



Introduction:

The aim of the Irish Mathematics Teachers' Association is to further the study and teaching of Mathematics and to foster co-operation between teachers of Mathematics at all levels. One of our specific goals is the encouragement and promotion of professional development.

Upon receipt of the Draft Framework for Teachers' Learning entitled 'Cosán' in May 2015, a sub-committee of our National Council was formed to consider its contents and engage in the consultation process before the final plan is published in March 2016.

Response:

We feel that it is very important that teachers are enabled to identify the types of professional learning opportunities that benefit them and their students most. As a profession, the teaching body is diverse and any model for CPD will have to be very flexible in order to meet the wide range of needs and interests.

As an Association, we agree strongly with the standards outlined to guide teachers' learning and reflection. It is important that teachers as professionals show a commitment to: continued professional growth, sustained professional practice as well as quality teaching and learning.

However, we are also concerned with some proposals in relation to continuing professional development. It would be a grave error to make CPD mandatory and would serve to undermine many of its key aims. We are confident that teachers would engage with high-quality CPD but enthusiasm and interest would be severely curtailed if any sense of being 'forced' to engage was introduced. Many of our members have had a negative experience with the 'Croke Park hours' and have been critical about the relevance and quality of some of the CPD given in their schools. The manner in which these additional hours were introduced and their mandatory status have made teachers' lives more difficult and generated strong scepticism towards any new developments in relation to professional development. The new hours have placed added pressures on child-care and home life and making life for those commuting long distances very difficult. By seeking to make teachers' professional lives stronger, they have instead damaged their personal lives. They should not be seen as mutually exclusive and it should be recognised that home life and school life are inextricably bound. To this end, we would encourage any form of future CPD to be undertaken as part of the working day.

We welcome that the efforts of subject associations like the IMTA are acknowledged and that a high value has been placed on our efforts by teachers. As teachers of mathematics, we have key insights into the challenges involved in delivering our subject and the issues that face both students and teachers. From our perspective, it would be beneficial for the national framework for teachers' learning to support the role of associations. Subject associations are one of the best examples of where teachers are "active participants in their professional learning". It can be costly for associations to source good quality expertise and resources for its membership. In our experience, funding from the Teachers' Professional Networks has repeatedly been cut back and the number of conditions in relation to how it is used has increased.

The various activities organised by the IMTA, which include lectures, workshops, communities of practice etc., are informed by their teacher members. As a result they are relevant to their maths teaching and have an impact in the classroom. Local IMTA Branch networks ensure that these activities are accessible to many teachers in their own area. Subject associations will cease to exist if the time and effort given by members to the associations are not recognised and credited in some way in any future CPD model. This is because teachers will prioritise the mandatory hours, resulting in the subject associations going into decline.

Summary:

- Every teacher in every school is different, any model of CPD proposed will have to be very flexible.
- We agree that teachers as professionals should show a commitment to: continued professional growth, sustained professional practice as well as quality teaching and learning.
- CPD should not be made mandatory and it is important to learn from the negative impact that the 'Croke Park hours' had on teaching and teachers' lives.
- We welcome the possibility that the national framework for teachers' learning might support the role of subject associations.
- Subject associations will cease to exist if the time and effort given by members to the associations are not recognised and credited in some way in any future CPD model.