

Reflective Practice and PRSD: Advice from GTCNI

*“We recognise the right of all engaged
in the process of education to ongoing
professional development appropriate to
their needs.”*

GTCNI Charter for Education



General Teaching Council
for Northern Ireland



Introduction

The publication of 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' represents a significant milestone for both teachers and schools in Northern Ireland. It is both a celebration of the high levels of teacher professionalism and, at the same time, the articulation and codification of the competences required by all members of the profession, regardless of the type of school they are employed in.

The twenty seven competences set out the professional values and practice, the knowledge and understanding, as well as the professional skills and their application, that should represent the highest levels of professional practice in schools in Northern Ireland. In presenting the competences along with phase dependent exemplars, the Council has sought to emphasise that the acquisition of competence is context and phase dependent, whether this is initial teacher education, induction, early professional development or beyond into a career-long continuing professional development. Furthermore, the competences and their associated phase exemplars underpin what, the Council believes, should be the most salient features of collaborative practice and school improvement. Indeed, it is this collaborative practice, situated within professional communities, that ultimately promotes and, as importantly, sustains whole school improvement. This document provides teachers and principals with guidance on how 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' can support the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) processes operating in schools.

Continuing Professional Development

The professions' 'Code of Values and Professional Practice' articulates clearly the relationship between teacher professionalism and continuing professional development (CPD). It states:

"Teachers will, in keeping with the concept of professional integrity, assume responsibility for their ongoing professional development as an essential expression of their professionalism."

However, concomitant with this responsibility the Council has sought to enshrine the principle of 'right of access' to professional development with its statement of guiding principles for CPD. This principle has been articulated further in the Council's 'Charter for Education'. The Charter states:

"We recognise the right of all engaged in the processes of education to ongoing professional development appropriate to their needs."

In recognition of this responsibility and the associated right to appropriate CPD the Council affirms that PRSD, if appropriately structured, can serve as a useful vehicle for needs analysis in relation to teacher professional development and, as emphasised earlier, it is upon such professional development that school improvement can be promoted and sustained.

The PRSD process and 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession'

The success, or otherwise, of the PRSD process depends heavily upon the quality of reflective practice that underpins it. Indeed, one of the principles which underpins the Council's concept of competence is the centrality of reflective practice. It is the Council's view that competence is developed through reflection on practice and through dialogue with colleagues. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), in its publication, 'The Reflective Teacher', provides guidance for teachers on how reflective practice should be central to all professional activity. The Council endorses this view and notes in 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' that:

"reflective practice needs to be internalised as part of a teacher's professional identity; it cannot simply be bolted on as an additional skill, rather it becomes part of the professional mind-set and it is integrated within all the competences in a holistic way."

The Competences and Reflective Practice

The Council asserts that the achievement of competence will depend upon:

- the nature and level of the teacher’s experience and their personal effectiveness;
- the work-based context; and
- the roles that teachers experience and the development opportunities arising from such experiences.

Moreover, the competences should not be viewed as discrete skills which once demonstrated are mastered for all time. The acquisition of any competence should be seen on a continuum reflecting the dynamic interplay between the nature of professional knowledge and the opportunities afforded teachers by the context of their professional lives.

Each competence, along with its phase exemplars, can therefore be used to support the reflective practice inherent at all stages of the PRSD process as follows:

- initial review meeting;
- gathering evidence;
- review discussion; and
- PRSD protocols.

The PRSD criteria

The PRSD scheme identifies a number of criteria for teachers and principals against which a total of three objectives should be agreed and reviewed annually. The criteria are similar for teachers and principals with the exception of leadership and management for principals which replaces professional practice for teachers; see Figure 1.

| Teacher | Principal |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Professional Practice | Leadership and Management |
| Pupil and Curriculum Development | |
| Personal and Professional Development | |

Figure 1.

The teacher competences can be used as the underlying framework to support the dialogue, reflective practice and professional development needs analysis inherent in agreeing PRSD objectives.

Moreover, the necessary depth to the process can be achieved by applying the ‘dimensions of development’ outlined in ‘Teaching: the Reflective Profession’.

Dimensions of Development

As teachers progress in their careers they will encounter different challenges and expectations. They grow in confidence, share in the knowledge of colleagues and learn from experience. It can also be anticipated that their practice will become progressively more sophisticated and nuanced. This will be evidenced by:

- a greater complexity in teaching, for example, in handling mixed-ability classes, or reluctant learners, or classes marked by significant diversity, or inter-disciplinary work;
- the deployment of a wider range of teaching strategies;
- basing teaching on a wider range of evidence, reading and research,
- extending one’s impact beyond the classroom and fuller participation in the life of the school.
- the capacity to exercise autonomy, to innovate, to improvise; and

- a pronounced capacity for self-criticism and self-improvement; the ability to impact on colleagues through mentoring and coaching, modelling good practice, contributing to the literature on teaching and learning and the public discussion of professional issues, leading staff development, all based on the capacity to theorise about policy and practice.

As stated earlier, in seeking to make more explicit the attributes, skills and knowledge that teachers as professionals should possess and exemplify, the Council has set out the 27 competence statements, under three broad headings:

- Professional Values and Practice (as enshrined within the ‘Code of Values and Professional Practice’);
- Professional Knowledge and Understanding;
- Professional Skills and Application;
 - Planning and Leading;
 - Teaching and Learning; and
 - Assessment.

The above groupings of the competences will provide teachers with a focus upon which to base their PRSD. The competences and the Council’s philosophy that underpins them will also give teachers a sense of ownership of the process and a framework against which they can enter into positive professional dialogue with other colleagues using a shared language and professional understanding. This is also supported by the Council’s view that the development of competence goes well beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills and that; although curricular knowledge and pedagogical skills are important, it must be emphasised that teaching is both an intellectual and practical activity with significant emotional and creative dimensions.

It is therefore important that the competences are used to inform not only the technical proficiency of teachers but also the creative, emotional and moral demands of professional practice.

The relationship between the PRSD criteria and the 27 professional competences is summarised in Figure 2, page 7.

Preparation for PRSD

Reflective practice lies at the heart of teacher professionalism and the 27 competences and their phase exemplars can be used to inform the dialogue necessary to make PRSD professionally productive. The following approach may serve as a practical guide to using the competences as preparation for PRSD:

- The teacher reviews his/her own professional values, knowledge and skills against the 27 competences and identifies areas in which professional development may be most appropriate.
- In the context of the whole-school development plan and current teaching responsibilities aligned with the identified PRSD criteria; professional practice/leadership and management, pupil and curriculum development and personal and professional development the teacher identifies which competences are most appropriate for the PRSD.
- The teacher uses this professional reflection to inform the discussions that take place during the initial review meeting and subsequently during the rest of the PRSD process. This will also help in agreeing the PRSD objectives in accordance with the agreed guidelines and success criteria.

The Council's Code of Values and Professional Practice

Chapter 7 of 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' restates the profession's 'Code of Values and Professional Practice.' This seminal document and the values it enshrines informed the development of the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences. It is also the Council's hope that these same values should underpin the whole PRSD process and the professional dialogue and reflective practice upon which it is based.

Regional Training Unit Support for PRSD

The Regional Training Unit (RTU) is also working with the Council to ensure that the new teacher competences are linked with the PRSD process. RTU will continue to lead and support PRSD through conferences such as 'PRSD – Beyond Implementation' and 'Re-Accreditation for External Advisers'. The following issues will be covered at these conferences:

- the new teacher competences;
- the educational reform agenda;
- the implications of ICT for PRSD and;
- PRSD and continuing professional development.

RTU has also upgraded its PRSD website to take account of recent developments such as the publication of 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' and the increasing importance of ICT in staff development. **www.rtuni.com**

Conclusion

In publishing this advice the Council hopes to 'add value' to the PRSD process. The publication of 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' (incorporating the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences) will give teachers a sense of ownership of the process and enable professional dialogue to take place within an agreed framework of competences using a shared language and understanding. This should only enhance the PRSD process and the reflective practice upon which it is based. It will also help ensure that the maximum possible benefits are derived for teachers and schools alike.

The Relationship between the Teacher Competences and the PRSD Criteria

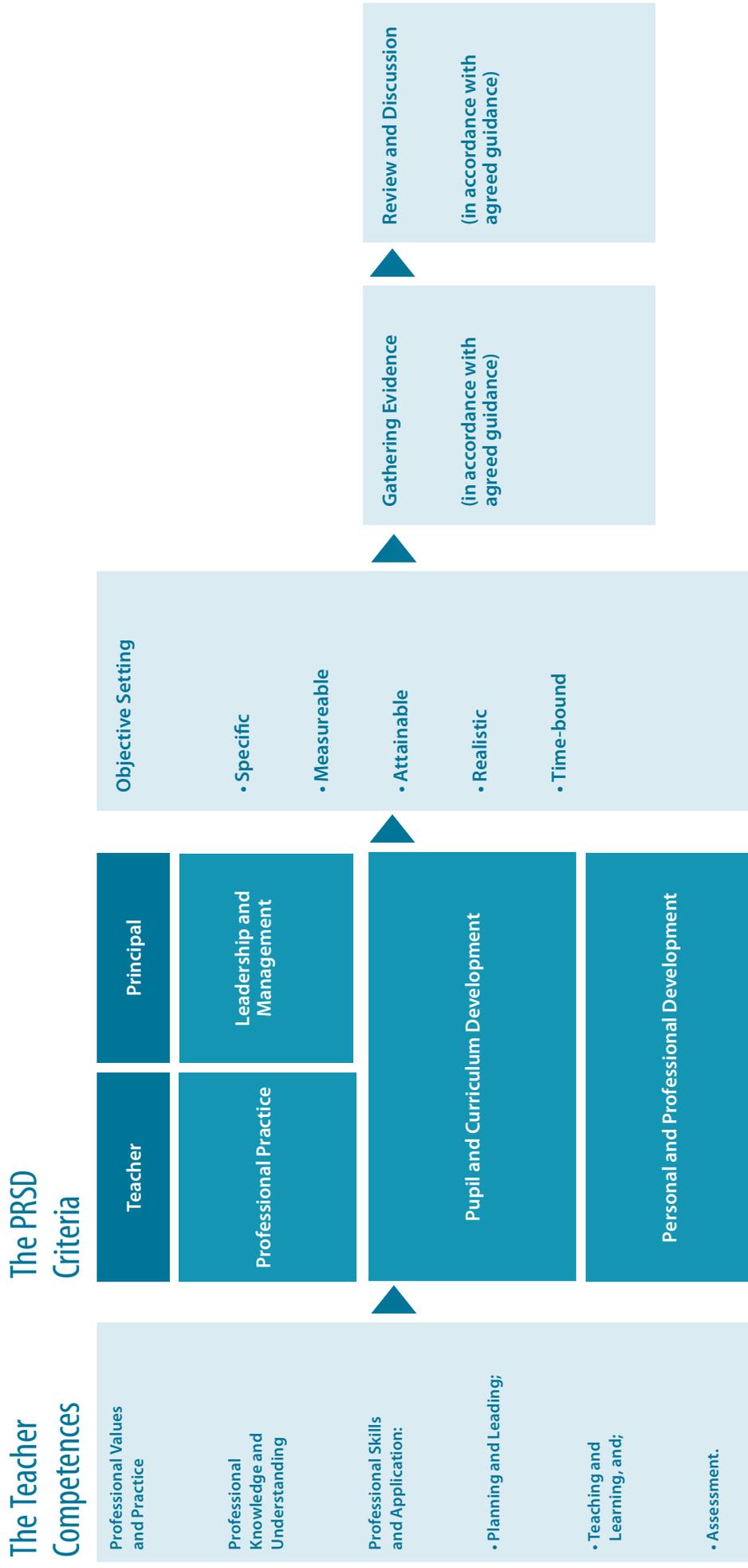


Figure 2.

www.gtcni.org.uk

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