

DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS 2015-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Enhancing Teaching Learning & Assessment

The Digital Strategy for Schools provides a rationale and a Government action plan for integrating ICT into teaching, learning and assessment practices in schools over the next five years. This Strategy builds on previous strategies in the area of

ICT integration and it takes cognisance of current education reforms that are already underway within the education system at primary and

VISION: "Realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland's young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy."

post-primary level. This Strategy focuses on the schools' sector and the proposed actions are designed to embed ICT more deeply across the system to enhance the overall quality of Irish education. Care has been taken, in developing the Strategy, to ensure that the actions align with and complement strategies and initiatives to support digital

learning in the further education and higher education sectors.

In developing this Strategy, the Department adopted an evidence-based approach. An ICT Census was initially conducted to provide base-line data on the levels and usage of

ICT by teachers and schools. Arising from this research a consultative paper, *Building Towards a Learning Society:* A

National Digital Strategy for Schools, was published and its publication coincided with the launch of a public consultation phase. One hundred and twenty-four (124) submissions were received from various organisations and individuals on the content of the consultative paper and these views were further augmented by face-to-face meetings with a number of

KEY THEMES

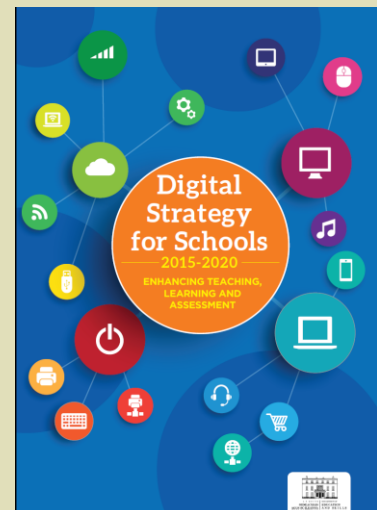
The Strategy has been developed around four key themes which were identified from the ICT Census in Schools report.

Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT

Theme 2: Teacher Professional Learning

Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy

Theme 4: ICT Infrastructure



stakeholder groups. The feedback and views from this phase was subsequently combined with international research on the integration of ICT to formulate the Strategy.

The Strategy articulates that all stakeholders need to take responsibility for embedding ICT into their existing practices. The Census data, along with a number of submissions, highlighted that many people currently view ICT as something peripheral and not core to

teaching, learning and assessment. However, the Strategy states that meaningful ICT integration is the responsibility of all and is a key component of a high-quality 21st century education system.

We live in a world that is characterised by abundant information, advanced technology, a rapidly changing society, greater convenience in daily lives and keener international competition. Therefore, it is important that all

stakeholders are proactive and take a leadership role in identifying how ICT can enhance our education system, particularly in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment. The Department will provide leadership and support to schools so that they take ownership of this challenge and identify how best to achieve ICT integration locally. Thus, ICT integration is a central pillar within the Strategy.

THEMES

Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT

ICT can play a central role in transforming teaching, learning and assessment practices for teachers and students, in a high-quality 21st century education system. The Department recognises that teachers and schools are constantly engaged in enhancing how they teach, how their students learn and how learning is assessed. An essential part of this continuous improvement, in how we enable students to learn effectively, must be to further embed ICT into our education system at all levels.

It is recognised internationally that meaningful ICT integration can be challenging to achieve and that schools need guidance and support to achieve it. All too

often schools are not clear as to what ICT integration looks like and therefore are unsure how they can achieve it. The Strategy will provide advice and guidance for teachers and schools, including examples of good practice on the use of ICT for teaching. In addition, the Department will continue to include clear statements regarding digital skills and learning outcomes in new curricula throughout the lifetime of the Strategy.

The Strategy will adapt the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers so that schools will have greater clarity around the concept of ICT integration. The existing UNESCO Framework was developed for teachers around the globe and there is a need to localise it for the Irish context. By localising the

UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers it will allow the Department's support services and others to provide more appropriate support materials and services to principals and teachers on embedding ICT into their practice. This will be a central focus of the Strategy and it will be reviewed at various intervals and levels between 2015 and 2020.

Theme 2: Teacher Professional Learning

Teachers, along with principals, will be instrumental in ensuring that ICT integration is achieved. There is a need to ensure that ALL teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to integrate ICT into their practice. The use of ICT for teaching, learning and

assessment will be embedded at each stage of the continuum of teacher education, i.e. Initial Teacher Education, Induction and Continuous Professional Development. This will provide multiple opportunities for teachers, across the continuum of teacher education, to become more knowledgeable and confident in achieving ICT integration. The Teaching Council's policies on teacher education will recognise the role and potential of ICT to enhance teaching and learning in schools.

The UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers will play a pivotal role in informing the design of all future teacher professional learning opportunities. The Department support services and others involved in teacher education will be encouraged to embed the use of ICT in CPD design, development and delivery. The Strategy will provide schools with guidance and examples of good practice on the effective, critical, and ethical use of ICT for teaching, learning and assessment. These examples will reflect real classroom practice in action.

Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy

There is a need for distributed leadership in order to truly integrate ICT across our education system. The Department and its agencies will provide strong leadership in

supporting schools to effectively integrate ICT into teaching, learning and assessment. However, this will not be enough. School management and other key stakeholders will also have to provide leadership and take ownership of this challenge so that we achieve ICT integration and equip learners with the digital competencies that we value.

The Strategy recognises the central role of evaluation in monitoring implementation and to ensure that the system is making progress towards ICT integration. It is also important that schools, and other education providers, capture and share innovative practice with the wider teaching community to enhance the overall educational experiences of our young people. By developing a strong research-base, the entire system, will be better informed regarding how to best integrate ICT.

The Strategy acknowledges that ICT also has the potential to be misused in schools and the Department will continue to provide guidance, planning resources and related supports for the effective, safe and ethical use of ICT to school leaders and teachers. Furthermore, the Strategy will facilitate schools to create linkages with existing school policies, for example School Self-Evaluation, so that ICT is embedded deeply within the school.

Theme 4: ICT Infrastructure

Over recent years, the Department has invested in national ICT infrastructure, specifically in the rollout of 100/Mbit/sec broadband services to all post-primary schools and a number of special schools with post-primary students. This programme is jointly funded by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) and the Department of Education and Skills. The provision of improved connectivity to primary schools will commence during the lifetime of this Strategy so that all schools have more robust access to the internet.

The internet is playing an increasingly important part in all our lives and the Strategy has identified recent trends regarding the role of cloud computing in education and students bringing their own devices to schools. The Strategy will provide advice and support to schools in relation to these new trends, so that principals and teachers make better-informed, local decisions. It also recognises that schools face challenges in acquiring appropriate technical support. The Department will evaluate a number of technical support options with a view to providing guidance on the best technical support solution for schools.

Schools will also need to upgrade their ICT equipment and the Department, working with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), will continue

to ensure the provision of frameworks and advice for the purchase of equipment such as printers, desktop PCs and notebooks. Funding, in the form

of school grants, will be provided for the purchase of such equipment.

KEY STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

The Department has developed a series of actions under each of the above themes to progress ICT integration over the lifetime of the Strategy. As noted earlier, there is a need for multiple stakeholders to adopt leadership roles in attaining the 36 objectives outlined in the Strategy and this will be essential in achieving success by 2020.

These objectives and the entire strategy are underpinned by five

key principles which were identified during the consultation and research phase.

These principles are designed to ensure that the Department, school authorities, school leaders and all key stakeholders play a proactive role in enhancing our education system by integrating ICT more effectively.

The Strategy recognises that schools are at different stages of their journey towards ICT

integration and there is an acknowledgment that a one-size-fits-all approach will not achieve success.

In consideration of this, the Strategy will support schools to identify where they are on this journey and will provide a range of supports to assist them move ICT integration forward over the next five years.

Principle	Descriptor
1. <i>A Constructivist Pedagogical Orientation underpinning the embedding of ICT in schools.</i>	A constructivist pedagogical orientation supports teachers in effectively using ICT with their students i.e. learners are actively involved in a process of determining meaning and knowledge for themselves.
2. <i>The use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment can enhance the learning experiences of all students.</i>	ICT plays an important role in supporting inclusion and diversity for all learners by enhancing learning opportunities for all students.
3. <i>The use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment is embedded in school curricula, Department policies and teacher education.</i>	The Department and its agencies will play a proactive role in implementing the Digital Strategy for Schools.
4. <i>ICT is used in an ethical and responsible way.</i>	Schools and the Department enable all users to employ ICT in an ethical and safe way.
5. <i>ICT Planning is required to ensure ICT integration in teaching, learning and Assessment.</i>	All levels of the education system are engaged in inclusive planning for the effective integration of ICT.