as closer to the new curriculum than was Key Stage 2 (Welsh Government, Curriculum for Wales: Foundation Phase Framework, Revised 2015, Donaldson, 2015).

When we reflect on capacity, then, we can see three areas of challenge. In terms of pedagogic orientation, the shift from a knowledge delivery paradigm to an experience realisation paradigm calls for a constructivist as opposed to an instructional way of thinking about practice, or at least a balance of theoretical orientation ideally defined by understanding the needs to the moment, the group and the learner (Fallon and Donaldson, 2015). In terms of curriculum making and experience realisation as a development of the point above, the pedagogic skills required for the realisation of authentic learning experiences need to be woven into the process of curriculum making at school level, complicated by the need to do this across a new framing of the traditional disciplines (Donaldson, 2015). And structurally, at its crudest, the reform programme asked upper primary and lower secondary school practice to become more like the Foundation Phase (Donaldson, 2015), with upper secondary (years 10 and 11, but in many schools years 9, 10 and 11) carrying on delivering the high-stakes qualifications-based goods. These capacity issues are what drove the measures put in place by the Welsh Government and its strategic partners, and it is to these measures that we will now turn.

Standards and Policies: The National Approach to Professional Learning, the Professional Learning Entitlement and Professional Development Review / Appraisal

In this section we will describe the changes the Welsh system made to two key areas of support for Professional Learning in the context of reform. The first is the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) (Welsh Government, November 2018). The second is Professional Development Review (PDR) and the Professional Learning Entitlement (PLE) afforded to all practitioners in Wales (Welsh Government, 01 May 2012 / 18 March 2024, and National professional learning entitlement, Welsh Government, not dated).

The NAPL was introduced in 2018. It largely consisted of a set of design criteria for PL, but also engaged with the reform-based drivers of PL as follows:



The image above was widely used in 2018-19 to describe and explain the NAPL to Headteachers, teachers and those designing and providing PL for practitioners (Welsh Government, 30 April 2019 / 12 August 2022). You can see the main reform-oriented imperatives in the placing of the school learner and the four purposes at the centre, with the school learner appearing again in the outer ring of the model to emphasise the importance of PL to practice and learners' experiences. The design elements are in the segments of the model, and the objective here was that those with responsibility for design and delivery would take account of the elements and, for example, ensure that PL was effectively blended, realised through collaborative networks, aligned with an effective set of pedagogic imperatives and appropriately recognised or academically accredited.

As regards the recognition and accreditation point, at the time of the introduction of the NAPL, there was in existence a masters level qualification, the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) (Connolly, Hadfield, Barnes, & Snook, 2017). An evaluation of the Master's in Educational Practice (MEP) highlighted lessons learned, including the challenges of securing sufficient expertise within the Welsh education system to deliver the programme effectively and consistently (Connolly et al., 2017).

A new MA Education (Wales), was validated in April 2020, with the core aim of providing a high-quality, bilingual, master's-level qualification for educational professionals across Wales that would build capacity within the system to support education reform and transformation, including the new curriculum. The 'National MA', as it has become known, was developed collaboratively by seven universities across Wales, which collectively share responsibility for governance, quality assurance, teaching, and learning. Since its inception, the National MA has enrolled almost 1000 participants, the majority funded by the Welsh Government. Participants are mainly educators who work in schools or Further Education colleges, but the qualification also attracts other members of the education workforce in Wales. To ensure that this national qualification reflects policy priorities, the programme offers various specialist pathways (e.g., Leadership, Additional Learning Needs, (ALN) Curriculum, and Equity in Education), affording opportunities for deep professional engagement and enhanced expertise, thereby increasing professional capacity and capability within the Welsh system.

The impact of the National MA on educational professionals has been both positive and significant. Collaboration between universities in Wales has played a key role in the programme's success, alongside a shared commitment to enhancing professional capacity across the system. In 2024, a National EdD (taught doctorate) was validated. The impetus for this new programme came from feedback provided by students who had completed the National MA, and from the need to create a 'pipeline' of suitably qualified teachers for the MA. Many of these students joined the National EdD when it was launched in 2024, and a second cohort was recruited in 2025 (Connolly et al).

Alongside these paradigmatic measures, it was necessary for key processes to be refined or even redefined so that Professional Learning could play its part in the reform journey. The process we are going to describe is ongoing PDR in the context of a policy of PL entitlement.

For those who are in practice, they face the challenges we have already described but from the perspective of having taught under the previous curriculum regime. This is where ongoing PDR in the context of a policy of PLE play a part, and where both aspects of practitioners' professional lives required policy articulation and operational realisation. The key point about the operational reality of this support regime is that the elements need to be integrated - PDR provides a cultural context in which the Professional Standards and an entitlement to PL support the individual journey of the experienced teacher in the context of reform (Welsh Government, 16th May 2023).

The important aspects of the shifts from the point of view of their support for reform were that both sought to create, sustain or enrich cultural change. In the case of PDR, this was a shift from 'done-to' and box-ticking performative appraisal to a culture of open, self-critical and reflective professional judgement that helped move practice and people on a spirit of mutually respectful support and challenge. In the case of the PLE, the intention was to ensure that professionals at all levels recognised that, as articulated in the Standards, they were entitled to PL, but that in return the school system had a right, in line with the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model, to have expectations of how they might access and use it (Welsh Government, SLO Model, not dated).

Section 2: Professional Standards, Induction, INSET

The Professional Standards were transformed to take account of the culture of the new curriculum in 2017 (Report of the Auditor General for Wales, May 2022). The previous standards (updated 2011, (Thomas, Duggan, et al., 2023) were widely considered a behavioural tick-list, unlikely to create the transformative culture-change that the reforms required (Anderson, Davies, Lofthouse, Phillips, Kurnuc, & Jain, 2025). This set contained some 55 separate statements, pretty well all of them behavioural, easy and convenient to tick off in the context of a performative appraisal system but not designed to develop the sort of professionalism at all levels that reform called for (Furlong, 2016). The new set looked from above like this:

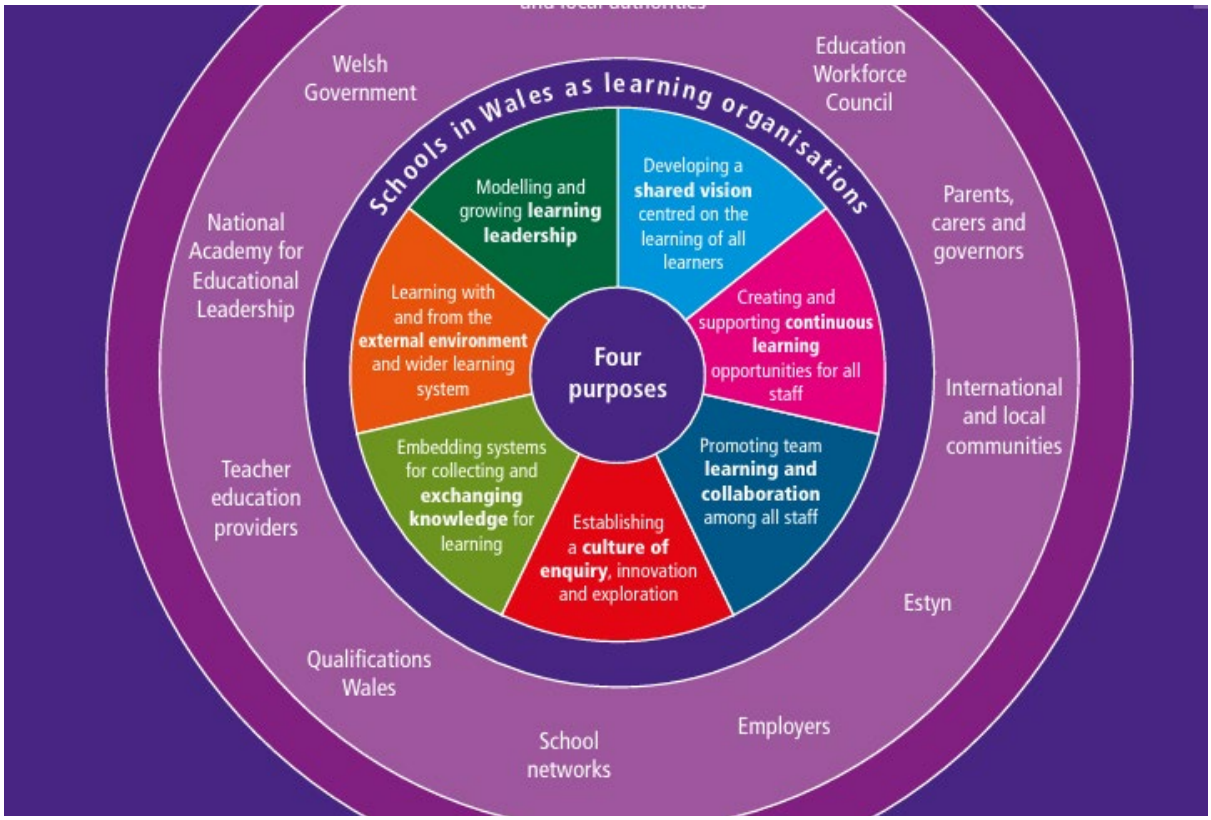


Here we can already see the key characteristics of a set of standards designed to underpin reform...

- In the centre, a focus on values and dispositions rather than behaviours and accountabilities - recognising that sustainable change cannot be made at the level of behaviour alone
- In the top element, a disproportionate space given to pedagogy in recognition of the capacity challenges already mentioned
- In the elements focusing on Pedagogy, Collaboration and Innovation a reflection on the realisation challenges referred to in our opening
- In the elements focusing on Professional Learning and Leadership, a recognition that (a) PL is lifelong and everyone's business and (b) Leadership happens in many parts of all professional communities

There are two other sets of connectivity between these standards and other features of the system. The first is that the standards indicated above also have their own manifestation in respect of the other significant workforce in Welsh schools, Teaching Assistants (TAs). TAs make up a significant part of the workforce, and provide support services ranging from in-class support for Additional Learning Needs to support for academic progress in Secondary schools. (Welsh Government, 01 November 2017 / 06 July 2020). Assisting teaching is considered an essential aspect of the realisation of learning experiences, and those practitioners providing TA services are considered professionals who work in partnership with teachers and leaders and who should have an appropriate set of Professional Standards to guide their practice and development (Welsh Government, 16th April and 28 October 2025).

The second connectivity is between the Standards operating at the level of the individual and the SLO model operating at the level of the school - the SLO model looks like this...



The connections between these two frameworks will be obvious just from the images - the driving imperative for having both frameworks in the system was to show how the key terms could operate and be developed at individual and institutional levels.

The main changes to Induction resulted from the application of the Professional Standards to judgements about whether an inductee should go forward to full qualification by 'passing' their induction process. All NQTs have to go through Induction to gain fully qualified status - this did not change. What changed was the standards in play for the process, the continuity of this with the newly designed ITE process and the alignment of the standards to the needs of curriculum reform.

In terms of INSET, the key change was the addition of an additional INSET day to the already existing allocation of five days in 2019 (Welsh Government, 14 December 2022). The PL undertaken on the additional day was not prescribed, but schools

generally used it to address curriculum reform, the emerging requirements of reform to Additional Learning Needs provision and, as a result of the demands of COVID19, blended and digital learning (Welsh Government, March 2026). The additional day continues to be available to schools, and the position on it is that the Welsh Government is in consultation on making it permanent.

So we can see that the Welsh system invested in a range of measures to enable PL to address the capacity challenges of the new curriculum. We will go on in a moment to discuss these in more detail, but in summary we have described development in respect of:

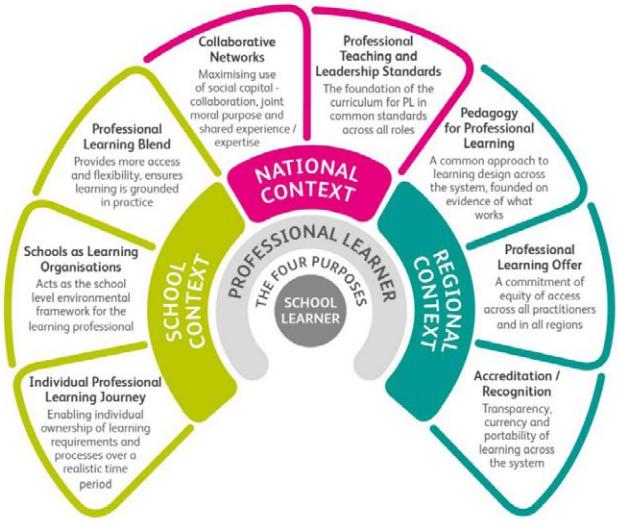
- The National Approach to Professional Learning;
- Professional Development Review and Professional Learning Entitlement for all practitioners;
- New Professional Standards for all school-based practitioners;
- Induction of those entering the profession;
- In Service Education and Training;
- Accredited PL in the form of the Masters and EdD.

We will discuss each of these in more detail next, leading us toward our conclusions and lessons learned.

Discussion 1: The National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) and National Accredited PL, the Professional Learning Entitlement and Professional Development Review / Appraisal

The NAPL and Accredited PL

When we described the NAPL above, we focused on how it was designed ensure a higher degree of consistency through design criteria for PL that were aligned with the reform programme. We can develop this description further by looking at some of the key design criteria and considering whether they do indeed support the imperatives of the reforms. This is a reminder of the design criteria from P.6 above:



The question to ask of each of these criteria is, how does this support the principles of reform? For ease of access and clarity, we might array this analysis as a table, working from left to right across the criteria as follows:

Criterion	Relationship with the reform agenda - supporting the principles of reform by...
IPLJ	Recognising the locus of responsibility for PL as set out in the Standards using the principle of subsidiarity - the right thing at the right level in the system
SLO	Governing the effective school operating environment when the emphasis is on change or transformation
PL Blend	Enabling access across a whole jurisdiction for teachers in a wide variety of schools and teachers in all stages, phases and subjects
Collaborative Networks	Recognising the importance of mutuality, co-construction and collaboration and the scale of the tasks that need sharing across individuals
PTLS	Providing a stable, reform-focused basis for the curriculum for PL
Pedagogy for PL	Recognising that PL is governed by its own needs and expectations, and that sustainable PL involves a range of approaches and practices
The PL Offer	Ensuring that all practitioners across all schools experience equality of access to PL for new practices and approaches
Accreditation / Recognition	Making PL visible and transferable across networks of schools, and applies quality criteria to give practitioners confidence in the investment they are making

As with the other areas we have considered, despite the apparent internal logic of this approach and its coherence with other measures, the NAPL had a variable impact on the design and experience of Professional Learning in the Welsh system (Hutt, Smith and Jones, 2024).

In line with the NAPL, the National MA and the National EdD are both designed to offer consistency of professional experience across both programmes. The National delivery model, which is premised on collaboration between universities within an agreed quality assurance framework, is deliberately intended to mitigate against any variation in content, quality, and experience that professionals may encounter.

Both the National Masters and the National EdD benefit from two features that are difficult to replicate at a local or regional level. The first is the Quality Assurance Frameworks and requirements that all universities must adhere to, ensuring the teaching and learning programmes are robust. The second is the extensive shared expertise pooled from participating universities, which helps reduce the potential for variability and inconsistency that could arise when such economies of scale were not as pronounced. Feedback from participants underlines the equitable nature of both programmes and a sense that the interdependence of universities adds significant value to the nature and quality of both qualifications.

Professional Development Review and Professional Learning Entitlement

When we described Professional Development Review (PDR) and Professional Learning Entitlement (PLE) above, we said that both sought to create, sustain or enrich cultural change. Firstly, we described a shift from 'done-to' and box-ticking performative appraisal and secondly, we described the attempt to ensure that professionals at all levels recognise that they are entitled to PL and in turn have professional expectations placed upon them by this entitlement. We can unpack these descriptions now by looking at further detail for both areas.

To start with PDR, the relevant guidance from Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 01 May 2012 / 18 March 2024), highlights the following three value positions as key to the process:

- **Affiliation**: developing ownership and connection to professional development review...
- **Agency**: having time and space to engage with, reflect on and map out your own professional learning journey...
- **Ambition**: setting your ambitions for professional growth by using the professional standards... as a framework for continuous improvement.

In addition, the guidance sets out a suite of principles underpinning the PDR process. We have identified some of those we consider to be key to the realisation of reform, with our emphasis added:

- An **entitlement for all practitioners** working in 1 school for 1 complete term or 2 consecutive half terms
- **Celebrates strengths,** recognises progress towards goals and promotes further development
- Part of a **culture of mutual trust and respect**
- An integral element of team learning and **collabora**tion
- Linked to a commitment to career-long **professional growth**
- Supports the individual's **professional learning journey** and guided by individual reflection and support from peers within the school or from another school
- Accompanied by **high-quality professional learning** and on-going, focused professional dialogue.

A similar emphasis on sustainable cultural change can be seen when we look at the PLE. This is what Welsh Government guidance says about the PLE:

The aim of the Entitlement is to promote the support practitioners, system leaders and advisors are entitled to. The Entitlement sets out how the continued development of practitioners will support the schools or settings in which they work and their learners to realise the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales, supporting learners with additional learning needs and embedding equity, well-being and the Welsh language across the whole-school community.

(Welsh Government, National professional learning entitlement, undated)

If we look at the table in which the PLE is articulated, this time focusing on leaders, we see the attempt to capture a spirit of mutuality in the individual's relationship to PL.

Entitlement/expectation statements for leaders	Effective practice in meeting and responding to the entitlement/expectation	Sustained highly-effective practice in meeting and responding to the entitlement/expectation (in addition to those noted in the effective practice column)
As a leader I am entitled to well designed professional learning based on the principles of the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) that includes a blend of approaches and opportunities for reflection, enquiry and collaboration for learning.	• Accessing a planned professional learning programme and stimulating resources. • Support in leading or facilitating school or setting level enquiry into identified priority areas. • Purposeful collaboration for school or setting improvement with other schools or settings in your local and regional area.	• Opportunities to contribute to professional learning provision for leaders beyond the school or setting, for example to share thinking and practice. • Opportunities to engage with and support local authority, regional and/or national enquiry programmes. • Opportunities for purposeful collaboration for school or setting improvement with other schools or settings on a regional, national and/or international level.

Here the language is about what leaders are entitled to, in line with the NAPL and seen through the lens of the standards, balanced by what the leader is expected to do to promote not only their own PL but also the PL interests of their staff. The practice indicators and their framing also invoke the standards in an attempt to make the measure consistent with the other measures designed to support reform.

As with the adoption and application of the standards, we can reasonably predict that there is variability across the system in the way these tools and the principles behind them have been applied (OECD, 2021). What the measures and tools provide is a transparent and coherent approach to PL, but what they cannot provide is a guarantee that all practitioners in all schools are able to adopt and apply them in the ways in which they were intended.

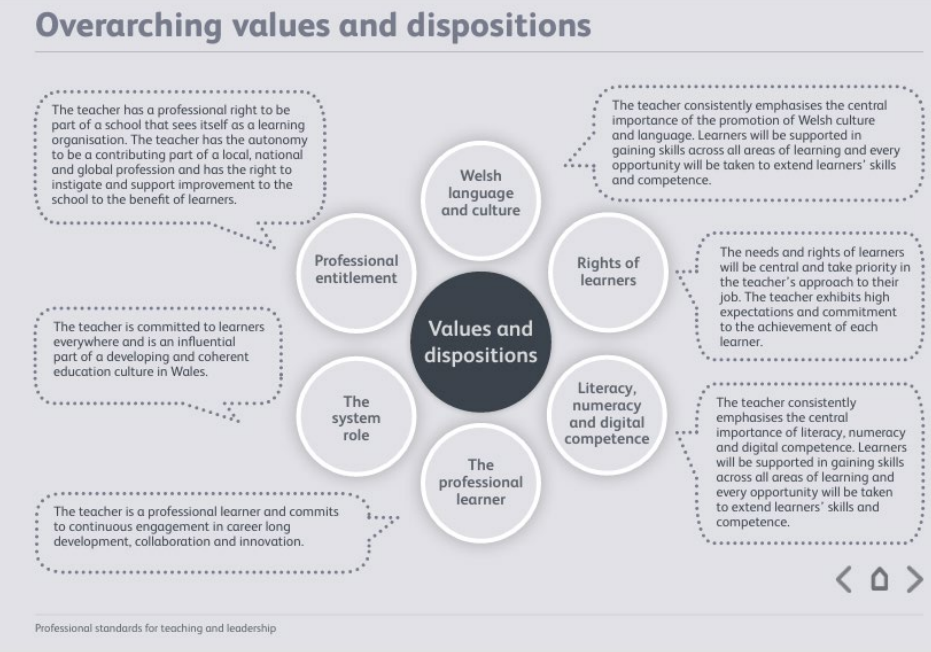
Discussion 2: Professional Standards, Induction and INSET

New Professional Standards for All School-Based Practitioners

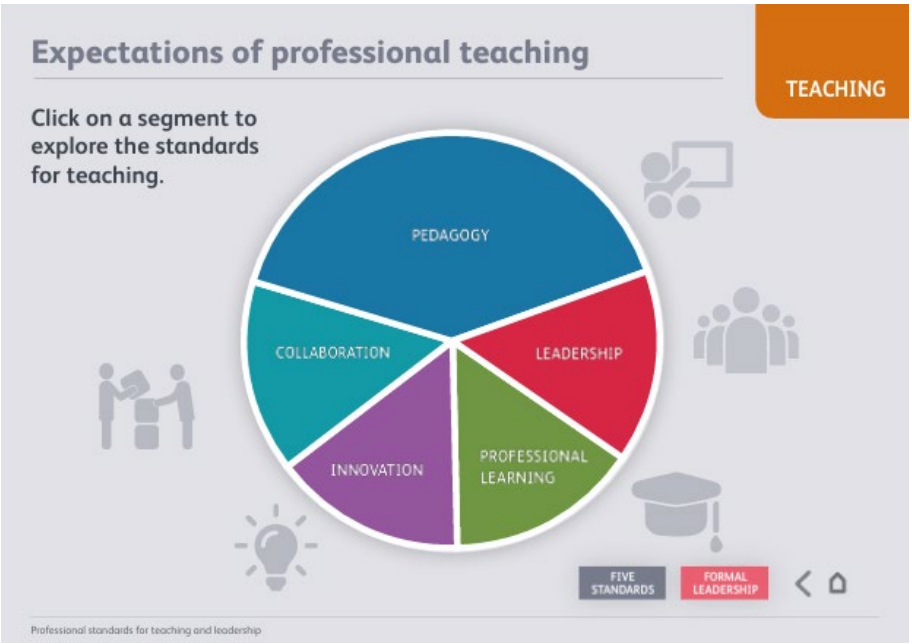
We set out in the description above the main changes that took place in respect of the Professional Standards. We will look now at some of the detail of the new standards, and how they could be expected to support system level reform through support for individual development and transformation. This is what the Professional Standards document says about the relationship between standards and reform:

The standards concentrate on the essential elements of every teacher's work – pedagogy, collaboration, leadership, innovation and professional learning – and will help underpin the development of the teaching profession as it leads the transformation of our education system in Wales. (Welsh Government, 01 November 2017 / 06 July 2020)

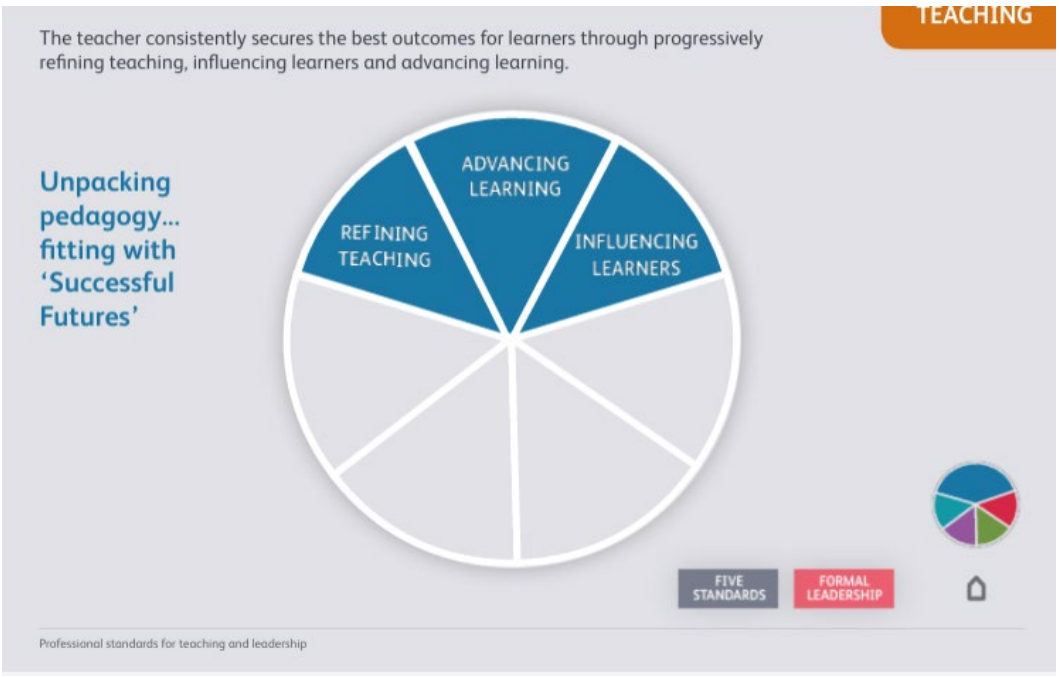
And this image shows the values and dispositions-based approach that underpins details about pedagogy, collaboration and so on:



So, we have in the standards an interaction between two structures. One sets out what matters in practice and the other sets out a group of values and dispositions that seek to describe the key elements of professional identity for those seeking to develop their professionalism. Whether they are TAs, teachers or formal leaders, these two structures are common. When we get down to a level of detail, we really see how far curriculum reform informs the thinking - we'll go down to the detail in respect just one of the sets of descriptors, starting from the opening framework...

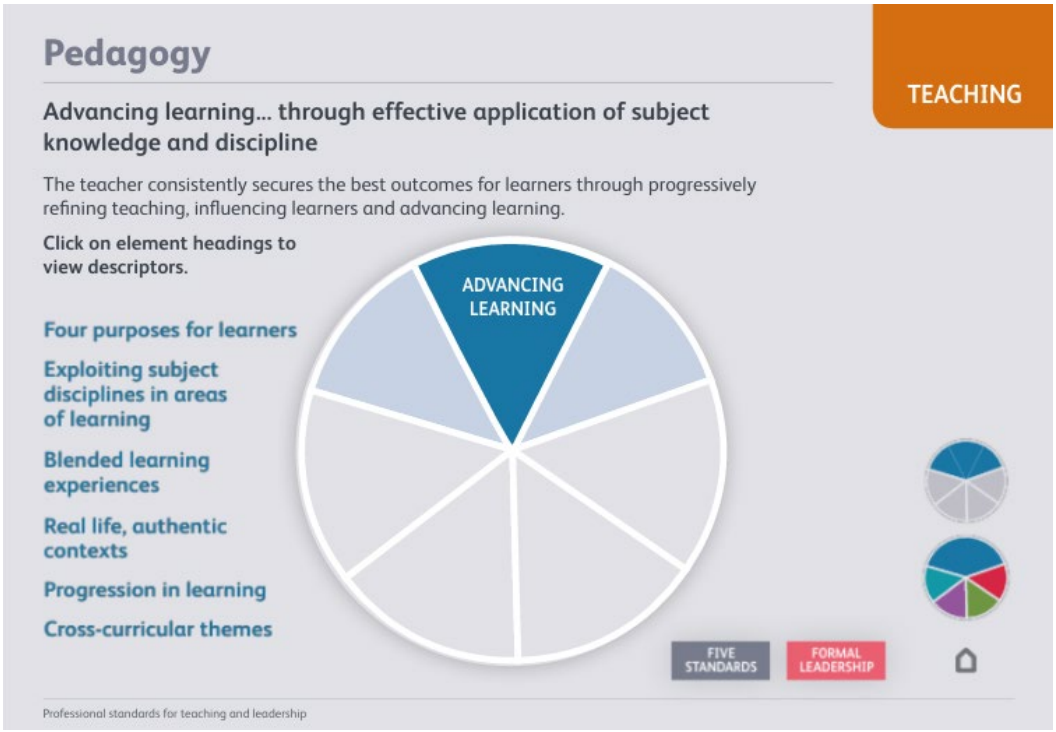


From this opening framework, we could go down into the levels of detail for any of the five segments. In each case we would see the standards reflecting the imperatives of the new curriculum, from pedagogic understanding to active teacher agency, to multi-layer leadership and the importance of collaborative approaches and networks. Focusing on **Pedagogy** takes us to:



Note the reference to **Successful Futures,** the core background report for the new curriculum, and how these feeds into the three segments considered in the standards most likely to inform successful curriculum realisation.

Then go down a level into **Advancing Learning** and you get on the left of the screen these more detailed foci for learning design and classroom practice:

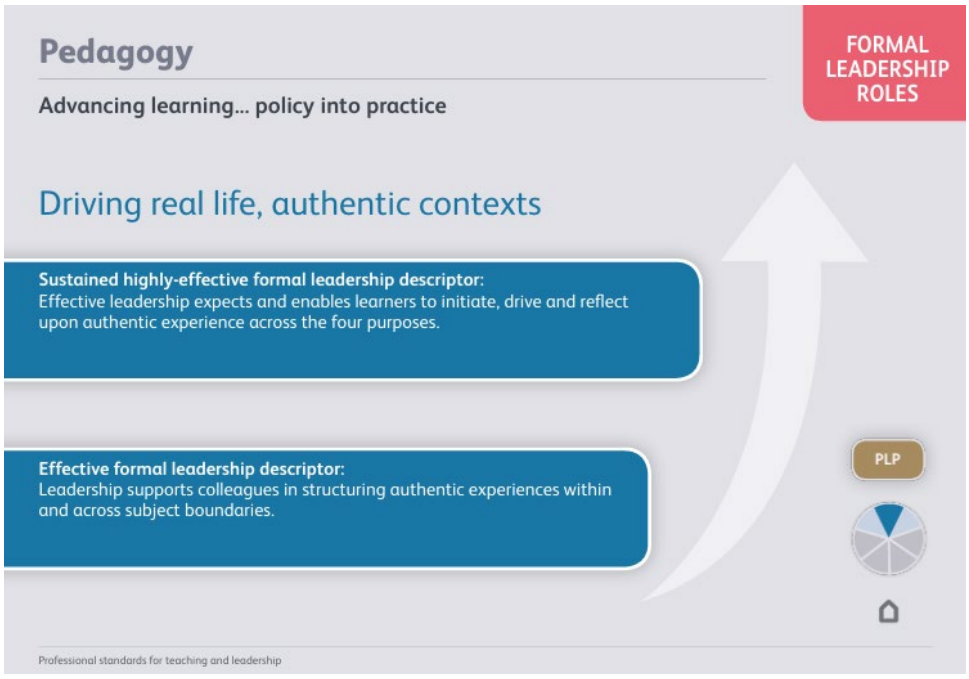


And finally, if you focus on **real life authentic contexts** you get the practice descriptors:



This is where we see not behavioural or performative standards, but expectations of what learning will look like and do in the process of realising the curriculum, and how teachers can progress in their practice in all of the segments.

If we went through the same process for the standards for leaders and TAs, we would find ourselves operating in a common paradigm with common language and descriptors that would inform each other in a conversation between a TA, a leader and a teacher. Just to illustrate with the end-point of the process above for formal leadership and the TA:



and



So a rigorous application of these standards by the whole workforce in a school that was an effective Learning Organisation would clearly underpin the reform journey at both individual and the institutional levels. As we would expect, though, this has not been the story of the implementation of the standards at school level (Welsh Government, 16 May 2023). Where the standards have been deployed as part of PDR, where they have been deployed in support of NQTs, and where the school works as part of an ITE partnership, the standards have made a more significant contribution to reformed practice. But many schools reported in a range of studies that COVID19 and curriculum reform had had such an impact on available time and space for development that the connection between the standards and the new curriculum was not always clearly understood (Welsh Government, 26 March 2026).

Induction

We see a similar set of policy and operational challenges when we look at Induction. In our description above we focused mainly on how the standards characterised professional progress during the induction phase. Here we can discuss Induction further.

During the autumn of 2019 and spring of 2020, finishing just before the period of lock down, a review of Induction in Wales was undertaken by Professor Mick Waters (Waters, November 2020). It followed on from the review of ITE by John Furlong already referenced (Furlong, 2015), and was a further key element of the system's rethinking the role of teachers in the context of reform. The review was critical of many aspects of the induction experience - from the security of employment of teachers at the start of their careers to the quality and consistency of support they enjoyed and the allocation of time they received for reflection and practice development as opposed to gathering evidence of their competence. And then COVID19 happened, throwing the system into challenge from March 2020 to at least August 2022. What we can discuss about induction now, some four years after this, is what are the key aspects of the Induction process, what is the role of the Professional Standards, and what might the future look like.

Key aspects of the induction experience include (Welsh Government, 28 August 2024):

- Defined support from school leadership.
- A dedicated Induction Mentor (IM).
- An Induction Validator to quality assure induction arrangements.
- A role called Appropriate Body (AB) to cover the overall supervision and training of an NQT undertaking induction and for ensuring that induction meets the statutory requirements - this role has been in place since 2015 and has undergone a number of iterations in detail since that time. It is a statutory component of the induction process and is intended to underpin quality and consistency in the induction of NQTs
- A defined range and scope of PL Entitlement that is specific to Inductees.

The role of the professional standards remains a key element in the PL curriculum for NQTs - ultimately the NQT goes forward to full qualification on the basis of the evidence of their professional abilities in respect of the standards. The intention of the policy area is that PL and mentoring/supervision will enhance the role of the standards in supporting the NQT.

The future of Induction will in large part rely on whether and how the recently published Strategic Education Workforce Plan for Schools (Welsh Government, 18 March 2026) is adopted by the incoming Government in May 2026. At the time of writing, the Welsh Government has recently changed, and it remains to be seen what aspects of the Plan will be taken forward by the new government.

Probably the key commitment to PL in that document is this…

Develop and deliver a structured Early Career Pathway to support teachers during their ITE and their first 3 to 4 years of teaching, including quality mentoring. The pathway will be aligned to the Professional Standards.

There are other commitments - across wider PL and INSET, the Welsh Language and other areas covered in this paper - that are designed to improve the professional experience of early career teachers and enhance the perception of the professional identity of the community, including those supporting learning and formal leaders.

In Service Education and Training (INSET)

With INSET, we focused above on the additional INSET day and suggested the key areas for INSET as curriculum reform, ALN and blended and digital learning. In the recent evaluation of INSET (Welsh Government, 26th March 2026), the key issues reported were:

- Most settings use a combination of full days and twilight sessions
- In the 2025 to 2026 academic year, INSET content was predominantly planned to focus on curriculum design , safeguarding, additional learning needs and cluster collaboration
- While the WG does not mandate specific INSET content, senior leaders described activity related to safeguarding, health and safety, and behaviour and medical training as “mandatory”
- While schools that participated in fieldwork did not reference the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) directly, planning processes described by leaders did reflect some of its principles
- The sixth INSET day was described as increasing capacity to address national reform priorities
- INSET days were perceived to have a positive impact on practitioners
- There was strong support for the continuation of the sixth INSET day
- The evaluation ends with 10 recommendations on how the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Dysgu can further support INSET

Conclusions - conditions under which these measures have supported curriculum reform

From our descriptions and discussions of the various PL measures deployed in Wales to support curriculum reform, we can offer some conclusions about the conditions under which these measures have been supportive. We will look at each of the six areas in turn.

A National Approach to Professional Learning is incredibly difficult to deliver in balance with a subsidiarity based approach to the curriculum. They appear to pull in different directions, and they will do so unless the NAPL conveys a clear vision of what PL is and how it works, especially in the balance of learning and enquiry for the practitioner - this is what hands the real responsibility and ownership of learning to the professional. If the NAPL operates as a genuine and visible quality assurance measure across all providers in a system, it can be seen as providing a level of confidence, especially to practitioners who might have been through the PL mill a

few times, and especially in a jurisdiction with an open market in PL providers. But we should recognise that a NAPL is least effective as a tick-box exercise in meeting regulatory requirements.

Both the National MA Education (Wales) and the National EdD (Wales) have supported curriculum reform and implementation in several important ways. Firstly, both programmes offer consistently high-quality professional learning that underscores the importance of the education workforce in Wales by providing professional recognition. Secondly, an All-Wales approach supports the reform process by developing professionals who are creative, innovative, and can actively lead rather than passively follow, which is a cornerstone of Curriculum for Wales (CfW). Thirdly, the development of a collaborative ethos across the education workforce is fostering better networking and lateral relationships, which encourage effective collective problem-solving and broker new solutions and ways forward amid complexity and large-scale reform in Wales.

PDR is likely to support reform, any other significant change programme or even scheduled school improvement activity when all practitioners in the school enjoy a common, high-quality entitlement, including TAs and those in the most senior management in the school. This entitlement is to a mutually supportive, robust and open process, having the greatest impact on professional experience and identity when treated by all parties as an opportunity for growth and improvement through collaboration. PDR is less effective when treated as performative or ritualistic, the first leading to risk of not addressing issues and the second running the risk of repetitive behaviour with little prospect of sustainable change.

Investing in policy or practice around the realisation of a PLE is most likely to be effective when treated as a high priority in the context of a Learning Organisation, with leaders sharing and modelling their own PLE, both in the entitlement and expectation domains. When the entitlement and expectation are in balance and apply across the whole workforce, teachers and TAs see leaders and the Head contributing to the growth of the school and the contribution of the school to its social and professional communities. When the PLE is focused on the needs of the practitioner and their school or group, the benefits are felt most immediately and sustainably. The wider school community will support practitioners' learning when they see the benefits it bestows on children and young people in the school.

With the Professional Standards, we can say that these are best understood in areas, schools and teams where investment is made in interpretation and sense-making, and where a sense of ownership of the standards is enhanced through processes of co-construction. As they are national standards, co-construction in their creation is necessarily limited, but the processes of interpreting and applying can be co-constructed. The standards will make a difference in schools where the whole workforce is committed to the culture of self-improvement, premised on honest and robust self-evaluation and a recognition of professional responsibility for improvement. They do not have the intended effect when they are used as accountability measures or behavioural tick-boxes.

Induction has (like all PL) highest value to the NQT when it focuses on practical needs - areas such as behaviour, understanding the range of diversities in the school and the classroom and subject knowledge (Clinton, Lisa & Farrell, Ann, 2026) are visible benefits not just for the teacher but for learners in school. Induction needs to be a combination of individual support and mentoring and ongoing instruction, balancing the often-personal support needed in the early career phase with the need for cognitive growth, skill development and cohort affiliation. Induction needs to recognise the skills and knowledge the NQT has from ITE and build on these, to be progressive and personalised in design. It is ineffective when the NQT is not given

structured time, reduced workload or support to develop.

With INSET, there are four conclusions. First, and like Induction, structured and protected time need to be allocated across the school, with no exceptions for the Head or the TA group. The school, its Governing Body and Local Authority need to identify a balance of national and local drivers for the focus of INSET, with any national priority being supported by universally available and high-quality resources. It is essential to have transparency of what is 'statutory', ideally with a clear link to the regulation or legislation that renders PL so, and with alignment at national and local level about what INSET should include. This is extremely difficult in complex systems, especially where systems want to invest in subsidiarity and the multi-layered nature of decision making implied by this. It's a long story in Wales, but the key point is transparency and certainty. Finally, INSET needs to be designed based on evidence of what works in PL and delivered by those with the experience and expertise to be credible across the workforce.

Lessons learned - three perspectives in the system

In this paper, we have looked at six areas in which the Welsh system developed measures to support reform. The conditions under which these approaches have been most effective have been identified, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions about the lessons that Wales, and other jurisdictions, might take from this reform trajectory. This concluding section outlines the key lessons, drawing on three perspectives within the system: policymakers, professional learning designers and providers, and school Practitioners. These lessons are grouped into three areas: NAPL and Qualifications; PDR and PLE; and Standards, Induction and INSET.

Considering the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL), the key lesson for policymakers lies in the importance of both vertical and horizontal alignment. A subsidiarity-based approach must operate coherently across policy domains to avoid fragmentation, confusion, or conflict. Misalignment between system tiers—including policymakers, system leaders, and school leaders—risks distortion of policy intent as it moves through the system, leading either to gaps or to competing interpretations in practice.

A further lesson emerging from the development and delivery of the National MA Education (Wales) and the National EdD (Wales) is the value of authentic collaboration. Although challenging to establish and sustain, collaboration across universities has enabled collective responsibility for programme design and delivery. This shared ownership supports coherence, coordination, and integration of expertise, ensuring that programmes are enriched by multiple perspectives and provide a consistently high- quality professional learning experience for participants from diverse backgrounds.

Finally, for practitioners, we go back to the importance of PL and enquiry in the forming and sustaining of professional identity (OECD, March 2025). Many professions (and the teaching profession in some other jurisdictions (GTC Scotland, undated) formalise PL as a professional requirement and set out conditions under which commitment to PL is a condition of membership of the professional community. Whether the system does this or not (and perhaps especially if not), learners need their teachers to be learners, and professional regard in the community can only be enhanced by the formal recognition of the professional's commitment to being a lifelong professional learner.

In relation to professional development review (PDR) and professional learning entitlement (PLE), a central lesson for policymakers concerns the need for clarity and communication. PDR is often conflated with performance management, and policy must therefore clearly distinguish between these processes while articulating the relationship between them (Welsh Government, 2012, 2013, 2024). PLE must similarly be understood not as a compliance mechanism but as a structured entitlement that supports practitioner development and agency.

For those responsible for delivery, PDR and PLE must be designed and enacted with a focus on fitness for purpose, consistency, and transparency. Delivery agents are required to model the practices they seek to promote. Where enquiry, collaboration, or innovation are central to reform, these principles must be embedded within professional learning systems, including PDR processes. Alignment between the expectations placed on schools and those enacted by professional learning providers is essential if credibility and coherence are to be maintained across the system.

In practice, and this is a difficult lesson to learn for some parts of the system in particular, the lesson is to claim the entitlement and show peers and those around you that this ultimately (and visibly) has a positive impact on practice and outcomes. The same principle applies to practitioners as it does to professional learning (PL) providers. If reform directs standards towards pedagogy, collaboration, and innovation, and these in turn depend on active and critical self-evaluation, then these elements must shape not only how professional learning is enacted but also how the curriculum is developed and realised in everyday practice.

In relation to professional standards, induction, and INSET, the evidence points to the importance of alignment across policy and practice. We suggest that professional standards must be integrated into school improvement processes and linked explicitly to PDR to maximise their impact. However, the Waters report (2020) highlights variability in induction practices across the system, presenting a continuing challenge, particularly where resources are constrained. Evidence suggests that tighter resource conditions increase the likelihood that induction entitlements may be compromised, highlighting the need for sustained attention at policy level. For INSET, the evaluation report highlighted the importance of alignment between school development planning and INSET, addressing barriers such as workload and limited planning time, and ensuring coherence in the roles of supporting agencies.

Delivery agents should focus on relevance and quality, ensuring that standards and induction are framed by the benefits that accrue from applying them in practice. The curriculum for induction needs to be framed by the standards and articulated in the context of that which is being reformed, and PL for NQTs needs to be aligned with the curriculum that applies across the workforce - it's especially important that school leaders and NQTs are getting the same messages, particularly in areas where there might be controversy or dispute.

For practitioners, engagement with standards, induction, and INSET should be understood as a core dimension of professional identity. Professional learning is most effective when it is embedded from the earliest stages of a career and supported by approaches that enable critical se lf-evaluation and sustained engagement with enquiry. In this respect, enquiry emerges as a key mechanism for long-term professional growth and system improvement (Milton, &Morgan, 2023).

Overall, the Welsh education system illustrates the importance of alignment, collaboration, and professional capacity-building as drivers of reform. While challenges remain, particularly in ensuring consistency and resource equity, the emphasis on professional learning as both entitlement and responsibility provides a strong foundation for continued development.

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