

Research Strategy

1. Context

Everything the Council does is ultimately focused on teaching and learning. This is with the aim of ensuring that the educational experience of pupils in schools is the best it can be. This is the same for the teaching profession.

Three pillars that support the Council and the profession in this work are Research, Reflective Practice and Relationships. Research by and for teachers is essential to support their learning and practice as professionals. The Council's work also depends on quality research in order to make the best decisions possible in the interests of teaching and learning.

The Council views research as inextricably bound to teaching, learning and assessment. It involves asking significant but tentative questions around processes, practices, and mindsets. The Council places great importance on the accessibility of research, as an informed yet approachable mechanism for addressing key issues. As such, research entails active reflection and critical thinking, undertaken in school or other contexts, both with and for school communities, and indeed beyond. Hence, it is collaborative and collegial, with a view toward the generation and sharing of knowledge so as to positively impact on teaching and learning.

This strategy provides the framework for the Council's work in terms of its own research programme, and its work towards embedding a culture of research in the profession. It has been developed cognisant of the rich tradition of educational research in Ireland, and the existence of an active research community.

It was first published in March 2007, updated in March 2012 and again in December 2015. In that time, the Council's work in the area of research has involved, inter alia:

- the establishment and funding of a series of annual research bursary programmes
- the commissioning of research to inform its policy-making in a range of areas including induction/*Droichead*, school placement, job satisfaction and stress in teaching, the continuum of teacher education, and the role of self-study action research in teacher professional development
- the establishment of a research engagement group comprised of practising teachers and others who wish to promote engagement by teachers in and with research, and to strengthen the connections between research, policy and practice
- the provision of free access to online research by registered teachers
- co-hosting a research conference in 2013
- the hosting of a ResearchMeet as part of Féilte 2015, as a forum for teachers to share their research findings and/or discuss and explore their research ideas or proposals
- the launching of the #MolFeasa hashtag for conversations and sharing of ideas about research on teaching and learning in Ireland, on Twitter.

2. Priority Research Areas

In carrying out its research function, and in promoting a culture of research in the profession, the Council identifies areas which are of particular research interest. These are referred to as Priority Research Areas, and are identified having regard to:

- a) the objects of the Council as set out in the Teaching Council Acts, 2001–2015
- b) the aims and objectives identified in the Council’s Strategic Plan, 2015–2017
- c) The ongoing collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on *Research Alive!*

These priority research areas will be reviewed, and updated as appropriate, each time the Council updates its Strategic Plan. In doing so, the Council will consult with teachers and other partners in education. Click [here](#) to see the current list of priority research areas.

3. Implementation of this Strategy

This strategy incorporates two principal research strands:

- 1) the undertaking of research by the Council or the commissioning of external researchers or agencies to conduct research, and
- 2) the management of a range of initiatives aimed at promoting and supporting teachers’ engagement with research, embedding a culture of research in the profession and strengthening connections between research, policy and practice.

As part of its annual budgetary process, the Council will allocate up to ten per cent of its overall budget to cover the costs of implementation, having regard to the objectives set out in its Strategic Plan. Where appropriate, it may seek to supplement this through appropriate external sources of funding. The programme is co-ordinated by the Teaching, Learning and Research section of the Council, but it may supplement its in-house research team by procuring external research management support services through an open competitive tendering process.

3.1. Conducting or Commissioning Research

There are a number of means by which the Council conducts or commissions research and these include:

- In-house Research
- Commissioned Research
- Collaborative research with other bodies.

3.1.1 In-house research

Where appropriate, the Council will undertake research projects in-house. This approach may be used to aid the preparation of submissions and reports on educational issues. It may also be used to complement other approaches, for example, when in-house expertise is used for elements of a project while other elements may be outsourced.

3.1.2 Commissioned research

The Council's conceptualisation of research is a broad one, and commissioned research may take a number of forms from academic research, to market research, to action research conducted by teachers.

Academic research projects may be outsourced to an individual tenderer (which may involve a group of teachers working collaboratively) or a consortium of institutions or agencies.

With specific reference to market research, the Council may appoint a market research company to carry out attitudinal surveys on a sample of its target audience or, where appropriate, on demographically and geographically controlled samples of the population. Such surveys provide a cost-effective way of obtaining a quick response from a large audience.

In all cases, the research is commissioned in accordance with the Council's obligations in relation to public procurement. Tenders are evaluated having regard to set criteria and deliverables specified in an Invitation to Tender document. A performance contract is agreed with the successful tenderer.

Once complete, the Council publishes the findings arising out of research on its website or through such other media as deemed relevant, subject to any copyright or intellectual property ownership issues.

3.1.3 Collaborative research with other Teaching Councils and other relevant organisations

Where appropriate, the Teaching Council may carry out joint research in areas of mutual interest with other Teaching Councils and other relevant organisations such as Higher Education Institutions, management bodies, international education bodies, national research bodies, etc.

Such research collaborations have the potential to allow the Council to share its research costs and/or compare Irish findings with those obtained in another jurisdiction using an identical research methodology. In deciding on the appropriateness or otherwise of a collaboration, the Council would have regard to:

- the alignment of the partner organisation's strategic objectives with those of the Council
- the potential for the partner organisation to bring distinct expertise to the process
- the potential for the proposed collaboration to support and inform policy development and implementation at a strategic national level
- the potential for the collaboration to contribute to the enhancement of connections between research, policy and practice for teaching and learning, including supporting teachers in their ongoing learning
- the potential to contribute to the academic discourse on matters of strategic relevance to Council
- any potential for conflict of interest.

3.2. Initiatives aimed at promoting and supporting teachers' engagement with research, embedding a culture of research in the profession and strengthening connections between research, policy and practice

The Teaching Council wishes to support the development of a vibrant research culture within the profession, whereby teachers as reflective practitioners and enquiry-oriented learners are actively engaging in and with research, and confidently using research in reviewing and developing their practice on an ongoing basis.

Through a range of initiatives, it seeks to highlight the interface between research, policy and practice, by identifying the relevance of research for particular areas of practice, and also, the potential for research from a number of disciplines to support teaching and learning in a truly innovative way.

The interface between research and practice also has a human dimension, and it is exemplified through authentic engagement between teachers and researchers as people who care about teaching and learning.

3.2.1 Research bursaries

In implementing its research strategy, the Teaching Council will, from time to time, run research bursary programmes to support:

- groups of teachers who come together as a professional learning community to share, engage with, and reflect on research, and the impact of research findings on their practice and on policy development
- teachers carrying out practitioner-based research, particularly where it:
 - involves collaboration between two or more teachers from different schools or between schools and institutions and will contribute in a demonstrable way to learning and teaching
 - relates to one or more of the priority research areas which have been identified by the Council
 - other individuals wishing to carry out research in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment, where such research relates to one or more of the priority research areas which have been identified by the Council. In particular, the Council would welcome collaborations between such groups and practising teachers.

The Council will publish periodic updates from those professional learning communities who are being supported by way of a research bursary. Summaries of research funded by way of its bursaries will also be published.

Only those expenses directly associated with engaging with, or undertaking, research, will be considered for support by Council. [Please click here](#) for details of any bursary programmes which are currently operational.

3.2.2 Research events

Under the banner of Research Alive!, in co-operation with the NCCA and CES, the Teaching Council wishes to provide a space within which research capacity and culture in the Irish teaching profession can be enhanced. To that end, it periodically hosts research conferences, workshops and other events which bring together teachers, researchers and other stakeholders to discuss and explore teachers' experience of, engagement with, and access to, educational research.

In particular, its annual Féilte (Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence) event offers opportunities for generating ideas around, and support for, teachers on how to access research, and researchers and policymakers on how to make research findings more accessible. It also offers opportunities for teachers to begin their research journey, providing a space where they can ask questions, discuss possible research topics, and gain practical insights into how they might undertake a research projects.

3.2.3 Access to research

In response to a call from teachers for easier access to research and critical engagement with research, the Council provides all registered teachers with free access to an extensive collection of online journals and eBooks. Currently, the collection includes the full text of a range of journals, citations for several million articles and a tailored collection of eBooks. This allows registered teachers to stay in touch with current research in education and pedagogy, thereby informing and enhancing their practice as educators.

3.2.4 The Research Engagement Group

The Council believes that engagement with research should be a positive, motivating and professionally rewarding experience for teachers and researchers. It also believes that the professional voice of both teachers and researchers should be heard and should inform all aspects of the Council's research strategy. In order to support the realisation of these two goals, the Council hosts a Research Engagement Group, comprised of practising teachers from a broad spectrum of teaching contexts and others with a research interest in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment.

The Research Engagement Group works to facilitate teachers in accessing and engaging with research and researchers. A particular focus is on the interface between HEIs and the teaching profession, in the context of the reconceptualised programmes of ITE which involve a significant research component.

Participation in the group is on a voluntary, opt-in basis. The group offers practising teachers an opportunity to support and inform the thinking and actions of the Council in enhancing the connections between teaching, research and learning. It also offers the Council an opportunity to enhance its engagement with the teaching profession, and with researchers, to the same end.

The Council welcomes expressions of interest from teachers and researchers wishing to be part of its Research Engagement Group. Further information is available [here](#).

4. Ethics in Research

The Teaching Council maintains the highest standards of integrity in its research activity and expects the same standards from those carrying out research on its behalf or those carrying out research which has been supported by way of a Council bursary.

At present, there is no single regulatory system or body responsible for research ethics in Ireland (DCYA, 2012)¹. In that context, research agencies and Higher Education Institutions engaging in research, or supervising research, typically establish their own ethical codes and guidelines and these provide a useful framework within which research should be carried out.

The Council acknowledges the significance of other useful guidance, e.g. DCYA (2011², 2012¹) and BERA (2011)³, and expects that all researchers would comply with all relevant legal and ethical obligations. The principles hereunder, in particular, should be noted:

- Researchers must fully acknowledge potential ethical issues arising from their research and the implications thereof. In carrying out their research, they should take every possible measure to minimise the risk of harm to any individual. In particular, they must be fully cognisant of the implications of research involving ‘vulnerable’ groups, such as children and young people (18 years or under). They should communicate with participants in language that reflects their age group and comprehension level, and include in their final research report a plain language statement.
- Researchers must ensure that their research adheres to all legal requirements such as those set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Data Protection Acts, and the Freedom of Information Acts.
- Potential or actual conflicts of interest must be declared.
- Researchers must ensure the voluntary, informed consent of participants in the research, and recognise the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any reason.
- Researchers must not plagiarise, or fabricate or falsify results.
- Researchers must keep clear and accurate records of the research procedures followed and hold securely any data generated in the course of research. They should set out clearly the systems to be employed for the maintenance and destruction of data.
- The work of collaborators and other researchers who contribute to the research must be properly acknowledged.

¹ Department for Children and Youth Affairs (2012) *Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children*. Dublin: DCYA.

² Department for Children and Youth Affairs (2011) *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Dublin: DCYA.

³ *British Educational Research Association (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. London: BERA.

5. Review of the Strategy

This strategy was adopted by the Council on 15 December 2016 and will be reviewed from time to time and updated as required. Please refer to the Research page of the Teaching Council's website for the most up-to-date version.