**Teacher Professional Learning Framework Project**

**Final Report**

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**Table of Contents**

[Executive Summary 5](#_Toc3498666)

[Teacher Professional Learning Framework 9](#_Toc3498667)

[Final Report 9](#_Toc3498668)

[1. Introduction 9](#_Toc3498669)

[2. Methodology 10](#_Toc3498670)

[3. Current models of teacher professional learning frameworks 11](#_Toc3498671)

[4. Professional learning frameworks in other professions 1](#_Toc3498672)9

[5. Consultations with representatives of key stakeholders 2](#_Toc3498673)2

[6. Principles / Recommendations for a Teacher Professional Learning Framework 2](#_Toc3498674)3

[6.1 Background 2](#_Toc3498675)3

[6.2 Teachers as researchers 2](#_Toc3498676)4

[6.3 Principles for a Teacher Professional Learning Framework 2](#_Toc3498677)7

[7. Conclusion 3](#_Toc3498678)9

[References](#_Toc3498679) 42

# Executive Summary

1. **Introduction** 
   1. In 2016, following consultation with stakeholders, the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland launched its Teacher Professional Learning Strategy entitled ‘Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning’. The overall aim of this strategy is to empower the teaching profession to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century. The supporting objectives are: to provide a structured framework for teacher professional learning; develop the leadership capacity of teachers; and provide practice-led support within communities of effective practice (DE, 2016).
   2. To address the first objective of the Strategy the Department of Education commissioned the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers Northern Ireland (UCETNI) to conduct research and to provide recommendations for the development of a teacher professional learning framework in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy. Specifically, the objectives of the DE-commissioned research were to:

* identify current models of professional learning frameworks at national and international level;
* identify alternative models of professional learning frameworks in other professions;
* identify options for the design and development of a teacher professional learning framework in NI, including how the development can be aligned to key elements of the Strategy; and
* inform future policy making in this area.

1. **Methodology**
   1. A mixed methods approach was employed involving desk-based research (literature review and analysis) and interviews with representatives from key stakeholders.
   2. The literature reviews aimed to gather information on teacher professional learning frameworks from other jurisdictions both nationally and internationally. This review included the other regions of the United Kingdom (Scotland, England and Wales), as well as the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Canada. Also, a review of other professions’ professional learning arrangements was based on the Education and Training Inspectorate’s (ETI) work on lessons learnt by veterinary surgeons, general practitioners and social workers (ETI, 2016); one further service-providing profession, nursing, was also considered. The aim was to review the main elements of these jurisdictions’ teacher professional learning frameworks and those of other professions and to ensure that the recent Learning Leaders Strategy was inclusive of all recent trends and practices in professional learning.
   3. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the following key stakeholders: the Education Authority (EA), the ETI, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and the Teacher Education Team and the School Development Team from DE; also with members of the teaching profession (a group of teachers on a Masters course, teachers’ unions representatives and also one primary principal and one post-primary headteacher).
   4. A set of principles / recommendations was formulated following the reviews and consultations to take forward the teacher professional learning framework in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy. A proposed four-strand pilot project complementing the set of principles / recommendations and aiming at trialling key aspects of practice is also presented with each of the four strands being introduced in the relevant section.
2. **Outcome of review of current models of teacher professional learning frameworks in other jurisdictions and other professions**

3.1 The review of other jurisdictions and professions revealed that the Learning Leaders Strategy for teacher professional learning covers all current trends and practices, however, implementing these may be a challenge.

3.2 There are many elements of the professional learning processes described in this review that seek to ensure that professionals are up-to-date with developments in their field and that they have opportunities to undertake the learning which can underpin and enhance their practice across their careers. In the context of the teaching profession, it may therefore be worth considering adapting such elements to inform future professional learning processes. For example, teachers could potentially benefit from formal arrangements to set aside time to engage in professional learning with a structured programme of activities, goals and reflection.

3.3 Promoting evidence-based practice, professional inquiry / research and innovation are important elements of all professions’ professional learning arrangements. Although many teachers have always engaged in such endeavours in their own classrooms, there is an argument to be made that engaging in action research and in other related activities, both individually and collaboratively, should become a more formal part of professional learning with additional support being offered.

3.4 It is also clear from practice in other professions and other education jurisdictions that professional and regulatory bodies play a crucial role in the promotion, quality assuring and facilitation of professional learning and other professional learning processes for their members. This is important as it reinforces a sense of professional identity, values and ownership. Supporting professional learning / continuing professional development (CPD) is not something confined solely to the employer though they have a responsibility to invest in the development of their workforce. In Northern Ireland, the GTCNI, as the professional and regulatory body for teachers, could assume a more central position in teacher professional learning processes that may include advice and guidance, framework development, quality assurance and perhaps accreditation.

1. **Consultations with representatives of key stakeholders**

4.1 The consultations with the key stakeholders revealed that there is consensus on issues relating to time and resources when considering teachers’ professional learning. Other issues included ‘ownership’ for the various parts of a successful professional learning framework and its associated practicalities such as accreditation of available professional learning courses and providers; the ‘housing’ of a widely accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date database for such accredited, quality assured opportunities; and the fact that schools’ funding for professional learning is not ring-fenced.

4.2 There was agreement on the importance of opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and to experience teaching practice in different settings through school collaborations, secondments and sabbaticals, and the possibility of such opportunities being available to teachers was particularly welcomed by the teachers and their unions. The importance of the development of professional learning communities linking initial teacher education (ITE) and schools was also recognised.

1. **Principles / Recommendations for a Teacher Professional Learning Framework**

5.1 A set of principles / recommendations have been formulated based on the key priorities and policy commitments, as these were expressed in the Learning Leaders Strategy and on the reviews of other professions and jurisdictions. These principles are recommended as a basis for the design and development of a ‘transformative’ model of teacher professional learning framework in line with the Strategy’s aims and objectives.

5.2 Three principles were identified following the consultations with stakeholder representatives, the literature review and the policy commitments expressed in the Learning Leaders Strategy. These principles relate to (a) the necessity to achieve a balance between autonomy and accountability when considering teachers’ professional learning; (b) the necessity for continuity between ITE and in-service professional development and (c) the necessity for collaboration between teachers both in-school and within schools.

5.3 These proposed principles are supplemented by a set of actions/mechanisms that aim to facilitate the implementation of each principle within a teachers’ professional learning framework based on the underpinning themes of leadership and mentoring. Recognising that implementing these principles may pose certain challenges considering constraints in time, resources etc., a four-strand pilot project is proposed to test important elements of these recommendations and how they can be integrated into a future teacher professional learning framework based on the Learning Leaders Strategy policy commitments.

5.4 The four strands of the proposed pilot will cover work on (a) consultations with key-stakeholders on which body / space could host teachers’ professional learning records and to pilot on-line space (e.g. myGTCNI) or commercial apps to find which one is best fit-for-purpose, including a searchable database of professional learning experiences; (b) funding a number of seconded teachers to work with research active ITE tutors in order to develop professional communities of practice based around subjects / themes / priorities and an online, and other space where newly qualified teachers can find support and contribute their fresh ideas; (c) a consultation of stakeholders for the development of a research repository or other means of giving teachers access to educational research; and (d) a trial of how teacher researchers could offer research training and support to teachers in their area, either based in Area Learning Communities or as part of other collaborative support arrangements.

5.5 The proposed four-strand pilot project would play an important role in developing a framework for teacher professional development and in considering how its elements can be brought to fruition in a manner that is feasible, affordable and sustainable.

# Teacher Professional Learning Framework

# Final Report

## Introduction

* 1. In 2016, following consultation with stakeholders, the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland launched its Teacher Professional Learning Strategy entitled ‘Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning’.
  2. The overall aim of this Strategy is to empower the teaching profession to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century. The supporting objectives are: to provide a structured framework for teacher professional learning; develop the leadership capacity of teachers; and provide practice-led support within communities of effective practice (DE, 2016). It is a distinctive strength of the Northern Ireland education system that teaching attracts and retains high quality candidates but as the economy expands and diversifies this cannot be taken for granted; to retain teachers of the highest quality there is a need to invest in high quality career-long professional development (DELNI, 2014; OECD, 2014).
  3. To address the first objective of the Strategy, the Department of Education commissioned the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers Northern Ireland (UCETNI) to conduct research and to provide recommendations for the development of a teacher professional learning framework in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy. Specifically, the objectives of the DE-commissioned research were to:
* identify current models of professional learning frameworks at national and international level;
* identify alternative models of professional learning frameworks in other professions;
* identify options for the design and development of a teacher professional learning framework in NI, including how the development can be aligned to key elements of the Strategy; and
* inform future policy making in this area.
  1. A Research Fellow was appointed and a steering group was set up from within UCETNI, led by the Chair of UCETNI, Professor Linda Clarke (Ulster University). DE’s Teacher Education Team was the main point of contact and the Learning Leaders Oversight Group was the body overseeing the work.

## Methodology

* 1. A mixed methods approach was employed involving desk-based research (literature review and analysis) and interviews with representatives from key stakeholders.
  2. The literature reviews aimed to gather information on teacher professional learning frameworks from other jurisdictions both nationally and internationally. This review included the other regions of the United Kingdom (Scotland, England and Wales), as well as the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Canada. Also, a review of other professions’ professional learning arrangements was based on the ETI’s work on lessons learnt by veterinary surgeons, general practitioners and social workers (ETI, 2016); one further service-providing profession, nursing, was also considered. The aim was to review the main elements of these jurisdictions’ teacher professional learning frameworks and those of other professions and to ensure that the recent Learning Leaders Strategy was inclusive of all recent trends and practices in professional learning.
  3. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the following key stakeholders: the Education Authority (EA), the ETI, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and the Teacher Education Team and the School Development Team from DE. Some of these key stakeholder representatives were consulted twice, first to gather information on the current arrangements for teacher professional learning in Northern Ireland and secondly to obtain feedback on the proposed principles and recommendations for the way forward. To complete the consultation process it was considered important to consult with members of the teaching profession; therefore a group of teachers on a Masters course, teachers’ unions representatives and also one primary principal and one post-primary headteacher were asked to provide feedback on these recommendations.
  4. A set of principles/recommendations was formulated, taking account of the literature review and the stakeholder consultations, to take forward the teacher professional learning framework in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy aims and objectives. It was ensured that all principles/recommendations were linked to the policy commitments expressed in the Strategy. A four-strand pilot project complementing the set of principles/recommendations and aiming at trialling the feasibility of key aspects of these principles is also presented in this report, each of the four strands being introduced in the relevant section.

## Current models of teacher professional learning frameworks

3.1 The first objective of this research was to identify and assess the effectiveness of current models of teacher professional learning frameworks. A preliminary review revealed that, although there is not always a model of professional learning framework as such, in most countries, there are standards agreed for professional learning and guidance on how to apply these standards. With the Learning Leaders Strategy in mind, a review was conducted to explore other such strategies.

3.2 In **England**, following a public consultation in 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published its latest guidance, in 2016, in the form of a standard of effective practice for teachers’ professional development.

3.3 This guidance emphasised that effective teacher professional development is a partnership between headteachers and other members of the leadership team; teachers; and providers of professional development expertise, training or consultancy. The basis of this standard was *that professional development should be focused on improving and evaluating pupil learning outcomes*; that it should be *underpinned by robust evidence and expertise*; that it should be *collaborative and sustainable* and that is should be *prioritised by school leadership* (DfE, 2016).

3.4 Most recently, DfE in England has issued a new Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019a) which focuses on providing support for school leadership and early career teachers and on simplifying the process of becoming a teacher. From the professional learning perspective, this new strategy announced the introduction of the new Early Career Framework which will extend over two years (DfE, 2019b). This strategy also makes reference to piloting teacher sabbaticals for more experienced teachers, a move welcomed by the teacher unions. It has been claimed that union members were due to call for such measures for teachers ‘to stop them burning out and remain motivated to stay in the profession’ (Roberts & George, 2018).

3.5 Despite the standard for teacher professional development mentioned above, with its associated guidance for implementation, and the most recent teacher recruitment and retention strategy with various ‘perks’ for teachers to improve retention and provide additional professional learning opportunities, it is arguable that to-date a coherent strategy and associated framework for teacher professional learning has not been fully realised in England.

3.6 In **Wales**, teacher professional learning developments appear to be similar to those in England. A new set of professional standards for teachers came into effect for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) from September 2017 and for all serving teachers and leaders from September 2018.

3.7 These standards are based on ‘five essential elements of every teacher’s work’: Pedagogy, Leadership, Professional Learning, Innovation and Collaboration. Professional learning in these standards focuses on: *wider reading and research findings, professional networks and communities, continuing professional learning and Welsh language skills* (Learning Wales, 2018). The Learning Wales website also offers general guidance for teachers in the area of professional learning including resources on professional learning communities, reflective practice and effective use of data and research evidence.

3.8 The Education Workforce Council (EWC), which replaced the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) in 2015, also has a role to play in the area of teacher professional learning. Through the EWC website teachers can access their Professional Learning Passport (PLP), an easy to use platform where teachers can record their professional learning activities and where they can reflect on and improve their practice. Although all teachers are encouraged to use this tool for their professional development it remains optional, except for the newly qualified teachers who are required to use it during their induction year to access and develop their Induction profile. Not only does the PLP provide a space for teachers to record their professional learning, download documents, videos and other resources useful for their practice etc., it also provides free access for teachers to over 4,500 academic journals and e-books through sources such as EBSCO[[1]](#footnote-1) (EWC, 2016-2019).

3.9 In Wales, as in England, there is no centralised provision for teacher professional learning nor a related framework; however funds are devolved to schools, local authorities and regional educational consortia to address various school improvement activities including professional learning, e.g. the regional consortia are required to co-construct with headteachers and teachers such affordances as ‘*facilitating the development and work of Professional Learning Communities, lesson study and other means for teachers to work together within and across schools to review and improve their pedagogical practice*’ (Welsh Gov, 2015, p. 14). Important developments in this area include the Professional Learning Passport and the services it can offer to teachers; and a wide range of online resources to assist with improving teaching practice.

3.10 In **Scotland**, a national framework for teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was launched in 2003. This CPD framework was based around three professional standards: Standard for Full Registration, Standard for Chartered Teacher and Standard for Headship. Teachers were required to record their CPD activities and a National Register of Providers was also available to provide a resource for teachers, schools and local authorities wishing to identify suitable CPD from external sources. It was planned that mechanisms would be developed for the accreditation of CPD providers (Scottish Government, 2003). At the same time, through the teachers’ pay and conditions agreement *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*, the additional 35 hours of CPD per year was introduced as a contractual commitment which was accepted by teachers. Moreover, the teachers’ salary was increased significantly in an effort to provide them with ‘enhanced professional status’. A review of teacher education in Scotland argued that ‘*The overall aim of the agreement was to create the professional conditions of service appropriate to a world-class education service.’* (Donaldson, 2011)

* 1. The Donaldson Review of Teacher Education in Scotland in 2011 set out recommendations on how CPD evaluation should be refocused to consider the intended impact on the learners. Most crucially, Donaldson recommended that the Professional Standards needed to be revised ‘*to create a coherent overarching framework and enhanced with practical illustrations of the Standards. This overall framework should reflect a reconceptualised model of teacher professionalism.*’ Donaldson, 2011; p. 97)
  2. Criticism was reserved specifically for the ‘Chartered Teacher Status’ which, according to the Donaldson review, was deemed ‘controversial’. This Standard focused on enhanced professional practice and efficiency in teaching and learning and a Chartered Teacher was expected to promote learning and to share good practice in the school and the wider professional community (Scottish Government, 2003). However, abuse of the process along with strain on educational budgets and lack of evidence on whether/how Chartered Teachers brought excellent practice back to their schools led to calls for this to be discontinued and the standard for accomplished teachers to be redefined. The relevant recommendation states:

‘*The award of Chartered Teacher status should be based on a range of evidence, including improved teaching skills and significant impact on improving the learning of the young people and colleagues with whom they work… Local authorities should have greater control over the number of teachers who apply for the award.*’ (Donaldson, 2011; p. 100)

* 1. Following this Review of Teacher Education in Scotland, the 2003 Professional Standards were revised by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and came into effect in 2013. These new standards were: Standard for Registration, Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning and Standard for Leadership and Management. These standards formed the basis of the current GTCS model of professional learning, which is *a collaborative model based on learning by enquiry and with the focus on the learner.* On this basis, it aims to develop teacher leadership in relation to their own learning and that of their pupils.
  2. The GTCS’ guidance to teachers includes examples of professional learning activities they can engage in (for example *experiential learning activities and online learning, collaborative work, secondments and action research*) and it also provided detailed guidance on how to evaluate their own professional learning and provide evidence for it. The GTCS website – like the EWC website in Wales - also provides teachers with free access to educational research and guidance on practitioner enquiry through the EBSCO information services.
  3. According to the GTCS, *leadership of and for learning is recognised as an essential factor to ensure professional learning is well planned, supported, promoted and sustained* andprofessional learning should be:
     + *Challenging and lead to developing thinking, knowledge, skills and understanding [Learning that deepens knowledge and understanding]*
     + *Underpinned by an enquiring stance and developing skills of enquiry and criticality [Learning by enquiring]*
     + *Interactive, reflective and involve learning with and from others [Learning-as-collaborative]*
     + *Informed and supported by Professional Standards and other educational policy.*

(GTCS, 2013)

* 1. A Professional Update was launched by GTC Scotland in August 2014 for all fully registered teachers. Teachers in Scotland are required to engage in professional learning, self-evaluate this learning using the GTC Scotland Professional Standards, and maintain a record of this learning using their online profile on MyGTCS (or another system agreed by their local authority). Engagement in the Professional Update process is a requirement for registration with GTCS and confirmation of this engagement is required by the teacher and their line manager every five years for the teacher to maintain full registration (GTCS, 2014).
  2. The Scottish College of Educational Leadership (SCEL) was another development which followed the Donaldson review and it was established in 2014 to support the leadership professional learning of all educators through access to innovative and high quality leadership development programmes and activities. Since 2018, SCEL and its programmes have been transferred to Education Scotland, the Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education.
  3. Scotland does seem to have a model for professional learning and clear mechanisms for teachers’ engagement with professional learning activities, including a type of revalidation through the recent Professional Update process and also leadership training through SCEL. In addition to these developments, the Scottish Government has recently started to subsidise Scottish Universities to facilitate an increase in Masters level learning through enhancing provision for Career Long Professional Learning and formal postgraduate Masters learning opportunities.
  4. In the **Republic of Ireland (RoI)**, there have been a number of documents discussing, planning for and promoting teachers’ professional learning. Firstly, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), has issued two strategic documents: The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 and the Action Plan for Education 2018 - this latter paper being a more detailed updated annual action plan as a follow-up to the three-year strategy. These two documents outline all the goals necessary for the achievement of excellence in education and the 2018 update also includes timelines and responsibility for the actions. Goal three of these action plans focuses on the strategy’s objective relating to the provision of help to those delivering education services so that they continuously improve (DES, 2016 & 2018).
  5. Two bodies are mentioned in the Action Plan for Education 2018: The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) which was established in September 2010 as a generic, cross-sectoral support service for schools and is funded by DES, and the Teaching Council, which is the professional and regulatory body for teachers.
  6. PDST’s work focuses on supporting reflective practice through the school self-evaluation process and through the provision of professional development for teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational topics. In the Action Plans mentioned above, PDST is responsible for delivering CPD (PDST, 2017).
  7. The Teaching Council is the professional body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching. It has the responsibility in the Action Plan 2018 to examine policy implications from the development of the professional learning framework for teachers, based on professional standards for all teachers.
  8. *Cosán* (meaning *pathway*), as the framework developed by the Teaching Council is known, is a framework for teacher professional development which has at its heart teachers’ and students’ learning and which recognises teachers as autonomous and responsible learning professionals, taking into account the different dimensions of teachers’ learning and associated learning processes.
  9. In developing and finalising this framework, the Teaching Council consulted with teachers through workshops. These consultations assisted in refining and defining the framework’s learning processes as: *Practice and collaboration; Research; Reading and professional contributions; Immersive professional activities; Courses, programmes, workshops and other events*. The values, principles and standards which guide teachers’ learning and reflection are also represented in this framework (The Teaching Council, 2016). The intention is that quality assurance processes will ensure the quality of teachers’ professional learning.
  10. The Teaching Council offer, as part of its services to teachers and to promote evidence-practice, guidance on conducting and sharing research. They also give teachers access to the EBSCO research library for open source documents, academic journals and commissioned research reports. Research webinars and research ezines are part of the Council’s resources to support teachers’ ongoing professional learning through their engagement in and with research. The Teaching Council is also the main funding body for the Teachers’ Research Exchange (T-REX), an online community of researchers, teacher educators, students in initial teacher education (ITE) and those in schools nationally. This is a free online resource where teachers can access research, make valuable connections with other teachers and researchers, and access support in engaging with research[[2]](#footnote-2).
  11. Moving away from the UK and the RoI to obtain an international perspective, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) in **Canada** (which is the regulatory college for the teaching profession in Ontario) published in 2016 their *Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession*. This is a significant component of their vision of teacher professionalism and was collaboratively created by the profession and the public through a series of consultations. The other components of this vision are the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*and the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* (OCT, 2016).
  12. The OCT Professional Learning Framework is based on the teachers’ understanding that the most powerful professional learning happens within the context of their practice and that they learn along with their learners. The guiding principles of this framework are:
      + - *The goal of professional learning is the ongoing enhancement of practice. Educator learning is directly correlated to student learning;*
        - *Standards-based professional learning provides for an integrated framework for professional education and learning and teacher education;*
        - *Exemplary professional learning opportunities are based on the principles of critically reflective adult learning;*
        - S*elf-directed professional learning is planned for, guided and critically reflected on by members of the College;*
        - *Communities of practice and inquiry enhance professional learning.* (OCT, 2016; p. 5).
  13. One unique characteristic of this teacher professional learning framework is the professional inquiry section which is included throughout this document. This section is designed to invite teachers reading about the Framework to reflect upon their own professional learning experiences by providing a set of questions for them to consider.
  14. This framework also offers a useful ‘professional learning matrix’ presenting different contexts and the types of professional learning each one supports (OCT, 2016; p. 11) and a detailed representation of a conceptual framework for ongoing professional learning which provides *‘a lived theory of action for understanding the complex, holistic, interrelated, self-directed, contextual and evolving nature of relevant and meaningful ongoing professional learning’* (OCT, 2016; p. 7).
  15. The Ontario Ministry of Education’s involvement in teacher professional learning takes place through the *Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP)*, an annual project-based professional learning opportunity for experienced classroom teachers which has been running since 2007. The programme funds proposals from classroom teachers seeking peer leadership roles in curriculum, instructional practice or supporting other teachers. It has three goals: *Create and support opportunities for teacher professional learning*; *Foster teacher leadership*; and *Facilitate the sharing of exemplary practices with others for the broader benefit of Ontario's students* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019).
  16. In **Australia**, teacher professional learningis the remit of the *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)* (funded by the Australian government) which provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership.
  17. In 2012, AITSL published *The* *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*, a document which outlines the importance of professional learning; the qualities of a professional learning culture; the characteristics of effective professional learning and the shared commitment and responsibility of teachers, school leaders and those who support them to engage in professional learning in order to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians.
  18. According to this Charter, teacher professional learning must be *relevant*, *collaborative* and *future focused*, based on the national professional standards for teachers and principals and aiming at improving student learning. The Charter defines effective professional learning as a shared responsibility that must be taken up at all levels of the education system – by teachers, school leaders, system leaders and policy makers (AITSL, 2012a).
  19. The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* is supplemented by the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* which requires that every teacher, every year, in every school receives regular, appropriate and constructive feedback on their performance, opportunities to identify areas for development, as well as effective and ongoing support to further impact their practice (AITSL, 2012b).
  20. Teacher professional learning, in the context of the countries of this brief review, is informed by professional standards and its main characteristics include relevance to practice, learner-centeredness and collaboration; it seeks to promote teacher leadership and reflective, evidence-based practice. In most cases, teachers are given access to academic research and are expected to demonstrate effective use of data and research evidence and also record their professional development experiences. A teachers’ professional body, similar to GTCNI, has significant responsibility for the development of teacher professional learning in four of the six jurisdictions reviewed.

## 4. Professional learning frameworks in other professions

4.1 The second objective of this research was to identify models of professional learning (PL) frameworks in other professions and assess the potential for use in teacher professional learning. A review of the Education and Training Inspectorate’s paper ‘Learning Leaders: Lessons on professional learning from other professions and other education jurisdictions’ (ETI, 2016) evaluated professional frameworks for veterinary surgeons, general practitioners and social care council workers, recognising that these are three ‘service-oriented’ professions. This work showed that there are many elements of these frameworks which are already or could be applied to the teaching profession including:

(a) professional learning is informed by professional competences/standards but is also governed by the profession’s values, ethos and accountability and supported by HEIs and/or professional bodies;

(b) professional learning for revalidating competences etc. is a regulatory requirement for the other professions reviewed by the ETI but, perhaps surprisingly, it is not required for the teaching profession. It may be difficult to ensure that all teachers participate in appropriate professional learning activities, but to ensure equality of experience for learners there may be a case for introducing revalidation;

(c) recording professional learning activities, mostly with the use of an e-portfolio is common for professions other than teaching for purposes of revalidation and appraisal.

4.2 Other elements from the selected professions’ professional learning arrangements, which could potentially facilitate teachers’ participation in professional learning, include, for example, a professional learning allowance supplement to teachers’ pay as is the case for veterinary surgeons (ETI, 2016). This would be similar to the Scottish teachers’ pay and conditions agreement by which their additional 35 hours of CPD per year was introduced as a contractual commitment and which was accepted by teachers (Donaldson, 2011).

4.3 The professional learning activities accepted by the selected professions include:

* for veterinary surgeons: mentoring and being mentored; research; secondment; undocumented private study and studying for an external qualification;
* for general practitioners: auditing their current practice, online courses; professional reading with a reflective and impact summary; research in the form of surveys (mandatory every five years for revalidation purposes);
* for social workers: courses, seminars etc.; reading articles or researching care topics; training and mentoring colleagues; updates to legislation and policies.

4.4 Another service-providing profession which was not included in the ETI report is that of nursing. The body responsible for nurses’ continuing professional development (CPD) is the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which is carrying out work on nursing standards, education and practice, and is also a trade union. The RCN is also responsible for the professional standards of practice and behaviour, known as The Code (RCN, 2018), for nurses, midwives and nursing associates.

4.5 The RCN has recently announced the launch of a set of five principles which have been developed by the *Interprofessional CPD and Lifelong Learning UK Working Group* and should be applied across the health and social care workforce in all sectors, to support CPD and lifelong learning. These five principles state that CPD and lifelong learning should:

* *be each person’s responsibility and be made possible and supported by employers;*
* *benefit service users;*
* *improve the quality of service delivery;*
* *be balanced and relevant to each person’s area of practice or employment;*
* *be recorded and show the effect on each person’s area of practice.* (Broughton & Harris, 2019)

4.6 Specifically, for nurses and midwives, CPD is driven by the revalidation process which must be completed every three years for them to maintain their registration. This revalidation process requires the following: 450 hours minimum total practice; 35 hours of recorded CPD linked to the Code and including 20 hours of participatory learning; five pieces of practice-related feedback during the three years; five written reflective accounts on an instance of CPD or an event or experience of own professional practice and how these relate to the Code; a reflective discussion with another NMC registrant of the five written reflective accounts; a health and character declaration, professional indemnity arrangements and a confirmation of the above.

4.7 The RCN also recognises the importance of using knowledge and innovation to transform patient care and to this end they provide information and resources on their website for those seeking to use or develop research to enhance their practice. The importance of research for nursing practice is evident in the decision of the Health and Social Care’s Research and Development Division to provide funding for Research Offices in each of the five Health & Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland[[3]](#footnote-3). These research offices employ (often jointly with local universities) practitioners with research backgrounds to provide support and advice to staff undertaking research and to be responsible for research governance within the Trusts.

4.8 There are many elements of the professional learning processes of the professions discussed above that seek to ensure that professionals are up-to-date with developments in their field and that their practice is improved. In the context of the teaching profession, it may therefore be worth considering adapting such elements to inform future professional learning processes. For example, teachers could potentially benefit from formal arrangements to set aside time to engage in professional learning with a structured programme of activities, goals and reflection. Making this part of a contractual agreement may make it more attractive to teachers as the arrangements in Scotland suggest.

4.9 Promoting evidence-based practice, professional inquiry/research and innovation are important elements of all professions’ professional learning arrangements. Although many teachers have always engaged in such endeavours in their own classrooms, there is an argument to be made that engaging in action research and in other related activities, both individually and collaboratively, should become a formal part of professional learning. If so, additional support, as is in other professions, would be needed to ensure that all learners benefit from the latest developments in education.

4.10 It is also clear from practice in other professions and other education jurisdictions that professional and regulatory bodies play a crucial role in the promotion, quality assurance and facilitation of professional learning and other professional learning processes for their members. This is important as it reinforces a sense of professional identity, values and ownership. Supporting professional learning/CPD is not something confined solely to the employer though they have a responsibility to invest in the development of their workforce. In Northern Ireland, the GTCNI, as the professional and regulatory body for teachers, could assume a more central position in teacher professional learning processes that may include advice and guidance, framework development, quality assurance and perhaps accreditation. The basis for such a development is signalled by GTCNI’s recent profession engagement which reveals that teachers consider supporting CPD to be a top priority for their professional body and that accreditation of CPD and ITE should be considered[[4]](#footnote-4).

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## 5. Consultations with representatives of key stakeholders

5.1 A number of stakeholder representative consultations took place to inform the development of the principles detailed above. These stakeholders are DE, the ETI, the CCMS, CCEA, EA, GTCNI, the teachers’ unions, a group of 18 practitioners on a Masters level course, one primary school principal and one post-primary headteacher.

5.2 Most of the stakeholder representatives agreed that time and resources are a major issue when considering teachers’ professional learning. Issues discussed included ‘ownership’ for the various parts of a successful professional learning framework and its associated practicalities such as accreditation of available professional learning courses and providers, and the ‘housing’ of a widely accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date database for such accredited, quality assured opportunities; and the fact that schools’ funding for professional learning is not ring-fenced. The current industrial action; and the political uncertainty were all judged to be factors affecting the quality and quantity of professional learning currently available to teachers.

5.3 The importance of opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and to experience teaching practice in different settings through school collaborations, secondments and sabbaticals was reinforced by all stakeholders; and the possibility of such opportunities being available to teachers was particularly welcomed by the teachers and their unions. The necessity for the development of professional learning communities linking ITE and schools was recognised as was the importance of ensuring continuity from initial teacher education during induction and career-long development with the support of all stakeholders. Stakeholders recognised that teacher engagement in research with appropriate support would reinforce evidence-based practice and contribute to better learning outcomes.

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## 6. Principles / Recommendations for a Teacher Professional Learning Framework

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## Background

* + 1. To address the third objective of this research and following the literature review and the stakeholder consultations, a set of principles/recommendations have been formulated based on the key priorities and policy commitments as these were expressed in the Learning Leaders Strategy. These principles are recommended as a basis for the design and development of a teacher professional learning framework in line with the Strategy’s aims and objectives. The professional learning framework which would emerge could be broadly categorised as a ‘transformative’ model of professional learning which is intended to support teachers in contributing to and shaping education policy and practice as opposed to the ‘transmission’ models where teachers are merely the recipients of skills-based training (Kennedy, 2005).
    2. Three principles were identified following the consultations with stakeholder representatives, from the literature review and taking into account the policy commitments expressed in the Learning Leaders Strategy. Figure 1 shows the proposed principles and the policy commitments each one addresses. These principles relate to (a) the necessity to achieve a **balance** between autonomy and accountability when considering teachers’ professional learning; (b) the necessity for **continuity** between ITE and in-service professional development and (c) the necessity for **collaboration** between teachers both in-school and within schools. These proposed principles are supplemented by a set of actions/mechanisms that aim to facilitate the implementation of each principle within a teachers’ professional learning framework.

**Figure 1: Principles and policy commitments with underpinning themes**

Leadership and Mentoring

* + 1. Along with these three principles and the various practical requirements needed to deliver them, the teacher professional learning framework is proposed to be based on the underpinning themes of **leadership** and **mentoring**. Teacher leadership should arguably be developed at all levels, throughout the professional learning activities undertaken by teachers. Mentoring training is usually available to the school’s senior management team; however, with teachers working in collaborative teams for their professional learning, it is essential that training in mentoring becomes available to all teachers.

## Teachers as researchers

* + 1. According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) - Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) Inquiry into research and the teaching profession *‘every learner is entitled to teaching that is informed by the latest relevant research. Every teacher is entitled to work in a research-rich environment that supports the development of their research* *literacy, and offers access to facilities and resources (both on-site and online) that support sustained engagement with and in research* (BERA, 2014; p 7).
    2. The term *‘research literacy’* is central in the BERA-RSA inquiry’s vision and principles for developing a self-improving educational system and the authors of this review offer a description of what being *‘research literate’* means for a teacher:

‘*Where reference is made … to “teachers having a high level of research literacy” or “teachers being research literate”, this refers to the extent to which teachers and school and college leaders are familiar with a range of research methods, with the latest research findings and with the implications of this research for their day-to-day practice, and for education policy and practice more broadly. To be research literate is to ‘get’ research – to understand why it is important and what might be learnt from it, and to maintain a sense of critical appreciation and healthy scepticism throughout.*’ (BERA, p 40)

* + 1. Perhaps not many teachers would describe themselves research literate in the BERA-RSA inquiry’s sense, however, many teachers already engage in research (or ‘enquiry-based practice’ as teacher-researchers prefer to call it according to the BERA-RSA review) in various ways.
    2. Throughout this report, the term ‘research’ is mentioned in various contexts. For example, it is recommended that teachers should engage in research as part of their professional learning to develop reflective practice; that teachers should have access to research; and that they should also collaborate within and between-schools in order to research classroom practice or whole school-related questions. It is therefore essential that the term ‘research’ in the teaching context is explained to avoid perceptions of teachers being required to become researchers in the academic sense of the word. Furthermore, it is evident that research literacy, as defined by the BERA-RSA inquiry, is a prerequisite for teacher engagement in research and supporting teachers become research literate must be a priority to facilitate the development of best practice.
    3. The importance of action research has been well documented and, although many would consider it as an optional ‘extra’ to teaching, it has been argued that it must be an integral part of the teaching process (BERA, 2014; Elliott, 2015). Furthemore, the GTCNI states that ‘*the notion of the teacher as a researcher is complementary to the Council’s concept of reflective practice’* (GTCNI, 2015; p. 12). The final report of the BERA-RSA Inquiry into the role of research in teacher education has stressed the importance of building research capacity in the teaching profession and, specifically in the Northern Ireland context, there were several recommendations to ensure that teachers engage in research (BERA, 2014). Furthermore, the Learning Leaders Strategy, through Policy Commitment 6, focuses on teachers developing skills in action research:

*‘Teachers at all stages of their careers will have opportunities to develop their skills in action research, through closer partnership arrangements between schools and the EA, HEIs and GTCNI.’*  (DE, 2016; p 13)

* + 1. Considering the demands on teachers’ time and mindful of the current climate in respect of school funding and the ongoing industrial action, it is particularly important that teachers do not see any engagement in research as a burden, rather as a means to improve their practice and pupil learning outcomes. There are various types of research engagement (BERA, 2014; p.20) and teachers must become familiar and be supported to opt for what suits their classroom practice and professional interests best.
    2. For example, ‘conducting research’ may mean several things. Firstly, it is essential that teachers learn how to be ‘consumers’ of existing research, in other words to be able to critically approach academic articles and other work on classroom-based research, reflect on them and develop the skills to use such evidence to improve their own practice.
    3. At a more advanced level, teachers should be supported to develop their own research skills, both individually and in collaboration with colleagues, and use them to answer questions related to developing their own practice or to address whole-school issues.
    4. Through our consultations with teachers and school principals we know that teachers already develop research skills in various contexts through their practice, for example when working collaboratively with other colleagues or on their own to answer questions arising from their classroom practice. The recommendations in this report seek to address the issue of how best to encourage and support teachers to engage in and consider research activities as an integral part of their teaching, which will benefit them and their students and not as another top-down imposed initiative. This is in line with the recommendations of the BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of research in teacher education:

*‘… the expectation that teachers might ordinarily engage with, and where appropriate, in research and enquiry need not, and must not, become a burden on a profession that sometimes struggles with the weight of the various demands rightly or wrongly placed upon it. Rather this is about empowering teachers, school and college leaders, and all who work with them, to better understand how they might enhance their practice and increase their impact in the classroom and beyond.’* BERA, 2014; p. 6

## 6.3 Principles for a Teacher Professional Learning Framework

#### **6.3.1 Balance between autonomy and accountability**

6.3.1.1 It has been argued that the current climate of school and teacher accountability and performativity as an externally imposed demand on UK schools can interfere with teachers’ expression of their own professional responsibility (Sugrue and Mertka, 2017). Similarly, in a USA context, research has showed that, unless teachers are offered control and autonomy in leading learning for themselves and in their classroom, implementation of accountability reforms for school improvement can be in jeopardy (Ingersoll, Merrill and May, 2016).

6.3.1.2 Therefore, when considering teacher professional learning, it is essential to strike a balance between teacher professional accountability and the need to afford teachers a degree of autonomy with regards to their own professional development, moving away from a ‘managerial perspective of professionalism’ to a ‘democratic’ one (Kennedy, 2007). Hence any teacher professional learning framework must ensure it delivers this fine balance and Figure 2 illustrates how this may be realised in practice by addressing the main issues involved.

**Figure 2: Principle of Balance and the mechanisms for its application**



6.3.1.3 The Learning Leaders Strategy Policy Commitment 8 states that teachers will be encouraged to lead their own professional learning, which shows a shift from traditional ‘top-down’ models of professional learning:

*‘Where teachers and/or schools demonstrate the capacity to do so they will be encouraged and empowered to lead their own and/or other schools’ professional learning. Achievement will be measured through the inspection process.’*  (DE, 2016; p. 14)

This is an opportunity for teachers to take responsibility for their own professional learning and leave behind the traditional culture of schools expecting professional learning activities to be dictated to them. Iinstead teachers can become pro-active in engaging in professional learning activities linked to their own classroom practice as this has been shown to have the best results for learning outcomes (Wiliam, 2014).

6.3.1.4 Ensuring teachers have some say over their own professional learning does not only constitute good practice, it is also crucial if we want to achieve the balance between autonomy and accountability from the teacher perspective. Research has shown that the best models of teacher professional learning are these where teachers have some degree of ownership over the proposed activities – by contributing, perhaps, to these activities’ planning and design (Sterling, 2001; Fraser et al., 2007). It is therefore recommended that some of the teachers’ professional learning activities should be linked to the School Development Plan (SDP) to ensure school and teacher accountability, however, teachers should also have the freedom to engage in professional learning which may not be directly related to the SDP but which would be of particular interest to the teacher for reasons, for example, related to their individual classroom practice.

6.3.1.5 The importance of the teacher as a reflective practitioner who engages in evidence-based practice has been researched and documented extensively (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008; Day, 1993). Knowing how to approach and learn from other classroom-based research will assist teachers in reviewing their own practice and adjust it, if necessary, in order to achieve enhanced learning outcomes for their pupils. Therefore, ensuring that teachers are more than purely recipients of professional learning, that they are actively seeking answers by engaging with existing research, but also plan their own classroom-based research, will lead to their empowerment as professionals and will benefit their practice (de Paor & Murphy, 2018).

6.3.1.6 Well planned professional learning activities, with teachers’ own input to ensure fitness for classroom practice, are very important for improved outcomes; however it is crucial that good practice does not stay within the walls of one school. Initiatives such as the Research Lesson Study method of teacher professional learning can contribute to the dissemination of good practice between schools and the creation of communities of schools working collaboratively (perhaps existing groups such as Area Learning Communities) to improve teaching and learning (Akiba & Wilkinson, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2003). This method has the added benefit of being a bottom-up model of professional development as the teachers select their topic and plan their professional learning activity focusing on pupil learning and their classroom practice (Galanouli, 2010).

6.3.1.7 Professional learning should also include opportunities for experiential learning. The importance of professional learning, based on active learning and reflection, is well researched (for example, Girvan et al., 2016). Activities such as CCEA examinations marking or collaboration with other professionals (such as with social workers or psychologists to support pupils’ mental health) could offer valuable insights to teachers that could also benefit their pupils. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to participate in such activities which can then be counted as part of their professional learning activities. However, while information on the CCEA website lays out the professional benefits for teachers who choose to apply to become examiners, moderators or revisers, there is low interest for these positions and, according to anecdotal evidence, one reason seems to be that compensation in Northern Ireland remains low compared to other jurisdictions such as the RoI. Also, although there has been some negative publicity across the UK regarding a perceived inability to recruit high quality examiners, the high number of re-marks and other issues surrounding high stakes examinations (The Guardian, 2015; The Telegraph, 2014), to-date this is a largely under-researched area.

6.3.1.8 An online space should be provided for teachers to maintain a record of their professional learning activities, including courses attended and action research work. It may include private and shared spaces, the latter for best practice dissemination where applicable. This space could be provided through each teacher’s MyGTCNI account on the GTCNI’s website or, alternatively, through the C2K managed service or by using commercial tablet/phone applications (Apps). For example, in Wales as mentioned above, the Education Workforce Council has introduced a mechanism for recording teacher professional learning, the Professional Learning Passport, and have promoted this development for teachers as both a means of improving and reflecting on their practice and as a tool for them to plan their career (EWC, 2016-2019).

**Proposed pilot: Strand 1**

***Strand 1:* Online space to record and share professional learning**

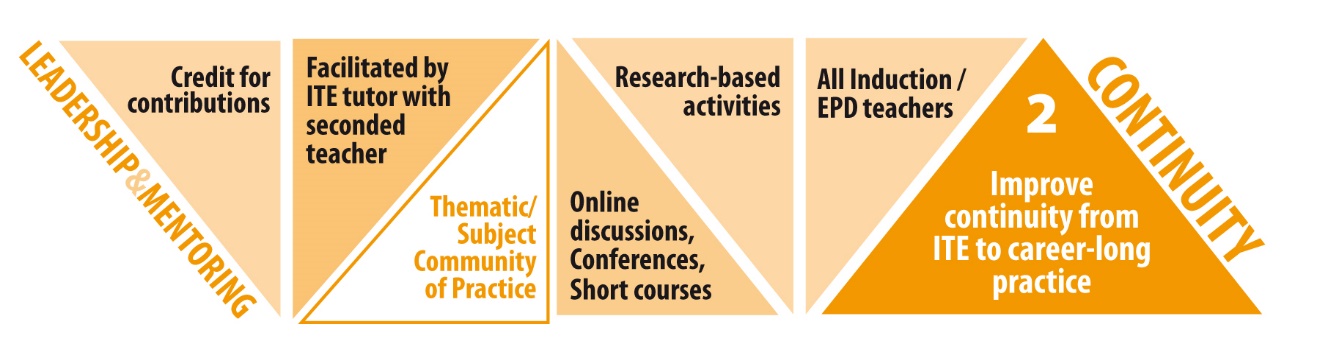
Consultation with key stakeholders to discuss which body/space could host teachers’ professional learning records and to pilot on-line space (e.g. myGTCNI) or commercial apps etc. to find which one is best fit-for-purpose. This should include a searchable database of professional learning experiences with names and email details for dissemination purposes and to promote peer learning.

6.3.1.9 To facilitate the teachers’ professional learning experience, a database of quality-controlled, up-to-date and accredited opportunities could be compiled and maintained, offering teachers options for their professional learning. With many commercial providers currently offering professional learning to schools, it is imperative that school managers and teachers are reassured that they do not engage in professional learning that is not fit for purpose and of the highest standards. Regulation / quality assurance of professional learning activities is necessary, and this role needs to be entrusted to a body that can both quality-control what is available and accredit successfully completed activities. All stakeholders consulted throughout this study emphasised the importance of such a resource for teachers and school managers.

#### **Improve continuity from ITE to career-long practice**

* + - 1. The second principle relates to the need for continuity from ITE to career-long practice in order to ensure newly qualified teachers continue to reap the benefits of the relationship with the academic community. For example, they could continue to have access to cutting-edge, practice-informed, educational research and enjoy mentoring partnerships with ITE tutors and school-based mentors.
      2. Figure 3 illustrates how this continuity from ITE to career-long practice and the proposed partnership may be achieved:

**Figure 3: Principle of Continuity and the mechanisms for its application**



* + - 1. The Learning Leaders Strategy, through its Key Area ‘Building Professional Learning Communities’, strongly supports this principle of continuing collaboration between schools and HEIs. Specifically, Policy Commitment 9, lays the groundwork for setting up structures to develop and implement this continuity from ITE to Early Professional Development and career-long practice:

*Teacher tutors in schools and university tutors will have opportunities to work alongside each other. This will enable them to support and assess the progress of student teachers in ITE and beginning teachers during induction and EPD.* (DE, 2016; p. 14)

* + - 1. It is recommended that this partnership between ITE providers and schools will be facilitated by an ITE tutor and with the support of seconded teachers (to provide subject support for post-primary teachers and theme support for primary). Each seconded teacher would work with an ITE tutor to create a thematic/subject community of practice (CoP) (depending on school phase) with all Induction and EPD teachers participating. Post EPD teachers will provide support and guidance but will also learn from the new members of the profession.
      2. Another issue to be addressed is that of accrediting teachers’ participation in the online communities and other events organised as part of these professional learning networks. Contributions will be acknowledged and accredited as part of each teacher’s professional learning. Various activities will support these CoPs including online discussions, conferences and short courses. Research-based activities will particularly benefit from these partnerships and sharing through the CoPs. Teachers have an opportunity, an incentive and a venue/forum to continue to engage in reflection on learning and to be challenged and encouraged by peers and tutors. Whilst the classroom may be the epicentre of teacher learning, the university provides a space for meta learning combining reflection with professional discussions and insights from relevant literature. The Teachers’ Research Exchange (T-Rex) website (§ 3.25) used in the RoI is such a space and possible collaboration and participation of Northern Ireland ETI providers, teachers and schools to this online community should be explored.

**Proposed pilot: Strand 2**

***Strand 2:* Continuity from ITE to career-long practice**

Funding a number of seconded teachers to work with research active ITE tutors in order to develop professional communities of practice based around subjects / themes / priorities and an online, and other space where newly qualified teachers can find support and contribute their fresh ideas.

* + - 1. This principle aims to address the various problems faced by newly qualified teachers and those in the early stages of their teaching careers, as it is recognised that such problems can lead to teachers either leaving the profession early or becoming demotivated and eventually disengaged. For example, recent research has showed that, especially in low-performing schools, such partnerships between teacher education providers and schools can have good outcomes for beginning teachers by connecting teacher preparation with teacher induction (Bastian and Marks, 2017). In Northern Ireland, a unique 3Is (Initial, Induction and In-service) model was developed but gradually fell into abeyance and there has long been inconsistency in the induction process, not least due to the low number of permanent job opportunities for new graduates and inconsistencies between induction providers (Abbott, Moran & Clarke, 2009). Donaldson also argued the importance of continuity between ITE and career-long professional learning involving all main stakeholders in his review of teacher education in Scotland:

*‘… teacher education should be seen as and should operate as a continuum, spanning a career and requiring much better alignment across and much closer working amongst schools, authorities, universities and national organisations.*’ (Donaldson, 2011; p. 85)

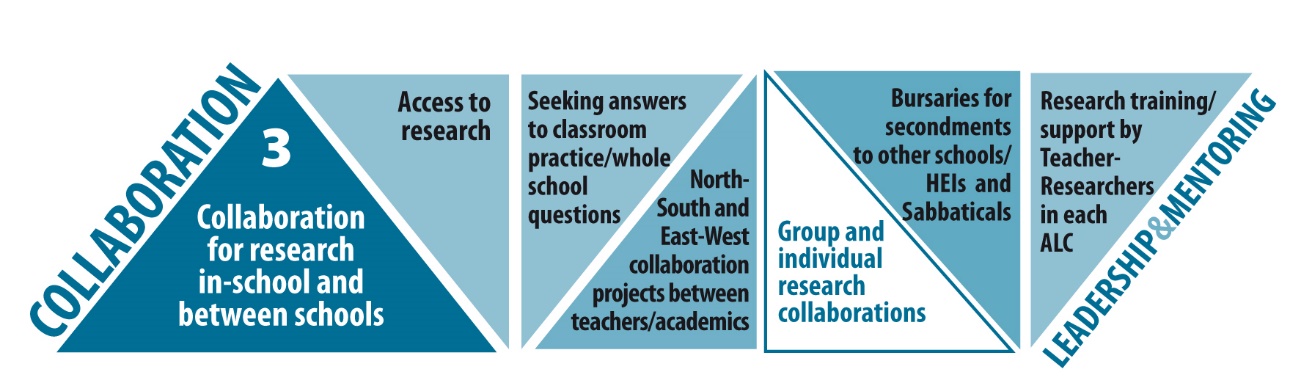
* + 1. **Collaboration for research in-school and between schools**

* + - 1. The benefits of teacher collaboration within and between schools has been well researched and documented in various contexts through the employment of specific professional learning methods. These include the Research Lesson Study, which was found to alleviate feelings of professional isolation and provided a sharper focus on student learning (for example, Stewart and Brendefur, 2005; Galanouli, 2010; Chong and Kong, 2012; Cajkler, Wood, Norton, Pedder and Xu, 2015). Post-conflict school-based initiatives such as the Shared Education Programme (Duffy and Gallagher, 2017) are also examples of teacher collaboration.
      2. Other such collaboration between schools in a cross-border setting on the island of Ireland has been evidenced in the Dissolving Boundaries through Technology in Education project, which ran successfully between 1999 and 2014 and showed how such collaborative practices can change teaching and learning approaches in the classroom (Austin et al., 2003; Austin et al, 2010).
      3. Teacher collaborations in wider educational contexts in Northern Ireland have a history of success in improving practice. For example, since 2003, research funding for collaborations between teachers and teacher educators have been provided by the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) through the SCoTENS Seed Funding Programme. SCoTENS is a network of colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils, curriculum councils, education trade unions and education centres on the island of Ireland. Their research seed funding programme has promoted and provided funding for a range of research-based initiatives aiming to improve teaching practice through sustainable North-South partnerships and projects (for example, SCoTENS, 2012). Several projects have involved teachers and schools.
      4. GTCNI could explore the value of further collaboration with SCoTENS for the purposes of promoting cross-border school research collaboration North and South of the Irish border and other such resources should be sought to support teacher and school collaboration across Northern Ireland. It is important that good practice is disseminated and that the gap between outstanding schools and low-performing schools is closed by successful cross-fertilisation of ideas and sharing of good practice.
      5. Teacher collaboration also features strongly in the Learning Leaders Strategy under Key Area ‘Building Professional Learning Communities’ and it is expressed in Policy Commitment no 7:

*‘Support will be provided for the ongoing development and sustainability of professional learning communities and/or self-directed learning networks where schools or groups of teachers can demonstrate the capacity to deliver clear educational benefits.’* (DE, 2016; p 14)

* + - 1. Considering the importance of evidence-based practice and the research evidence mentioned above, which suggests that teacher collaboration in researching classroom practice has had specific benefits for both professional wellbeing and learning outcomes, and the policy commitment in the Learning Leaders Strategy that such collaboration should be supported, Figure 4 outlines recommendations for how best to develop and support such teacher collaboration:

**Figure 4: Principle of Collaboration for research in school and between schools**



* + - 1. The focus on teacher research literacy is explained earlier in this report (§6.2). It is important to build research capacity in the classroom in a supportive manner. For this reason, teachers need to have access not only to purely academic research, but also to action research accounts presented by other teachers, perhaps as part of post-graduate course requirements such as MEd dissertations. Accessing such resources would help teachers envisage research activities as an integral part of teaching. Indeed, offering teachers access to research is ranked highly in the BERA-RSA enquiry into research and teacher education recommendations:

*‘… further work needs to be undertaken in each of the four jurisdictions to ensure that relevant high-quality research is easily accessible to all practitioners and policymakers.’* (BERA, 2014; p. 27)

* + - 1. Currently, in other jurisdictions, teachers are given access to research, for example in Wales this is part of the Professional Learning Passport resource space (EWC, 2016-2019) and in Scotland this service is provided to members through their professional body. In the Republic of Ireland, the Teaching Council website offers access to its members to open access resources and to academic journal research through the members’ registration (The Teaching Council, 2015). Most jurisdictions provide teachers access to research through the EBSCO research database.
      2. In the past, in Northern Ireland, the GTCNI provided access to a research repository for teachers (Access to Research Resources for Teacher Space - ARRTS) as one of its services to the profession and as a result of a stakeholders’ consultation (Holmes et al, 2005). However, this service had to be discontinued as the research repository project would have needed better leadership and more resources to make it a success and these were not forthcoming[[5]](#footnote-5). Looking forward, it is essential that access to such a resource is planned and developed to offer teachers in Northern Ireland access to educational research.

**Proposed pilot: Strand 3**

***Strand 3*: Providing teachers with access to educational research**

Funding a consultation of stakeholders for the development of a research repository or other means of giving teachers access to educational research. The previous work on such a research repository by the GTCNI should be explored to find ways forward so that Northern Ireland teachers have the same access to research (both the unpublished work of their peers and journal articles as their counterparts in other jurisdictions in the UK and beyond).

* + - 1. Sources of research funding for teacher research collaborations such as the SCoTENS seed funding are discussed above, however teacher secondments and sabbaticals represent another type of opportunity for good practice dissemination and a professional learning opportunity for teachers.
      2. A good example of such secondment opportunities was the Research Bursary Scheme offered by the GTCNI between 2005 and 2008 to teachers who wished to carry out a professional development activity and also to teachers who wanted to work with colleagues on an inter-school basis. During the three years of this programme, 171 teachers benefited from these bursaries (GTCNI, 2005-2008).
      3. Examples of the professional learning activities, in which the teachers in receipt of these bursaries were involved, included: ‘An evaluation of the approaches to the teaching of phonics’; ‘Work shadowing in the careers advisory service’; ‘Reviewing my role as head of department and learning from good practice’; ‘Teaching the Electric Guitar to Improve Pupil's Self- Esteem’; ‘Learning together about Play and Autism’; and ‘The Use of Peer Mentoring as Part of a School Pastoral Care Programme’ (GTCNI, 2006).
      4. These examples of the work carried out by teachers enabled them to visit other schools/educational settings and observe/work with colleagues which shows the breadth of experiences these bursaries can offer. Although the scheme ran for a limited period of time, the reports from those in receipt of the bursaries (published on the GTCNI website), show the impact on teaching and learning these bursaries had and that this model of professional learning can become an accredited professional learning activity for teachers (GTCNI, 2007). Moreover, if teachers are required to share the outcomes of any such activity they engage in, the whole school can benefit from the breadth and depth of the experiences gained through these bursaries.
      5. Another secondement opportunity for teachers funded by the GTCNI was the *Teacher Fellowship Pilot Programme* which involved teacher secondments to local teacher education institutions for one term; these were judged to be of value to both the seconded teacher and the institution hosting them as student teachers and ITE tutors alike had the benefit of interacting with a practitioner during their university-based part of their course. Successful applicants had the opportunity to carry out a project of their own design relating to innovative and best practice in teaching, learning and pupil assessment. This scheme run for one year only in 2012/2013.
      6. In addition to the above, sabbaticals could also be offered in the context of collaborative research-based professional learning as another type of such activity. Taking as an example the recent introduction of one-year teacher sabbaticals in England, where the Department for Education announced a £5 million fund for those who have been qualified and teaching for at least seven years and who had a specific project in mind (Whittaker, 2018), a similar scheme could be introduced in Northern Ireland.
      7. This sabbatical scheme would offer teachers an incentive to engage in a type of research activity outside their own classroom but with a view to improve their teaching practice and to share their experiences upon returning to their school, benefiting the whole school community. Care should be taken in order to avoid the pitfalls of the Scottish Chartered Teacher (see §3.12) by stating clearly the expected ouctomes for successful applicants and how they would share their experiences upon completion of their sabbaitical leave. Making available scholarships for Masters - following the Scottish example (see §3.16) - and perhaps even an annual PhD scholarship competition (following the example of the Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland[[6]](#footnote-6)) could serve to raise the profile and build capacity for teacher research.

* + - 1. It is clear from the above that any research activity planned as part of individual teacher enquiry, as a collaborative project between teachers or as the focus of a bursary/sabbatical related professional learning research activity, it should preferably relate to either classroom practice or to questions related to whole-school culture/problem. Both modes - with groups of teachers in one school or groups of teachers across collaborating schools - for example in the context of the Shared Education Programme mentioned above - could arguably point towards some solutions to problems such as student lateness and absence.
      2. Practice-based research should be, in the first instance, the focus of any research activity carried out by teachers. It has been argued that the most important element of effective teacher professional learning, and at the same time one of the prerequisites for effective adoption of innovation by teachers, is that the aims and objectives of the training or innovation need to be clear and related to the teachers’ own interests and relevant to their classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Davis,1997). The BERA-RSA Inquiry into the role of research in teacher education (BERA, 2014) has also stressed that:

*‘…there is also strong evidence that teachers and teacher educators need to be equipped to engage in enquiry-based practice, which means having the capacity, motivation and opportunity to use research related skills to investigate what is working well and what isn’t effective in their own practice.’* (BERA, 2014; p. 18)

* + - 1. The last and perhaps most important element necessary for the implementation of the principle relating to research collaboration is that of support – if teachers are to engage in research they will need to be offered adequate training and support (Taylor, 2017; BERA, 2014; Davis & Resta, 2002). Also, the BERA-RSA inquiry into research and teacher education recommends that: ‘*Universities – especially but not only their departments of education – need to maintain the capacity and personnel to support teachers, school and college leaders involved in research and enquiry ‘on the ground’.* (BERA, 2014; p. 12). Findings from recent UCETNI research, which employed the teacher as researcher methodology, showed that support is very important for the success of any activity which requires teachers to engage in research (Galanouli & Clarke, 2019).
      2. In the specific Northern Ireland context, the BERA-RSA inquiry calls on ITE providers to ‘*foster closer links with local school-to-school partnerships to encourage and support research engagement in all schools and colleges*’ (p 35). However, there are also recommendations for the Department of Education for Northern Ireland to support schools in promoting research informed reflective practice (BERA, 2014). The Learning Leaders Strategy, under Policy Commitment 6, prepares the ground for such support by stating that: *‘Teachers at all stages of their careers will have opportunities to develop their skills in action research, through closer partnership arrangements between schools and the EA, HEIs and GTCNI.*’ (DE, 2016; p. 13).
      3. Research training and support are therefore crucial elements of any initiative involving teachers engaging in research. According to the Learning Leaders Strategy, various bodies such as the EA, the GTCNI and the HEIs should contribute to partnerships with schools for teachers to be enabled to participate in action research, or any research activity, that will enhance their classroom practice and will support them in further developing as reflective practitioners.
      4. As a possible means of offering support in developing school-based research, and considering the support mechanisms already in place as part of the Area Learning Communities (ALCs), it is recommended that teacher-researchers could be based in each ALC for this purpose – this model already adopted by the NHS to support evidence-based nursing practice could be used in the education context. However most ALCs do not involve primary schools and there are a range of other interschool partnerships which might be the loci of such collaborative professional learning.

**Proposed pilot: Strand 4**

***Strand 4*: Research training and support through Teacher Researchers in each ALC (Area Learning Community)**

Funding for a pilot should be made available to trial how teacher researchers could offer research training and support to teachers in their area, either based in ALCs or as part of other support arrangements. Northern Ireland teacher education providers and schools should consider participating in the Teachers’ Research Exchange, or T-REX, an online social network for Irish teachers and other educational researchers, and a space to ask questions, find support, share resources or set up collaborative research projects. Although links to this network for educational professionals could be piloted across all strands of this pilot, due to its research focus, it could be more readily implemented within this strand.

### 7. Conclusion

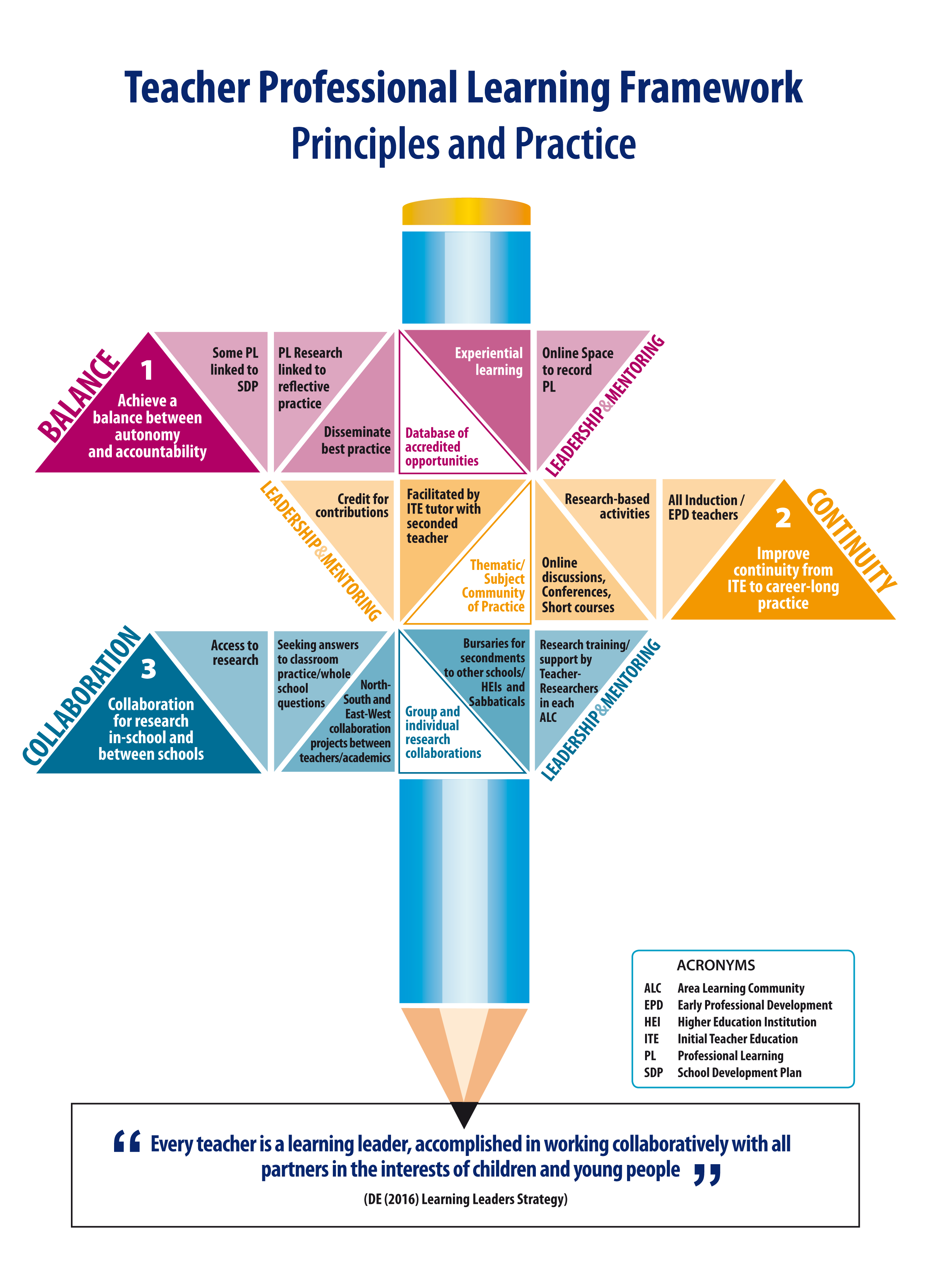
7.1 This review has addressed four key requirements, set out as the objectives:

* identify current models of professional learning frameworks at national and international level;
* identify alternative models of professional learning frameworks in other professions;
* identify options for the design and development of a teacher professional learning framework in Northern Ireland, including how the development can be aligned to key elements of the Learning Leaders Strategy; and
* inform future policy making in this area.

7.2 The results set out in the various sections above have enabled to formulate recommendations for a diverse but coherent teacher professional learning framework to be created around the key processes of leadership and mentoring between teachers, school leaders, HEI staff and staff in professional education-related organisations. The framework would be centred on the three principles of Balance, Continuity and Collaboration that together promote and deliver the coherence in a teacher’s professional development journey, complemented by the underpinning themes of Leadership and Mentoring.

7.3 These principles and the various activities that underpin their realisation are set out schematically in the infographic below (Figure 5). Adopting these principles as a basis for a future professional learning framework will ensure that teachers feel valued and that teaching is perceived as a highly esteemed profession so that we continue to recruit the high quality entrants to the profession which are a distinctive hallmark of ITE in Northern Ireland.

7.4 Whilst this report borrows policy ideas from the experience of other jurisdictions, it also highlights the existing potential for positive developments in Northern Ireland, including experience from previous professional learning-related activities and programmes. Using these recommendations to develop a framework, the next steps would be to examine how its elements can be brought to fruition in a manner that is feasible, affordable and sustainable; using the proposed four-strand pilot project would be a step forward.

**Figure 5: Principles and Practice**

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