Partners for Progress

A review of
**Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century
(TL21)**

A school-university programme
of
professional learning

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Contents

Executive summary

Teaching and Learning for the 21st century (TL21) is a professional learning programme for schools and teachers conceived, established and managed since 2003 by the Education Department, Maynooth University (MU). The programme is constructed on a partnership model, the chief partners being the university, the participating schools, the network of education centres and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Funding for the programme is provided by the DES through its Teacher Education Section.

The programme aims to strengthen teachers' capacities as the authors of their own work and to encourage students as active and responsible participants in learning. A key feature of the programme is a focus on action-research and the building of teachers' capacities as researchers. As well as providing the conceptual frame and academic leadership of the programme, the university also offers a designated postgraduate accreditation option for participants.

In the current phase (2017-19) of the TL21 programme, some twelve networks of schools operate, clustered around ten education centres. Typically, a network consists of between five and eight schools. Each school participating in the TL21 programme undertakes to nominate a team of at least five teachers, including the principal or deputy principal. This team is asked to identify an issue pertaining to teaching and learning in their school on which they will concentrate their attention over a two year period. Through that period of engagement, each school team will participate in about twelve workshops in their network, organised through their local education centre. These workshops are facilitated by regional coordinators who advise and respond to work in progress, and maintain liaison through school visits and other means. Between workshops, school teams develop strategies and activities at school level to further their chosen objectives. Workshops provide a forum for teams to report on and discuss their endeavours.

The TL21 programme director in MU coordinates the entire programme, liaising with the team of coordinators and the education centre directors. The MU leadership role is manifested through the TL21 Director's attendance at workshops in each network, visits to each participating school and regular meetings in the university with coordinators and education centre directors. TL21 maintains communications with policy makers in the DES, the Teaching Council and the many other key agencies in education.

This external evaluation report, commissioned by the DES, reviews the TL21 programme in operation now, as it has evolved over sixteen years. The terms of reference for the evaluation were extensive but have been distilled and simplified as follows:

> To report on TL21 in terms of *what it does* (the aspirations, activities, and initiatives that constitute the field of operations of TL21); *how it works* (the various players, processes and relationships that are identified, formed or developed within the experience of TL21); and *what it means* (the implications of the TL21 experience for national policy and programmes, for school communities, and for individual participants).

Fieldwork was carried out between mid-January and early April 2019. The evaluation engaged with some fifty schools and more than 178 teachers, through attendance at workshops in eleven of the twelve networks of schools, through follow-up work with school leaders and teachers and

students in selected schools and through interviews with associated personnel in various schools, organisations and agencies.

The evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with their TL21 experience among participants. The conceptual and organisational frame of TL21 was seen to be very successful in meeting the needs of participants. Features identified by participants as being critical to the success of the programme included the voluntary participation of each school team; the process of identifying a school-based theme for extended engagement; the continuity and progression over two years; the opportunity for teachers to talk to school colleagues about their own school, in extended professional conversations, and the opportunity to share experiences with other schools.

The presence and engagement of school leaders was seen by participants to be a very important component of the programme: by the same token where such engagement was felt to be inadequate, less successful outcomes were reported.

The evaluation highlights the significance of the TL21 experience for the teaching profession, for the role of the school as locus for professional learning and for universities and higher education institutes in terms of their role in professional development. Specific recommendations are made including the following:

1. The TL21 programme should be maintained, sustained and developed;
2. The programme should be financially and strategically supported by the DES as an autonomous initiative; various other sources of funding should be sought;
3. A Steering Committee should be established to work with and to advise the TL21 team and to draw up and oversee a strategic plan for the next phase of TL21;
4. TL21 should be developed to include initial teacher education, newly qualified teachers and continuity work with schools on completion of their two-year programme;
5. The TL21 programme should be promoted and given high visibility within MU, the responsibilities of the director should be facilitated through a number of specific actions and a concerted programme of TL21 research publications should be initiated;
6. Discussions should be undertaken within Maynooth University to explore the possibility of an 'adjunct' designated status for the coordinators; a system of advance identification and recruitment of coordinators should be developed;
7. Education centre directors should engage as professional leaders with post-primary schools through active engagement in recruitment of schools, liaison with coordinators in the design and implementation of workshops series, and the design and planning of second-phase work, on completion of the two-year TL21 programme;
8. School initiatives can further facilitate professional learning, such as designation of certain DP or AP posts as carrying specific teaching and learning responsibilities; and the provision of structured professional time for planning and review purposes.
9. A programme of TL21 academic research publications should be augmented by other dissemination activities, including showcases and similar events, and high-level international conferences with leading academics, theoreticians and practitioners of international repute.

Introduction: *scenes from an education programme*

In a warm drawing room, in an old manor house now incorporated into a secondary school, a group of more than a dozen teachers are seated, chatting, round a large table laden with plates of sandwiches, scones and pots of tea and coffee. They welcome the stranger just arrived from the road, and further conversations ensue until the coordinator stands and leads the group upstairs.

As a workshop concludes and the teachers drift away, one teacher pauses and slips across the lobby area to another room. A different session is just about to start in the busy Education Centre. She is looking for a colleague attending another course for SLAR (Subject Learning and Assessment Review) facilitators and she wants to say hello, maybe sit in if she can.

At the end of a workshop, one teacher apologises to his colleagues: he has to rush away with no time for informal conversation. He is on the Board of Management of his school and a meeting is due to start in 20 minutes: he has miles to drive cross-country. He is not alone – his two colleagues have to rush away also, one to collect her daughter from training, the other to bring her son to a music lesson. Outside, the first snowfall of the winter has left a white blanket across the outskirts of town.

Ag caint sa seomra foirne, míníonn múinteoir cé chomh tábhachtach is atá teagasc foirne: 'Nuair a bhímse agus Cáit ag gáirí eadrainn féin, tugann sé dearcadh dos na leanaí gur féidir ghnáth shaol a chothú tríd an teanga. Sin é mo leathscéal, pé sceal é!'.

On a school corridor, a young boy carrying his hurling gear engages a teacher in conversation about his homework. The teacher smiles and tells him not to worry – 'just win the game' she calls, 'and I'll talk to you about it on Friday. But if you lose …!" she jokes as he departs. The boy has been recording some difficulties in school-designed TL21 student monitoring booklet, in relation to homework assignments, but his teacher notes that he has been making steady progress of late.

'I love my job – I love the subject I teach, the way it's different to other subjects and how students who are not 'academic' can excel at it. I love the school I teach in.'

The vignettes above are fleeting moments observed[1] in the lives of teachers engaged in the educational development programme, Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21). They are presented at the top of this report to reflect a lasting impression that this research project has left on the external evaluator: the quality of engagement of the participating teachers. This engagement was repeatedly demonstrated in the form of

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[1] All were observed by the external examiner, except the last reference, which is quoted from an MEd (Innovative Learning) thesis completed by a TL21 teacher Aisling McGuire in 2018.

understated but real commitment, serious intent and perhaps most strikingly, consistent good humour.

Teachers, including school leaders, engaged in TL21 commit significant time and energy to the programme. They do this with no specific financial or other compensation. Much of the fieldwork for this project was carried out through dark winter evenings, when teachers, having completed a regular day's teaching, travelled to attend and participate in workshops for a further few hours. The ongoing demands of their own personal and family lives have to be accommodated in this venture but this is invariably done without any great fuss.

The intrinsic motivation that underpins their engagement is a striking testament to their sense of professionalism and care. It is a truism in Irish education to say that small gestures of appreciation and acknowledgement can foster highly productive developments. The TL21 programme is a vivid demonstration of this. The provision of warm welcome and simple refreshments in an Education Centre, the cultivation of a positive environment by coordinators in workshops, and the visible and collegial support of school leaders in their shared action research projects provides the context where teachers can express their commitment to their own professional development, to their colleagues and especially and ultimately, to the young people in their educational care.

Beneath this impressionistic description of an educational experience, however, lies a carefully designed and highly sophisticated programme. The accumulated experience, research and wisdom brought to the programme by the Maynooth University Education Department, chiefly through the former director of TL21, Dr. Pádraig Hogan and the current director, Dr. Anthony Malone, provide the platform for all this work. The quality and dispositions of the participants are a reflection of and a tribute to their work.

1. TL21: Historical context

Evolution of TL21

Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21) is a long-standing professional development programme established by the Education Department in Maynooth University (MU). Initiated in 2003 as a research and development initiative with the support of Atlantic Philanthropies, and directed at the needs of post-primary schools, the aims of the project were initially distilled down to two main items: (a) strengthening teachers' capacity as the authors of their own work and (b) encouraging students as active and responsible participants in learning, while a third aim was articulated before the completion of the first phase: (c) developing innovative teachers as a strategic national resource (Hogan *et al*, 2007).

The first iteration of TL21 ran from 2003 to 2007. The experience and findings of that phase were published in a comprehensive report (Hogan *et al*, 2007). With the engagement of participating schools, the commitment of the university Education Department and the residual funding support of Atlantic Philanthropies, the initiative was maintained for a further six years. While the initiative had the active involvement of and positive engagement with the Department of Education Skills (DES) from its inception, it was financially and organisationally autonomous. A feature of the initiative was its base in the university. A high input of time and expertise from established personnel in the university along with a specially recruited cohort of project personnel, ensured a tight bonding between the participating schools and the project leadership.

Some significant structural and strategic changes in the initiative occurred around 2013/14. As the external funding from Atlantic Philanthropies drew to an end, the DES was invited to take to a more direct and proactive role in the initiative. This resulted in DES funding being provided so as to help disseminate and scale-up the continuous professional development (CPD) model. Some changes were introduced in the

organisational structure of the project. The extended team of university-based project personnel was discontinued, with the recruitment of a team of part-time regional coordinators to act as local agents. The network of education centres became formally involved as key partners in the initiative and providing facilitatory centres for networks of participating schools. Leadership of the initiative was unchanged, with the personal and professional commitment of the university-based project director and colleagues providing both the academic and organisational leadership of the initiative.

By national standards, the longevity of TL21 is quite significant. Few pilot projects[2], interventions or initiatives in post-primary schooling extend beyond five or six years at most, before being closed down, adapted or incorporated into the wider system. However, its longevity does not imply that TL21 has remained unchanged over this time. As with any organic process of development, major changes have occurred in the form and nature of TL21 over the years. The changes in organisational structure noted above are indicative of significant shifts of emphasis in ownership and control. While the project has always promoted school and teacher ownership of the professional development process, the heightened role given to regional coordinators, the increasingly prominent role of the education centre (EC) directors, and especially the school-focussed networks cultivated around those centres, have increased local autonomy and diversity of approach across the programme. Perhaps most significantly, the wider environment of post-primary education has undergone radical change over the past decade, notably in the landscape of continuing professional development for teachers and in the changing post-primary curriculum, as exemplified in the new junior cycle framework and the current review of senior cycle.

The first phase of TL21 had subject-focussed collaboration at its heart. Four subjects – English, Irish, Mathematics and Science – were initially selected to be the focus for development, and a further area, Information and Communication Technology (ICT),

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[2] TL21 has been variously described in its own literature over time as a project, an initiative, and a programme. In this report, the term usually but not always employed is 'programme'.

was added at an early stage of the work (Hogan *et al*, p. 27/8). From the very start, however, a constant core principle was the active participation of the principal or deputy principal in each school. The need to extend the impact of the initiative across the whole school curriculum was identified soon after the work commenced but the first phase retained that subject orientation at its core. The composition of school teams reflected these subject interests. As the programme has evolved over time, the subject-specific identity of TL21 has disappeared entirely. In the current round of external evaluation observations, there was little or no reference to subject-specific issues at workshops or in school-based meetings.

The scale of the initiative has also changed dramatically. From a project operating in fifteen schools in 2003-2007, TL21 listed 69 schools ostensibly participating in 2017-19, in networks of between five and ten schools clustered around ten Education Centres. There is some 'roll-over' continuity among schools from one two-year cohort to the next, but each cohort has a substantial recruitment of 'new' schools. The cumulative 'reach' of the initiative is thus quite significant, perhaps as many as 200 schools, across a swathe of territory from the Shannon to Dublin, and from the south-east to north midlands (broadly speaking, the hinterland of MU Education Department). While the core 'terms of engagement' for school participation – committed and active participation of principal or deputy principal (P/DP) and identification of a school team of teachers – remain unchanged, the operational 'contract' has evolved to comprise a two-year commitment, identification of a school-generated theme for development and active participation in about ten collaborative workshops over the duration of the school's participation in the programme.

Evaluation methodology
This evaluation project was designed as an exercise in conceiving, obtaining and communicating information for the guidance of decision making. Informed by 'democratic evaluation' models developed in University of East Anglia (CARE) and in

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (CIRCE), the role of the researcher was seen as that of a broker in the exchange of information between groups who want knowledge of each other. In the TL21 context, these groups include the DES and other national policy actors at one end of the spectrum, and individual schools and teachers at another end; but crucially, they also include the university community and the network of Education Centres whose mandate is the provision of CPD and other supports for teachers.

The terms of reference for the evaluation were extensive (see Appendix 1). They included the extent of alignment between TL21 and major national and international policies, priorities and performance criteria, as well as identifying eleven specific items for evaluation. When introducing the present external evaluation project to participating schools and teachers, however, the external evaluator tended to summarise it as follows:

To report on TL21 in terms of
- *What it does*: the aspirations, activities, and initiatives that constitute the field of operations of TL21;
- *How it works*: the various players, processes and relationships that are identified, formed or developed within the experience of TL21;
- *What it means*: the implications of the TL21 experience for national policy and programmes, for school communities, and for individual participants.

While this formulation seems almost simplistic, it contains more depth than might initially be apparent. Describing what it is that TL21 actually 'does' is more complex than simply recording the events and initiatives that are visibly at the heart of its operations. And 'how it works' cannot be captured adequately in a systems flowchart or sophisticated organogram (a crude attempt visually to capture the structures and processes of TL21 is presented in Appendix 4 as an indicative map, but this cannot capture the nuanced relationships and interactions of the programme). What TL21 does and how it works are inextricably bound up in 'what it means'. The experience of the

external evaluation project has been one of consistent reinforcement of this underlying complexity within the structural organisation of the programme. The structure of this report follows and integrates the same three themes – what it does, how it works and what it means.

The External Evaluation of TL21 formally commenced on 6 December 2018. Initial work in the weeks immediately before and after Christmas 2018 consisted largely of desk research and email introductions and communications with key personnel associated with the initiative, notably with the various coordinators and with the relevant Education Centre Directors. Fieldwork commenced in mid-January and continued until early April 2019. This consisted mainly of attendance at eleven (11) workshops (one in each network, bar one), follow-up work with staff in five (5) selected schools, meetings with students in two (2) schools and a series of meetings and face-to-face or telephone interviews with associated personnel in various schools, organisations or agencies. In all, the evaluation project engaged with some 50 schools and more than 178 teachers in the course of its work.

The Final Report draws on the direct observation of the author, on notes drawn up in the field and on audio-recorded interviews with key individuals. Appendix 2 contains details of the fieldwork carried out, while Appendix 3 provides a summary of the coding and reference system used in interpreting and presenting qualitative data in this report. An Interim Report was submitted in February 2019 and elements of that report are incorporated and expanded upon in the present text.

2. TL21: *What it does*

TL21 is a CPD programme developed by the Education Department of Maynooth University. The programme seeks to promote innovative pedagogic practices and professional learning communities in post-primary schools. Its two main aims are

- To strengthen teachers' capacities as co-operative and self-critical authors of their own work;
- To enable students to take an active and responsible hand in their own learning.

The programme works with teams of teachers, with senior leaders (principals and/or deputy-principals) as active members of each team. These teams are linked in regional networks, usually comprising five or six schools, coordinated through local education centres and facilitated by a team of regional coordinators. Participating schools are asked to commit to a two-year sustained engagement with the programme.

The programme is a workshop-based CPD initiative. Each network holds five or six workshops each year, 10/12 in total. These workshops are held on agreed dates outside school hours, typically from about 5.00 to 7.00 pm. Workshops are usually held in the appropriate education centre, although on some occasions, usually for reasons of distance to be travelled, participating schools agree to host sessions. The regional coordinator facilitates the workshops. Communication with schools (notice, agenda, material etc.) is usually done by and through the education centre although sometimes the coordinator makes direct communication, both before and after workshops.

Engagement in TL21 is voluntary: schools are invited to join through their local education centre. However, participation requires consistent and sustained engagement over two years. A TL21 school is required to nominate a team of teacher participants who will remain constant in their engagement over the two-year period. While the normal life and career patterns of teachers (change of job, maternity or paternity leave, etc.) are always liable to alter a team's composition, *ad hoc* shuffling or substitution of teachers on the team is discouraged.

In participating in TL21, a school commits to the identification of a school-related theme which will be the focus of their work over the time-span of their involvement. Schools are not asked to have that theme identified before joining: indeed, they are encouraged to have an open mind on entering the programme, with the identification of the theme being the first key task to be undertaken at school level, informed by discussion and exploration in the early workshops.

Workshop format

Workshops are the engine of the process. It is through the workshops that participants generate their sense of belonging within the programme. The format of the workshops generally adhere to the five components identified by the MU TL21 team in its first iteration (Hogan *et al*, 2007, p. 100): active participation, clearly defined tasks, purposeful collaboration, continuity and feedback – all aimed at fostering emergent learning communities. Workshop transactions within this format tend to reflect the particular pedagogic style of the coordinator in particular, and the EC director to a lesser extent. In one network, the coordinator (CN2)[3] presented the school teams with a generic template as to how the workshops would generally be structured:

All sessions to include the following components:	Time allowed:
In-school discussion	10 minutes
Progress report from each school and open discussion	15 minutes
Tutor input to include:	1 hour 15 minutes
• *Input*	
• *Group/school discussion*	
• *Cross school discussion*	
• *Feedback*	
• *Next steps*	
Planning time for each school	20 minutes

Table 1: Sample workshop template

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[3] See Appendix 3: Coding system, for explanation of codes used in citing respondents throughout this report.

As a general format, this structure is apparent in workshops in all networks, albeit not necessarily in the same sequence or with the same time allocations. In all workshops, opportunity for discussion is prioritised, with a particular emphasis on school team discussion. The usual physical formation of the workshop is a series of school-specific tables. In some cases, participants may be asked from time to time to physically leave their base-table and join with members of the other schools for interchange of ideas. In most cases, however, cross-school discussion occurs as general, open discourse across the room, under the guidance of the coordinator.

TL21 teams are expected to continue their work at school level between workshops. A standard component of each workshop is the update session, where each team reports back on progress (or otherwise) of their thematic project. The exchanges that these reports generate are one of the defining features of the process. Another defining feature is the continuing developmental nature of the work, allowing growth, change and reflection over time to imbue the work with added meaning over the two years.

In maintaining TL21 at school level, teams adopt various approaches. In some isolated cases, formal meetings are actually timetabled: in most cases, however, meetings are arranged outside the formal timetable, usually at lunchtime, sometimes before or after school hours.

The research component
TL21 describes itself as a research-led initiative. Emanating from a university, it is a reasonable expectation that a research orientation would be a feature of the programme. The interpretation of research within the programme is one that places a strong emphasis on the participants as researchers, rather than a didactic presentation of the international literature. Coordinators and invited guest presenters make frequent reference to research findings and trends but the most tangible research presence is consistently that of the participants themselves. Most school projects within the TL21

rubric feature elements of data gathering – for example, surveys of students, peer observations and feedback, longitudinal monitoring of cognitive aptitude test scores – as well as structured references to the external literature. This emphasis on the role of the teacher as researcher reflects the priorities of the university-led dynamic of the programme.

In operational terms, TL21 has evolved a distinctive style of work, without being prescriptive. The first year of TL21 engagement is generally seen as one of orientation and clarification of the school theme; the second year is then more focussed towards full implementation of the project that has been honed in the first part. Teams are encouraged to ensure that staff colleagues in their schools are regularly briefed on the TL21 experience. In Year 2, greater emphasis is placed on systematic dissemination within the school. All schools are guided towards the completion of a TL21 report at end of year 2 which can be the basis for whole school application and adopted if appropriate as school policy.

The present external evaluation takes place as the 2017-19 cycle of TL21 draws to a close. Some 69 schools and 412 teachers are currently recorded as participants in the programme. In reality, the numbers are slightly less than these, as some schools and some teachers have effectively discontinued their engagement. Such drop-off is inevitable but difficult to quantify, as it is not formally documented. Some 52 schools and more than 178 teachers were directly engaged with, in the course of this evaluation activity. At least seven schools were identified as not currently active, a further school identified as active at school level but not engaged in the workshops.

3. TL21: *How it works*

The impetus for school engagement in TL21 comes from a variety of sources. Frequently, it is the principal or deputy-principal who introduces the idea but many schools also report that the suggestion initially came from a member of the teaching staff. EC directors are the formal source of promotion and recruitment among post-primary schools.

In-school recruitment for team membership is largely the same across schools and networks. Open invitations are extended to all interested parties. Staff meetings are usually the first occasions for such invitations, with subsequent circular emails, notices or other such communications from the principal. The principal or deputy will sometimes privately encourage individual staff members to apply, without duress or moral pressure.

The structure of TL21 (school team, school theme, workshop participation, continuity and progression over two years, end of programme summary and reflection) is quite simple but nonetheless demanding. The series of workshops acts both as a spine for the programme – 'it keeps us honest' as one school leader (SP6) said, in the sense of providing a deadline and a target for task completion – and as the developmental ladder upon which schools can assess their own progress.

While the themes adopted by schools reflect their own concerns and priorities, it is not a surprise that many similar themes emerge, between schools and across networks. The regulatory environment of schools is a recurring point of reference that shapes the choices of many schools. Thus, many schools adopted themes that reflected their collective staff engagement with the school self-evaluation process (SSE). Similarly, the classroom-based assessments and differentiation issues associated with the emerging subject specifications of the new Junior Cycle Framework were characteristic tropes,

with frequent reference to learning intentions, success criteria and similar concepts and processes.

In terms of actual processes employed in school-based work, peer observation was a very common method of in-school collaboration, with critical commentary from colleagues being sought on specific pedagogical issues. Team-teaching was another popular mode explored under the TL21 banner. Digital technology and game-based learning platforms (e.g. Kahoot, Padlet) were also frequent items around which school staffs could cooperate in the context of the National Digital Strategy 2015-20.

Many of these processes gave rise to informal, in-school events for teaching colleagues. At these 'lunchtime tutorials', as one coordinator (CN6) referred to them, TL21 teachers presented some aspect of their work to whoever else on the staff might be interested – such sessions dealing with digital technologies were organised in a number of settings (S3b, S5a). In a few schools, physical manifestations of TL21 work were established, such as notice boards, resource shelves, even a dedicated collaborative space (SN8), where teachers would meet, discuss TL21-related issues, share resources or just catch-up.

Formal school-based TL21 team meetings are rarely timetabled as such. Meetings tend to be held at lunchtime or through some *ad hoc* scheduling. Frequently, however, meetings don't occur for long periods, often only when a network workshop is imminent and a sense of urgency is engendered in getting ready for the session. This is perhaps inevitable when a structured schedule is not formally adopted. 'It's a matter of priorities – if it's important enough, it gets on the timetable' said one school leader (TN11a) whose school has timetabled meetings built into the school calendar.

A critically important component of TL21 is the commitment to a time period of two years. This is a significant commitment for a school team to take on. It reflects the lengthy nature of any developmental process in a school setting. It is also an explicit

recognition of the need for extended time to be devoted to any process of growth, in professional development especially. One-shot interventions or short timescale projects can rarely have an impact on deep-rooted practices and cultures.

While some participants felt that a shorter time commitment would be preferable, and pointed to the *Forbairt* developmental programme which takes one school year to complete, others felt that the two-year period itself was two short to see real change emerge.

> To invent things into practice: it's a short window… By the time you get an idea, and by the time you do some research on it and by the time you try it the first way, and then you tweak it and then you try it the second way, your two years are gone before you've done anything real (SP1)

On balance, despite the strain it puts on participants, the two-year timescale is a positive contribution to successful innovation.

Workshop participants

In the course of discussions at workshops with teachers, principals and deputy principals, a number of recurring questions were employed. One such question was "what is the distinguishing feature of TL21 in your experience as compared to your experience with other CPD programmes?" Almost invariably, the response to this question identified the self-directed and peer-informed basis of the TL21 experience. The TL21 model received almost unanimous praise with its focus on the needs of the individual school and the individual staff members involved. A subset of this theme was the voluntary nature of the TL21 model. Many participants identified the self-selection process as being a key factor in the perceived success of the TL21 programme in their school:

> We volunteered for this (TN1a).

> This is our programme, we make it what we want it to be, not like a course you go to for a day… (TN7b).

> Won't know for a year or two, but we've great conversations. What we know, we know really well! (TN11b)

I only came to this school this year, and I was amazed at the culture change [from where I had been teaching]. This [TL21] seems to be embedded in the school: it's more than the sum of its parts (TN11c).

Teachers made frequent reference to the concept of school-based CPD as distinct from national programme delivery. All participants had experience of a range of national CPD provision. Comments on such provision varied from highly positive to somewhat reserved.

We had great in-service for our subject. Really enjoyed it (TN1b).

Just different approaches, both [national CPD and TL21] good. This is different though, 'cause it's more friendly and you get to know people over time (TN2a).

… very good presenters [at national CPD course] but when teachers leave, they try out the ideas and when they don't work they [give up]… Because there was no thought put into it, no reflection … this was something that worked for somebody else (TN4a).

Most difficult part was the atmosphere of the place [national CPD event]. There were people there who just didn't want to be there. And they made it clear (TN9d).

A second question put to participants was: "if I were to appear in your staffroom tomorrow and speak to other teachers who are not involved in TL21, would they know what I was talking about?". Responses to this question tended to be largely positive but somewhat more nuanced than the previous question.

They'd know what it's about but they wouldn't know much more (PN3)

Yes, I guess. We have it regularly at staff meetings so it's there. Some more than others I guess (TN4b)

I heard about this from another teacher. That's why *I'm* here! (TN2k)

Most participants took the opportunity provided by this question to identify certain processes that were in train in their school. They noted that TL21 issues were commonly raised at staff meetings. In many cases, these were standardised agenda items at every whole staff meetings; in other cases, they were once a year items or only as issues

arose. In some schools, as noted above, informal tutorial sessions were provided by TL21 staff members in areas like the use of digital technologies.

There were some interesting observations regarding other teacher reactions. One teacher, who completed the MEd (Innovative Learning) in Maynooth in 2018, has recorded one such incident:

> One of my colleagues approached me following a parent-teacher meeting. A parent had asked her why she doesn't upload videos of course topics on the internet like some of the rest of the teachers. This colleague was not happy that a parent had said this to her. She said she felt as though they were saying she was not a good teacher, or not moving with the times (McGuire, p 60)

The risk of alienating non-participant colleagues is always present in school projects.[4] Resistance by colleagues to change is not necessarily a negative force: it may provide an interesting forum for dialogue. Resistance as such from colleagues was not reported by participants in the TL21 experience, but getting 'buy-in' to emergent practices was.

> Not resistance as much as apathy (PS1)
>
> The challenge is to get everyone on board (TN10a)
>
> You have to be smart with TL21 – not another 'ask' of teachers (TN7a).

A very common experience of TL21 teachers is their involvement in collaborative or shared practice. Peer-observation is consistently referenced; team-teaching and pairing with non-TL21 teachers are also frequently noted. These practices, as well as helping the participants in their action-research projects, also have the effect of disseminating the experience across the staff.

> Team teaching was a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with another teacher and share the learning environment to enhance the experience for the students. The first hurdle to surmount in team teaching is to adapt to sharing your teaching environment…. Personal relationships lie at the heart of team teaching. In order to achieve a successful partnership, there has to be a good, solid relationship underpinning it (Sheehan, MEd 2018, p. 77).

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[4] 'I like everything about Humanities except the teachers who keep going on about it!' was a heartfelt comment by a highly innovative, but non-participant teacher in the CDU Humanities project in the 1970s, as recorded by an external observer at the time.

When asked to identify the most positive aspects of their TL21 experience, participants frequently identified the opportunity to have extended conversations with colleagues from their own school and from other schools. Interestingly, the majority of participants tended to identify the opportunity for extended conversation with their own school colleagues as the most valuable aspect of these workshops. They noted that school life rarely afforded them the time for such professional discourse in their own staffroom.

> Actually, I find this [indicating table with school colleagues] more valuable than the wider discussions. I mean that's great too, but the really good thing here is that we have time to talk about what we're doing in school. We never get this in school (TN1d).

> Getting time to do this, to talk to each other (TN8a)

> Listening to people from the other schools and then talking to each other – they're having the same issues that we are (TN6b)

One teacher described how she loved to hear her own colleague make a presentation to the wider group. An EC director noted something similar:

> I really feel proud to hear her speak so well. Like, that's our work she's talking about, that's us! (TN3d).

> I have seen that change in teachers – and then they feel empowered when they stand up at a meeting, when they present …and when they see improvement in their own classroom (DN11)

The importance of the support of principals and deputy principals (P/DP) was repeatedly cited, both in positive affirmation of its impact or, less frequently, in rueful acknowledgement of its absence. The importance of the full engagement of the P/DP was noted not just by participating teachers, but by P/DPs themselves, by education centre directors and perhaps most strongly by coordinators and by the TL21 Director. One coordinator expressed a reservation about some schools who made enquiries about, and sometimes even signed-up for the programme, but whose motivation was more to do with public perception than professional development:

> I'd want nothing to do with them – they just want the glory of naming it [TL21] on their brochure. If they're not serious, I don't want to know (CN7).

Internal evaluations

The collected sequence of internal evaluation forms completed by teachers in successive cohorts from 2015 to the present was made available for study, as part of this external evaluation. The common story contained in these evaluations is one of very positive feedback, consistently evident across the various networks and cohorts.

The phenomenon of 'happy sheets', the positive feedback given at the end of an 'in-service day' is well-known. It can sometimes simply reflect the polite nature of teachers, who themselves appreciate what the performance of teaching and facilitations means. In other cases, it can be understood as the hurried response of teachers who simply wish for a quick exit! The TL21 evaluations are more thoughtful and nuanced that this however: there is consistent evidence of serious reflection in the cumulative impact of participant evaluation of their TL21 experience. The survey instrument issued annually by the TL21 Director in MU, adjusted or amended in sequenced iterations, is structured in six levels of questioning: basics (operational efficiency), participants' learning (quality of learning experience), application of new approaches (individual teacher and collective staff), school support for TL21 participation, improvements in students' learning (in attitudes to learning, practices of learning and achievements in learning) and finally, improvements in teachers' capacity.

These internal evaluations indicate a consistently high level of satisfaction among participants. Aside from the basic provision and structure of the programme – the workshops, the school-based project, the inputs and support from the university – which generated strongly positive responses, the key factors identified by teachers and school-leaders were the high quality of peer support, the sharing of resources, the 'slow, steady steps' that characterised the evolution over time and the different form of CPD experience, school-based and collaborative, as compared to what one teacher referred to as 'CPD that tells us what to do'. The item that evoked the most equivocal response was that related to student achievement: while positive impact was identified in student

attitudes and practices, expressions like 'too early to say' or 'hard to judge', were most common in relation to actual student achievement.

It is always necessary to examine what may lie beneath self-reported evaluations. One of the founding founders of the curriculum development movement in Ireland in the 1970s would famously berate his project team who reported back with positive responses from teachers. If the purpose of the project was to disrupt established practices, he would proclaim, teachers need to feel challenged, uneasy and anxious after such courses – not 'happy'.

Coincidentally, a current leader of one national CPD programme articulated the very same point: when staff would report back that

> … 'it was a great day, they were all kinda happy', I'd say: 'I'd prefer if you came back saying they were upset, a wee bit uneasy … if they're doing it all already, why are we here? … We've got braver now, braver and bolder and harder – our goal is to disrupt the thinking! (A4)

Less 'happy' feedback may indicate the uneasiness that presages changed practice. In the context of a mandated change in the curriculum, for instance, when different classroom practices are required, the professional development encounter is likely to have quite a different orientation to – but no less legitimate than – that typical of the school-focussed, teacher-led TL21.

While such reservations need to be acknowledged, nevertheless a feature of the internal evaluations, reinforced by the evaluation conversations with workshop participants, is the critical perspective that teachers and school leaders bring to bear on their experience. Positive commentary is usually accompanied by evidence, anecdotal or otherwise. Many of the respondents identify the self-selected engagement in CPD as distinct from the mandated CPD associated with national curriculum reform, for instance, as a crucial success factor.

This is not to suggest that one form of CPD is superior to the other. Clearly, the self-reported evidence indicates that a school-based model is a solid determinant of success. However, such processes are not necessarily sufficient in themselves to secure the achievement of national objectives, like those of a new curriculum programme: the mandated CPD model is likely to have a greater level of success in such a context. However, the recurring evidence is that school-focussed, locally-networked and professionally-supported ongoing initiatives like TL21 have an unrivalled capacity to engender collective professional learning across self-identified priorities.

Strategic drivers of TL21

The design of the TL21 programme from its inception has emphasised the importance of collaborative partnerships at work. A feature of the regional network model of TL21 has been the central pairing of the education centre director and the regional coordinator, working within the professional frame designed and overseen by MU Education Department.

Coordinators

The team of regional coordinators is a striking feature of the programme. This particular collection of individuals constitutes a significant and rich repository of expertise. This expertise has been garnered through extensive practical experience at different levels of the education system in Ireland. The team of coordinators, as currently constituted, includes retired school principals and experienced facilitators of professional development in second-level education.

In the various workshops observed for this external evaluation, the inputs, presentational styles and facilitatory roles adopted by the coordinators varied quite considerably. Yet they all fall within a common mode of facilitation set out by the MU TL21 team, recognising the professional capacity and responsibility of the participants. The workshops provide strong examples of informed and condensed research, a

recurring motif within TL21: action research as a mode of activity involves an ongoing dialogue between the world of educational research and the practice of teaching and learning. Participants display impressive familiarity with the language and concepts of contemporary research and how they relate to the daily life of schools. The role of coordinators in presenting and contextualising such research is vital.

The quality and expertise of these coordinators is consistently identified by participants as an outstanding feature of the programme. These coordinators each adopt quite distinct signature pedagogies in their work. While clearly adhering to the central tenets and guiding principles of the TL21 initiative, the coordinators each bring a distinct and unique style to their work. The commentary by participants in TL21 on the role of the coordinators is consistently positive and laudatory.

A question does arise as to how a team of coordinators like the current team can be maintained and sustained over time, or replicated in new networks and different situations. The experience and visible authority of the coordinators is a key factor in their success. The recruitment of coordinators is an informal process, managed by the TL21 director in conjunction with EC directors but with considerable input from time to time from other MU personnel, from school authorities and indeed from other coordinators. This organic process has served the programme very well and is appropriate for the niche task and its part-time nature. Some forward planning for future recruitment, perhaps to include some initial engagement of possible future coordinators prior to recruitment, might be addressed by the TL21 Director and EC directors.

Consideration should also be given to some further capacity-building within the team. This might take the form of more regular team meetings, sharing resources and research material and perhaps joint publications. Not all coordinators are likely to be energised by such collaboration if it seems contrived, but these and similar options

should be explored to maximise the benefit that the coordinators' collected experience and expertise provide.

A specific route that should be investigated relates to the possible establishment of adjunct roles within the university structure. These would be honorary positions, conferred by the university in recognition of the qualities demonstrated by persons in the service of education. They would likely be fixed-term appointments, and could include opportunities to engage in some other capacities within the Education Department (e.g. guest lecturing, research supervision etc).

Education Centre Directors

There is a high level of awareness and appreciation of the significance of the TL21 initiative, even among those EC directors whose professional background is in the primary sector. Many of the directors interviewed for this evaluation project identified TL21 as of strategic importance for them in their role, offering a very strong platform for wider engagement with post-primary schools.

The role adopted by EC directors in relation to TL21 varies across the networks. Some are present and active in each TL21 workshop in their centre, some have chosen to have an overt presence but not active engagement while some others are more remote in their involvement. One director, new to the post, valued direct participation along with the coordinator in the workshops, as a means of becoming familiar with the sector as well as with local schools

> I will keep up my visibility – very important for me because I came from the primary sector. I've invested in this because it is a model I believe in (DN11).

The mechanics of communication with schools varies across the networks: in some cases all communications are carried out through the Education Centre, in consultation with the coordinator, while in other cases the coordinator communicates directly with participants. A key role is carried out in the education centres by designated

administrative personnel, whose positive contribution is frequently acknowledged by coordinators, as well as by directors.

TL21 provides education centres with a further opportunity to develop their growing profile as active agents in educational enterprise. They are well-placed for a key role in the recruitment of new schools, in the identification of key personnel and in the promotion of the initiative and its outcomes. One EC director (DN2) for instance speculated on the possibilities of local seminars or conferences, showcasing school projects in TL21. Research publication, as an outcome of such events, was also mooted as an example of the sort of promotion that education centres, perhaps working collaboratively (as per one group of centres in the southeast), could facilitate. Another director (DN11) addressed the same issue: 'we're looking at ways of disseminating materials across the centres' and developing a small community of practice within the wider network of centres.

The same director referred to a key role of the EC directors in promoting the programme and in recruiting schools. This is a core responsibility of the directors within the TL21 structure.

> We've lost one school and there are schools that have lulls but you have to keep supporting them. I'll be sending out notice to schools over the coming weeks for next year's intake. We'll have an information meeting in May for sign-up in September … (DN11).

In a recent comprehensive review of the Irish educational landscape (Coolahan *et al*, 2017), the authors identify the

> … strategic and active role of the Education Centres … This includes not only their role as venues … Equally significant is their leadership and developmental role, for instance, in designing or providing participatory seminars or programmes that cultivate professional learning communities among teachers (p. 163)

The TL21 programme offers rich potential as a platform for the further development of this role. In particular, a programme like TL21 is a very strong base from which to develop a deeper relationship with second-level schools, the weaker sector in terms of

involvement with the centres. For instance, one TL21 principal (SP3) wondered as to how best the school might maintain the initiatives they had undertaken when the current cycle had reached its end – 'I want to know what the good principals have done or are doing about this. I want to work this out with someone'. Education Centre directors are particularly well placed now to help such schools, perhaps through the establishment of follow-up groupings or second phase work with such school teams.

Department of Education and Skills (DES)

The DES has been an active partner with the TL21 programme since its inception in 2003. For the first phase of the initiative, funding was provided mainly by Atlantic Philanthropies. Since that source concluded in 2013, the DES has provided financial support to Maynooth University in the maintenance of the programme. The DES engagement encompasses more than financial support alone. From its inception in 2003, the DES has been an active partner in the initiative, both in terms of advising on programme content and direction and in providing high-level access to the TL21 director and team in consultation and national policy planning.

The main reporting pattern and chief accountability channel has been from the TL21 team (Director and colleagues in MU) to the Teacher Education Section in the DES. Annual reports have been provided by the Director of TL21, briefly describing the work done. Comprehensive, reflective and succinct summaries of the qualitative data generated by the annual internal evaluations, submitted by the participating teachers are provided. Since funding was secured from the DES in 2014, a total of €104,000 has been committed to the TL21 programme. Each year the annual subvention is deposited with TL21 in the Education Department, Maynooth University. This is then distributed in full to the participating Education Centres. The respective Directors allocate these funds specifically to defray the costs incurred by the Regional Coordinators. Various other costs are incurred in the operations of TL21: EC directors note that the running expenses, while not exorbitant (mainly being in the form of light catering for workshop

attendees) are invariably carried by the Centre out of their general budgets. Individual schools also incur some running expenses related to TL21 programme activities (as distinct from teaching and learning activities) for example, when they host workshops. Such costs are sometimes borne by schools themselves, more often referred back to the appropriate Education Centre.

Relationship to national policies

Participants in TL21 initiatives display a constant awareness of the policy context within which they operate. This is most frequently manifested in specific references to school self-evaluation (SSE) and to junior cycle reform. School participants make recurring reference to the wider regulatory context within which they operate and they place high value on the capacity of their TL21 work to contribute to these external requirements. As noted earlier, many of the TL21 workshop presentations make explicit reference to key instruments such as the DES '*Looking at our School*' (2016) framework and the process of school self evaluation.

CPD is well-established in the professional experience of teachers and school-leaders and there is a constant process of comparative commentary as between TL21 and national CPD processes. While TL21 invariably emerges positively in these comparisons, the self-selecting nature of TL21 engagement is a contributory factor to this: participants are invested in and have a tangible 'ownership' of the process. In a nationally mandated initiative like the new junior cycle framework, the dynamic of participation is markedly different.

In further discussing their comparative experience of national CPD and TL21, two features recur in teachers' comments: the learning environment within which the CPD takes place and the relative quality of presenters. With regard to the former, in relating their national CPD experience, most commonly in relation to junior cycle reform, many teachers comment on the tension or negativity they felt emanating from some teacher

colleagues. This negativity was, unsurprisingly, almost entirely absent from their TL21 experience and this provided an environment much more conducive to professional learning.

A common motif in discussion with TL21 teachers is their high regard for the presentations they encounter at the workshops. This high regard is directed in the first instance at the regional coordinators with whom they work. The experience and insights of these coordinators, allied to the non-directive manner of their leadership, is greatly appreciated. Almost equally valued, however, is the contribution of peer teachers, both from their own school and from other schools in the network. Teachers report a credibility and authenticity in these presentations which they contrast with some of their experiences on national CPD courses (only 'some' of those experiences, it should be stressed: overall, the attitude to national CPD experiences was not a negative one).

While theoretically, the topics chosen for action research in TL21 could range across the entire gamut of possibilities, in reality, there is significant replication or comparability between schools. This is due largely to the exigencies of national policy and the consequent priorities identified by schools. Thus, within the current cohort of schools, there has been a frequent identification of some core themes, including various assessment-related themes (e.g. AfL, CBA-preparation, homework policy and strategies, digital supports for learning).

At present, there is no formal linkage of TL21 with national CPD initiatives, such as the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). It has been pointed out, for instance, that TL21 teachers are well positioned in terms of process, methodology and experience, to act as local associates for such national initiatives. Some TL21 teachers already have such roles. It has also been observed by JCT staff that TL21 teachers are frequently evident in their sessions through their engagement –

>   … they're tuned into how really good CPD can work – they're walking the walk! (A4).

There would appear to be mutually beneficial outcomes to such connectivity. However, such collaboration should not diminish the loosely-coupled relationship that is the hallmark that distinguishes TL21. The risk is always present that a local or regional initiative can easily become co-opted or colonised by the juggernaut of a large national programme. An advisory or steering group, with representation from some key national agencies, might be an appropriate forum for connections, information exchange and mutual awareness and support.

The positioning of TL21, not as a national programme 'delivering' change, but as a school-based programme supporting locally identified priorities, is a crucial issue. TL21 operates in a zone that is ambiguous and uncertain. While participants make frequent reference to the capacity fostered by TL21 to engage with mandated processes of change, it is valued highly for not being itself part of such a mandate. Indeed, it may be that TL21 should consciously foster more autonomous or 'subversive' initiatives by schools, without reference to national prescriptions. As one coordinator noted –

> … the best teachers have to be heretics! (CN9).

Coordinators (CN2, CN11) and EC directors (DN3, DN12) repeatedly make similar observations, citing the rich potential of national frameworks like *Looking At Our School* (2016) and curriculum programmes like the *Framework for the Junior Cycle* (2015) in empowering real professional growth. One coordinator, stressing the need to embed changes in the deep structures and culture of the school, used the metaphor of a medical 'drip' where the positive developments of a programme like TL21 can be 'mainstreamed' in the lifeblood of the school, through a process like SSE:

> if the school *owns* the SSE process and has an agentic rather than a compliance approach, then the linkage is good – it develops the school's capacity to 'speak for itself' [within the frame of national policy] (CN9).

The distinction between the bottom-up approach promoted by TL21 and top-down nationally-mandated programmes is not one of 'good' versus 'bad'. Both models of

development are not only complementary but symbiotic: a purely school-based and teacher-focussed model runs the constant risk of taking safe options and replicating or merely 'tweaking' established practices, if there are no regulatory requirements or external challenges. A model solely driven by national imperatives tends to foster a resentful and superficial compliance. Where both models co-exist, powerful synergies can be achieved – this is evident in much of the work of TL21 schools – while occasionally and inevitably sparking some clashes and conflicts.

Role of the University

Partnership is the hallmark of the TL21 organisational structure. The principal institutional partners are Maynooth University (whose Education Department has been the originator, designer and driving force behind TL21 since its inception in 2003), the network of education centres, the Teacher Education Section of the DES and of course the participating schools, including the P/DPs and teachers. A less formal but nonetheless crucial element in the enterprise is the team of regional coordinators who constitute a unique and defining component of the programme.

The university engagement is highly valued by the various partners and participants. The attitude of teachers, in this country and elsewhere, to academic research and commentary has frequently been sceptical, if not cynical and dismissive. By contrast, the role of the university in TL21 is consistently regarded very highly. The active presence of Maynooth University is well appreciated by participants, seen to add weight and gravitas to the initiative – 'credibility' was the word spontaneously chosen by many participants in conversation on this point. While the teacher-led and school-focussed orientation of TL21 is consistently cited as the defining positive feature of the initiative, the active engagement of Maynooth University is seen as providing validity to the enterprise. Indeed, some participants suggested a more extensive and formal role for the university, in the form of structured inputs to the workshop series, especially in the

early stages. Such interventions, it was suggested, would give a more confident platform to schools in embarking on and designing their own action-research projects.

While a university-linked CPD programme is seen as valuable in its own right, the particular contribution, commitment and support of both the former and current directors of the TL21 programme are regularly noted by participants.

> Yes – it gives credibility and a strength to our work. It's very helpful when he's here – no big sell but you get a real sense of commitment (TN9)
>
> These are essential – really helpful supportive and ready to respond to things as they arise. It also adds credibility and a touch of authority when he visits (DN2)
>
> The personality and presence of both has been hugely important … both exceptionally approachable, grounded and also well-known and well-regarded (CN9).
>
> Links with Maynooth are very tangible – the teachers know they are part of bigger project… Maynooth are incredibly supportive of us. When I came in, I came to an email saying 'welcome'. That was in my inbox when I arrived! (DN11).

This transparent and authentic engagement is highly valued and appreciated, augmenting the institutional gravitas provided by the university as such.

A key feature of any university-based programme should be a body of academic publications and research dissemination. A number of important publications derived from the TL21 have been published in recent years in respected international journals as well as in Irish publications, chiefly through the work of the current and former TL21 Directors. There is great potential for an extended suite of publications of various types – academic research papers, implementation-oriented articles, policy focussed papers etc. – which should be given priority in the future. Such publications should feature collaborative work between MU staff and various other personnel in the programme.

The university dimension has a deceptively light touch, belying its deeply researched developmental model and its carefully planned implementation strategy. It is the central component that defines the programme. Strategies to enhance the presence and role of

the university in the programme may be worth exploring. These could include the incorporation of the coordinators within a more formal linkage to the university: a status of 'adjunct' lecturer or researcher, as part of increased collaboration across the team, could help increase the profile of the university and the leverage of the programme.

It might also be beneficial to explore further interchange between schools, coordinators and the university in the context of the wider range of programmes in the Maynooth Department of Education. The TL21 experience could be a great learning context for student teachers on Initial Teacher Education programmes.

In all of this work, there is disproportionate reliance on the programme Director. Within the contemporary university structure, the quality and intensity of the academic leadership and applied research work involved is not easily recognised. The DES should engage with MU in the first instance to explore how such work might be best facilitated. At the very least, it might be feasible to 'buy out' some time to facilitate the programme Director not just to manage the programme but also to coordinate a body of TL21 research publications that could give the programme the international exposure and recognition it deserves. Such an initiative would also begin a desirable process of further engagement with other colleges whose education departments and schools struggle to establish appropriate partnership programmes with schools.

Accreditation

Participants in TL21 are eligible for two forms of accreditation. Each participant receives a TL21 certificate of participation from their education centre at the end of the two years, itemising their attendance at workshops over the period of the programme. The opportunity to pursue their work in an accredited postgraduate academic programme to PG Diploma or Masters level, through the MEd (Innovative Learning) programme, is also offered to participants.

Both TL21 accreditation routes are well regarded by participants. The education centre certificate is seen as having tangible currency in the contemporary school environment. Specifically it is seen as an important testament of achievement in the context of middle-management promotional opportunities in schools. While teacher participants were generally positive but not visibly energised about the certificates as such, school leaders spoke of a rapidly growing awareness among teachers of the currency-value of the TL21 certificate. The new promotional posts of Assistant Principal 1&2 are particularly well aligned with these teaching and learning certificates and this new vista has changed the context considerably: '*fáinne geal an lae*' was how one school principal (SP1) described the sudden awareness of new promotional possibilities among teachers. While the dominant motivation factors for TL21 participants have been consistently 'internalised', in Firestone's (2015) descriptions of teacher motivation patterns, the TL21 certificate now provides a tangible form of external motivation for teachers, given the new model of promotion.

The take-up of the academic MEd route is naturally much lower. The highest cohort proportion taking the academic option is cited as 20%: this is indeed a very high rate of participation but the overall figure on average is significantly lower. At present some 26 teachers are enrolled on the university accreditation route.

The quality of the postgraduate programme is very high, as attested by consecutive external examiners, as evidenced by a reading of submitted theses and as reported by observers (coordinators and EC directors) as well as participants in the programme itself. The deep immersion in study and concerted engagement with MU staff that course participants experience is an engagement of the highest quality.

A positive side effect of this is the on-site dissemination that occurs both in participating teachers' own schools and in their local network. At one workshop, for instance, a

teacher (TN7) made a presentation on his research in the area of 'retrieval practice', a presentation informed by the maxim that 'memory is the residue of thought'. At a time when educational discourse on assessment is dominated by Assessment for Learning (AfL) and similar constructions of formative assessment, this presentation took quite a different perspective. The short presentation, informed in equal measure by academic research and the teacher's own classroom research, made a persuasive case for retrieval practice as an approach to decrease test anxiety and increase higher order thinking. More important than the actual content however, was the capacity of the teacher to present dense material in an accessible manner, while querying some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of most of the audience.

Many participants commented positively on the availability of the academic pathway, even though they themselves chose not to pursue it. The changed environment for postgraduate study in education over the past decade is cited as a causal factor for this, exemplified by the common Masters-level entry (PME) for new teachers, the removal of allowances for additional qualifications and the greater orientation towards 'leadership' programmes *per se* for purposes of promotion.

That scenario is now changing somewhat, as noted above, in the context of internal school promotion processes. A further initiative to promote the masters/graduate diploma route may be timely and productive at this stage. The concept of instructional leadership is beginning to take greater hold in the system alongside more traditional school leadership programmes, as indicated by different school leadership personnel (A1, A3), with organisations like NAPD advocating and promoting such perspectives. Maynooth University can legitimately aspire to being the leading academic centre for this, given its TL21 experience as well as the *Tóraíocht* programme and long-standing masters and graduate diplomas in leadership.

Student achievement

It is a truism to state that improved school performance and enhanced student achievement are the ultimate aims of CPD in education. How to identify, let alone how to assess such improvement and enhancement is very problematic, however. In the internal evaluations of TL21, for example, the least positive and assertive commentary tends to refer to that section dealing with 'student achievement'. Variations on the theme of 'too early to say' or 'hard to be specific' constitute the most common response.

An issue that requires serious consideration however is what constitutes 'student achievement'. The default interpretation is usually defined by test scores, examination grades and academic results. There is little evidence that directly links TL21 to such improved academic performance, although some such effects are reported in respect of some interventions.

However, reliance on such a metric for the assessment of student achievement is highly reductive. For instance, some schools report improved student engagement, more interest in their lessons and more responsiveness to their learning tasks. The long-term effect of such changes in attitude to and practices of learning are likely to be of greater significance than short-term academic performance, in terms of lifelong learning and extended engagement with education. However, while such effects are reported, there needs to be more examination of such evidence as exists, the extent to which it can be attributed to TL21 and especially of the long-term residual impact, if any, that remains over time.

Most importantly, the very evident effect of TL21 participation on school climate or culture directly improves the quality of student learning, as evidenced by the extensive literature on the subject.

<u>Student voice</u>

Because TL21 in itself incorporates so many diverse lines of action, not to speak of the various other initiatives with which most schools are simultaneously engaged, it is quite impossible to discern causal relationships between the programme and student outcomes. In TL21 schools, most programme interventions are diffuse and largely invisible to students. While all interventions are designed for the ultimate benefit of the student, the approaches, techniques and instruments developed tend to be directed towards the teacher. In that context, seeking a student perspective on these interventions would be of limited benefit to the study.

The student voice dimension in this evaluation was therefore a smaller element than initially planned. However, student views and opinions were sought in two schools. One school was an urban all-girls school of c.350 students; the other was a rural school of mixed gender with a population of about 500 students. In each of these schools, a discrete and visible TL21 intervention had been made, with tangible product or process with which students were specifically engaged. In one school, the TL21 focus was on parental engagement with the school, through a collaborative homework project. In the other school, it was on raising academic ambitions and student achievement through self assessment and monitoring[5].

The key observations made by the students related to their perceptions of what constituted good teaching and how they interpreted or understood the TL21 intervention they had experienced. In respect of the first item, there was a consensus across both schools on what they liked and did not like:

> *I like when we're doing things*
>
> *Not to read from the book*
>
> *Not more PowerPoints!*
>
> *I like strict but nice teachers*

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[5] Procedures adopted were guided by the models described by Lundy (2007) and by Flynn (2017).

Getting keywords, so that I can remember what I learned

All students professed a preference for activities rather than book- (or screen-) based learning. They reported a mixed diet of these experiences when it came to their typical school day.

In terms of their perception of TL21 as such (and both sets of students used the term 'TL21' as part of their natural discourse), their descriptions were largely focussed on the transactional processes involved (e.g. task descriptions, deadlines, difficulties), rather than the purposes or generalisations that could be made. Thus the homework project was largely relayed in terms of the subject matter (in many cases, it was home economics-related) including some ancillary activities that were built in (TED talks and *Kahoot*-tasks). The TL21 focus on the engagement of parents in school-related work was repeatedly but tacitly incorporated in the students' retelling of the project: which is probably the crucial indicator of success from the school's perspective.

In the second school, where the TL21 vehicle was a personalised booklet in which all first year students recorded their own expectations of performance before taking school tests, together with actual scores attained and a WWW/EBI[6] reflective panel. Students again reported their experience in terms of the transactions undertaken and the relative accuracy of their own predictions.

One young boy made the observation – *predicting my results helped me think* – a descriptive observation, quite profound in its understatement. As such, it serves as a validation of the school's wider aspirations for the project.

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[6] What Went Well – Even Better If …

4. TL21: What it means

The Irish post-primary school system has remained relatively unaltered in structure and design over the past century. The introduction of free post-primary schooling some fifty years ago marked the most significant change in the system, but that change was essentially one of scale, not form. The curriculum and examination structures remained largely unaltered. Today, those structures and the educational culture they have fostered are still dominant in our schools but there are significant developments occurring under the surface that have potential to affect real change.

Changes in the post-primary system, when they have occurred, have tended to be generated at the periphery of the system, not at the centre. Thus for instance, the national curriculum changes of the 1980s and 90s were largely shaped by earlier pilot projects carried out by agencies like the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) and the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). The curriculum design and structure of these curriculum projects (such as Humanities and ESLP[7] in the CDU, or SESP[8] and SPIRAL[9] in CDC) informed the development of national programmes like the Junior Cycle schools programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). On the face of it, this would seem to be a good example of successful dissemination of innovation. Yet, the qualitative experience of those curriculum projects, the sense of teacher ownership and engagement and some of the distinctive innovations of the individual projects were felt by participants to be lost in the transition from the periphery to the centre. Perhaps this is inevitable in any process of research, development and dissemination but there is also a possibility that the research, development and dissemination (RDD) model itself may be not always be the only or the most appropriate one for educational innovation.

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[7] Early School Leavers Project
[8] Social and Environmental Studies Project
[9] Shannon Project in Relevant Adolescent Learning

It is instructive to consider TL21 in light of the experience of pilot projects and educational innovation in Ireland. It may also be helpful to bear in mind the limitations of the seemingly rational approach of the RDD model.

Maynooth University has a long and strong tradition of active engagement in developmental work with schools. The earlier curriculum development of the CDU and Shannon found echoes in the work of Maynooth University, for example through the Schools for Active Learning programme and the School and Curriculum Development Initiative which operated through the 1990s. These programmes were regionally located, curriculum oriented and school focussed and they were specifically referenced to the Junior Certificate and senior cycle reforms then being introduced by the NCCA (Callan, 1994, 2002).

At its inception in 2003, TL21 introduced a form of educational development which had some continuity with those pre-cursor projects but was unique in Irish education at the time. This developmental model – school-focussed, team-centred, teacher-led – entailed a sustained commitment over time from school leadership and participating teachers. In its original manifestation, TL21 also retained characteristics similar to earlier curriculum related projects, in its regional location and notably in its initial orientation towards designated subjects. As the programme has evolved, however, a wider conception of teaching and learning has been adopted, one which transcends subject boundaries and places the learner as such at the heart of all its explorations.

TL21 is not a curriculum project in the sense that that term has been traditionally understood. The early CDU and Shannon projects were concerned with curriculum *per se* and with the development of new courses for students as alternatives to, or divergent options within, national programmes. The Maynooth programmes of the 90s were consciously located within the emerging new national curriculum programmes and were designed to empower teachers in fully exploiting the opportunities that could be

generated there. While curriculum matters as such remain an important point of reference for TL21 schools, their focus is not on the formal curriculum as such but on generic and deeper processes of teaching and learning.

Neither is TL21 a traditional CPD programme as such. The nature of professional development for teachers has undergone a radical transformation over the past three decades. When the Junior Certificate programme was first introduced, there was no provision for a support programme for teachers, other than voluntary engagement outside school time. Through subsequent years, largely due to intensive campaigning from teacher organisations, a model of 'in-service days' linked to new syllabus introduction was introduced, with the linked establishment of support teams for those designated subjects.

The identification of 'in-service' with syllabus change was always a quite restrictive construction. A more comprehensive and coherent interpretation of professional development was manifested through the establishment of overarching initiatives including the Second Level Support Service (2003) and the School Development Planning Initiative (2001). Issues of school leadership, cross-cutting themes of teaching and learning, special education needs and whole school policies and practices became more prominent in the inventory of support provision. The current range of dedicated national services, including the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), indicates the extent of the changed understanding of professional development. It is interesting to see how many of the distinguishing features of TL21 have now been taken up by other national CPD programmes. The *Forbairt* programme, for instance, promoted by the PDST has a set of operating principles that in some senses strongly echo those of TL21 – school team engagement to include principal, school-generated action project, developmental process over time (PDST, website).

Perhaps the most significant official manifestation of change in the concept of teacher professionalism was the establishment of the Teaching Council of Ireland as a statutory body in 2006. The Teaching Council has identified the continuum of teacher education (initial, induction and continuing) as a central part of its conception of the teaching profession. *Cosán*, the emerging framework for that continuum, provides for an inclusive and diverse CPD provision, incorporating personal/professional, formal/informal, individual/collaborative and school-based/external forms of teachers' learning (TC, 2016).

Clearly the ethos of TL21 resonates positively within the parameters of the *Cosán* framework. The features and qualities of continuing education for teachers that the TL21 project proposed at the end of its initial phase, including the diversity of need as between system, school and individual, and the concept of CPD as integral, as distinct from additional, to the work of the teacher (Hogan *et al*, 2007) are now enshrined in the rhetoric and policy of national bodies.

The question can then be legitimately asked – what purpose, if any, does TL21 serve now, if its operational model and vision of CPD are encapsulated in national strategy like *Cosán*, and national provision like the post-primary *Forbairt* programme of PDST?

There are some key points of differentiation between the TL21 experience and that of national CPD programmes as exemplified in particular by PDST and JCT. Factors identified by participants in the course of this evaluation included the self-selection process of TL21 (schools choose to opt-in), the school-generated theme (the facility to identify the topic to be researched) and collegial development over time (the reliance on peers within and without the school to guide and evaluate the work). While each of these features are, to some extent, also features of the *Forbairt* programme, the context for their treatment is quite different. This difference may serve as a good

illustration of the different perspective as between a local initiative such as TL21 and a national programme such as *Forbairt*.

The *Forbairt* programme is a carefully-designed and structured programme, containing many elements in common with TL21, including an 'Action Learning Project' as compared to the action research project of TL21. Indeed more than one interviewee in the course of the present evaluation noted *Forbairt* as a 'shiny new model' (DN4), a 'possibly more attractive option' (TF3) for schools than TL21, with, crucially, a one school-year timeframe, compared to TL21's two-year commitment. *Forbairt* makes explicit reference to the national policy framework. The programme

> uses as its methodological basis the SSE guidelines and the Looking At Our Schools 2016 (LAOS) document… the Action Learning Project aligns itself closely with the framework of "Looking at our Schools 2016" and the 6-step School Self-Evaluation model and it may become part of participating schools' SSE Report and School Improvement Plan (PDST website, accessed 23 April 2019).

Many TL21 schools have used their Action Research Project for exactly the same purposes as set out in *Forbairt*. This has been cited by many participants as one of the most positive outcomes of their TL21 experience, facilitating both professional development and regulatory requirements. However, the front-loading of this within *Forbairt*, as compared to its spontaneous emergence within the TL21 model is a key difference: one model (*Forbairt*) is 'tightly-coupled' with national policy, the other (TL21) is loosely-coupled.

Loose Coupling

This concept of 'loose-coupling' may provide a useful lens through which to examine the features of TL21, both in its organisational relationship to the state and in its educational practice. The term 'loose-coupling' is mostly associated with Karl Weick who first introduced it in the context of educational organisations in 1976, subsequently revisiting the concept on a number of occasions. In more recent times, Firestone (2015, 2014) has used the concept in discussing contemporary educational issues in the USA, notably in relation to teacher motivation.

Essentially, 'coupling' describes the extent to which components of a system are linked to each other and the extent to which changes, imperatives or actions in one component may affect the other. Schools and school systems can be viewed as loosely or tightly coupled systems depending on various factors. Crucially, in Weick's conception of schools as loosely-coupled systems, the dialectic capacity to change from loosely-coupled to tightly-coupled on certain occasions or under specific conditions, is a defining feature (Orton and Weick 1990).

A loosely-coupled system is one where different means can achieve similar outcomes, where regulations are lightly or inconsistently applied or policed, where there is a relaxed coordination regime and where networks are highly connected but with slow feedback and interaction times. In conventional terms, these features appear largely negative but Weick argues that they carry very positive attributes. They allow the organisation to survive through threatening environmental fluctuations, they improve the organisation's capacity to respond creatively to changing local conditions, they improve the organisation's sensitivity to the immediate environment, they allow for localised failures without damaging the main system and they facilitate more self-determination by local actors.

Schools can be seen as loosely-coupled in terms both of their internal organisation and of their external relationships. Thus, internally, a school may be loosely-coupled in the sense that various subject departments and indeed individual teachers operate largely autonomously. Similarly, the relationship between the school and the central DES (or intermediate tier where such exists – e.g. Education and Training Board (ETB) or relevant patron-body – may be loosely-coupled in terms of day-to-day activities.

In viewing loosely-coupled systems as a positive phenomenon, Weick emphasises what he terms the 'dialectic' nature of loose-coupling. This dialectic, meaning the inherent

capacity to tighten connections at short notice when necessary, is what makes it particularly valuable. Thus a loosely-coupled school can become tightly coupled through the intervention of school leadership and the adoption of some new code of practice – e.g. a standardised homework policy across all subject departments where none existed previously. By the same token, the loose relationship with the DES can become very tightly-coupled as a result of a new curriculum or examination requirement (or indeed, a whole-school evaluation visit and report). Weick's 'loose coupling' image of the school, bears comparison with compares with Hargreaves (2001) 'moving mosaic' model of a high quality school.

Firestone (2015, p. 53), addressing the loose-coupling concept as applied to contemporary school settings has found that 'couplings that promote professional community, intrinsic incentives, and teacher learning are more constructive than those that rely on authority and extrinsic incentives to promote compliance'. Instructional leadership styles are likely to facilitate positive teacher motivation.

The lens of loose-coupling may be helpful in understanding how TL21 operates, as a regional initiative within a national system, as a programmed initiative across ten networks of schools, as a school-based initiative within individual schools and finally as an educational initiative in its own right.

Its relationship with national policy and priorities has oscillated between tight and loose coupling. Even while it was funded entirely from a separate, independent source, the initiative established and maintained a strong connection with the DES in respect of national policy. This was manifested through frequent briefing sessions and information exchange with senior DES officials. Equally, the initiative has always expressed a desire to inform and help shape evolving national policy in relation to CPD and related matters. In particular, TL21 has made constructive, evidence-based submissions to the Teaching Council with regard to CPD in the evolving conception of the profession.

The 'dialectic' process of coupling is manifested in the historical evolution of TL21. The early identification of two aims – teachers as authors of their own work, students as autonomous learners – signified a leaning towards a loosely-coupled relationship with the national system, while the addition of a third aim – teachers as a national resource – was indicative of a more tightly-coupled orientation. By the same token, the gradual erosion of that third aim from the programme rhetoric in recent years may be an indication of the priorities of the current iteration of TL21.

Significantly, participating schools also displayed quite pragmatic approaches to their priorities, in their selection of research topics. Thus, many schools have deliberately chosen to explore themes that simultaneously helped them in developing their own School Self Evaluation (SSE), as part of the regulatory environment of contemporary schools. Other schools quite consciously chose to take a route that bore little or no immediate relevance to regulatory requirements but instead addressed a real and present issue of concern or interest to staff.

The loosely-coupled signature of TL21 also applies to its internal structure. Each of the networks operates on a more or less independent basis, but clearly within the same pedagogical model. As noted earlier, the role of the regional coordinators is a particularly significant one. A striking feature of the work of these coordinators is their simultaneously consistent and markedly different styles of facilitation. There is no rigid control mechanism in TL21. While there are regular (2/3 times per year) collective orientation, review and planning meetings hosted by MU and attended by Coordinators and Directors, there is no central 'training of trainers' programme: individual coordinators are trusted to apply their professional expertise and experience as facilitators within the broad parameters of the TL21 mission.

Workshops, variously described as the 'engine' that drives, and the 'glue' that binds the TL21 programme, are designed to adhere to the parameters set out by the TL21 team

(2007, p. 100). Designed to facilitate emergent learning communities, all TL21 workshops should feature active participation, clearly defined tasks, purposeful collaboration, continuity and feedback. Within these broad rubrics, however, workshop experiences vary significantly from network to network. One coordinator (CN3) quite consciously will not have a guest speaker (or even the co-ordinator) lead off in a session: it must always be one of the participating teachers. Another coordinator (CN9) likes to have an input at the start, usually directly from the coordinator but sometimes from an invited speaker, to frame the ongoing discussion. Yet another (CN1) likes, as often as possible, to bring in an outside voice to add some grit to the discussion.

There are other consistent and recurring features of all workshops: the presentation of research from the wider literature (often presented by the coordinator, but invariably also by the participants), significant time for school-based discussion among colleagues, extended interaction between 'tables' or schools, and regular reports to the full group from each school. This is the bedrock of the system, the glue that holds the loosely-coupled structure together.

Beyond its external and internal sets of relationships, the concept of loose coupling is perhaps most significant in terms of national strategy for professional development in education. Professional development within the post-primary education system is a relatively new arrival. Since its first introduction in the nineties, the nature of national provision has gone through three broad phases. The first was centrally organised and regionally delivered with reference to syllabuses for the new Junior Certificate programme introduced in 1989. The second phase was a more sophisticated and focused development, still curriculum related, through the establishment of support teams new programmes such as Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and LCVP and for individual subjects as they were being revised for the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes. This culminated in the establishment of the Second Level

Support Service (SLSS) in the early 2000s which endeavoured to provide a coherent and comprehensive service across the range of curriculum and related activities.

A third phase saw professional development become further established as an inherent part of the professional life of the teacher. The Teaching Council, in itself a landmark entity in Irish education, from the outset identified CPD as an essential element in the professional life of every teacher. Its policy framework *Cosán* is a formal manifestation of this concept. The establishment of the PDST in 2010 with an overarching brief to support teachers at all levels in the full variety of their professional needs is a further manifestation of the role of CPD as part of the professional life of teaching.

The evolution of CPD has been a process of movement from the periphery to the centre: most of the initial energies for CPD came from curriculum projects on the periphery of national provision. There has been a remarkable shift in the locus of energy over the past 25 years where the leadership of DES and central authorities has opened up a new scenario for the teaching profession. In Weick's terms, this can be seen as an example of tightly coupled activity after a long phase of relatively loosely-coupled relationships between the educational centre and the periphery. It may be timely now to facilitate some loosening of the ties that bind local practice to central policy.

Any programme led from the centre will almost invariably have the needs of the education system as its primary focus. While the needs of the individual teacher and the needs of individual schools will of course be valued, the context will nearly always be the achievement of national goals. This is as it should be, given the role of a national authority. For coherence and alignment in the process of systemic change, a high quality national programme, responsive to local situations but conscious of the need to bed down innovative new policies, requires central direction especially in its early years. Without 'tight' central planning and control, the policy objectives of the central system may not be consistently achieved across all parts of that system. A number of collateral

effects can result from system-focussed, centre-led CPD, such as low-level resentment among teachers, a sense of being the objects rather than the subjects of the process (change 'being done' to them, as it were, rather than they themselves 'owning' the change), and a culture of conformity and compliance but compromised commitment.

By contrast, a decentralised model allows for a greater degree of teacher ownership and consequently a greater positivity, capacity for self-critique and reflection. 'Allows for' of course does not necessarily mean that it is successful in this ambition. The weight of evidence in the TL21 experience, however, evidence as articulated by participants, gives a very strong sense of positivity and high levels of personal satisfaction.

What TL21 describes as 'emergent learning communities' echoes the 'communities of practice' concept (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1999) that pervades the contemporary discourse of education. More specifically, the TL21 model tallies very strongly with the concept of 'collaborative professionalism' promoted by Hargreaves and colleagues in recent years. They make the distinction between 'professional collaboration', describing the way individual professionals may consult with each other, and 'collaborative professionalism' which is a deliberate mode of working through and with fellow professionals in pursuing shared objectives. In a recent publication under the auspices of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), based on specific studies in five countries across four continents, they propose an understanding of collaborative professionalism as follows:

> … collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose and success. It is evidence-informed, but not data-driven, and involves deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. Finally, collaborative inquiry is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care for and have solidarity with each other as fellow-professionals as they pursue their challenging work together in response to the cultures of their students, the society and themselves (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018, p. 3).

While this may appear to be an idealised picture, the evidence of collaborative professionalism produced in TL21 is at least as strong as that cited in the WISE study. The 'emergent learning communities' cited in the TL21 literature is visible and strong in several of the school sites encountered in the course of this evaluation.

Student outcomes as a function of school culture

Asked about the impact of TL21 on students, one principal (SP2) replied – 'it's having a great impact on staff – that's good enough for me'. While this may seem like a dismissive and evasive response, it actually carries – and was intended to carry – direct reference to the specific question posed. A motivated staff team working in a positive school climate is the best guarantor of high student achievement.

The relative distinctions between individual needs, school needs and system needs are not easily identified. These various needs often overlap and one set of needs are frequently realised in the ostensible pursuit of other needs. Thus, individual teacher needs, in terms of classroom practice or of personal satisfaction, can be realised while overtly engaged in a process of school development or indeed of national curriculum reform.

In locating TL21 along that continuum from individual needs to school needs to system needs, the dominant TL21 mode is that of the school. The school-focus enshrined in the architecture of the programme is the recurring motif threaded through most TL21 discussions. In the UK context, Waters (2013, p. 267) distinguished between school and system needs: 'basically, the school curriculum is what the children need to learn. The national curriculum is simply part of that overall programme for learning'. In so doing, he emphasised the professional responsibility of the school community to take authorship of its own programmes rather than act simply as a delivery mechanism for national policies. The menu of subjects for national certificate programmes has tended

to be over-dominant in the life of Irish post-primary schools, such that the 'school curriculum' becomes almost identical to that of the national programme.

National educational objectives and strategic initiatives have a responsibility to target, promote and support the achievement of high standards of student performance. National curriculum policies and strategies designed to achieve such standards are essential. There is no conflict between these strategies and what Waters identifies as the 'school curriculum'. Quite the opposite in fact: the particular learning environment or culture of the individual school is an essential element in achieving such national goals.

Irish and international research consistently returns to this theme: the crucial importance of school climate. ESRI researchers (Smyth & Coyle, 2011, p. 20) highlight

> three features which can make an appreciable difference to student outcomes – moving away from rigid ability grouping coupled with high expectations of all students, promoting a positive school climate, and providing active and engaging teaching and learning in the classroom. Effective investment in teacher education, both initial and continuous, is therefore a priority for resource allocation.

The identification of 'school climate' as such is significant, as it addresses many of the intangible features of the culture of a school, features that cannot be mandated (as for instance, ability grouping could be) or even coached (as active teaching methods could).

In related research, drawing on data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal study and with specific reference to junior cycle schooling, Smyth (2016, p. 473) again concludes that

> (t)he findings add to the growing body of research on the importance of school climate, as expressed in day-to-day interaction between teachers and students, in shaping student outcomes and point to the importance in policy terms of creating a positive school climate which supports student adjustment and enhances their wellbeing.

Schools are intense places of work and all teachers (and students) experience a range of pressures and stresses that come with the job. A positive school climate can facilitate the management of these stresses and contribute to a positive learning environment. While the stressors can never be eliminated, they can be managed and in some cases deployed in creative ways. In this context the motivational support engendered through the collaborative participation in TL21 is highly relevant: 'internally motivated individuals experience both autonomy and self-efficacy (Firestone, 2015, p. 2).

The TL21 experience supports the international findings:

> Trusting and open professional relationships, once established, nurtured and developed, may function in a way that allows teachers to pursue their goals, enhance the efficacy of the school staff and ultimately to enhance the academic achievement of the students. Likewise, research suggests that when the social organization of the schools is characterized by supporting, trusting and collegial relationships teachers' collective capacity, commitment and effectiveness is fostered (Morgan & O'Donnell, 2017. p. 96/7).

Positive school climate is a quality that can best be fostered and cultivated by a process of collective commitment of school leadership and teaching staff, as well as the wider school community, including boards of management, parents and the wider community. In particular, an instructional leadership role in the school, where the principal or deputy gives consistent priority engagement to teaching and learning, is a powerful element in the growth of positive school culture.

Instructional leadership – as distinct from transformational or transactional leadership styles which rely more on the managerial skills or charismatic qualities of school leaders – is central to the achievement of such a positive school climate. With its strong emphasis on the quality of teachers and teaching, instructional leadership has been shown in various research studies to explain more of the within school residual variance in student achievement than any other school variable (Robinson 2007, Darling-Hammond, 2000). In this context, the findings of this evaluation point to significant success in developing pools of positivity among school staffs.

The research dimension

The temptation to address issues at a superficial level only is a constant risk in all professional development. Coordinators and directors alike frequently refer to this, noting the understandable desire of teachers to find 'things that work', a set of tips and tricks for short term gains. One coordinator (CN9) stressed

> … the need for some kind of input on *purpose,* not just practice. If there's a lack of change in teacher beliefs and values, then we're only scratching the surface. There needs to be some element of challenge with regard to what they're doing… This is slightly less congenial because it involves theoretical perspectives. It's not immediately attractive.

This sort of issue arose with specific reference to assessment for learning at one workshop, when discussion turned to how schools would continue their work through the next phase of TL21. 'We're not sure whether to dig deeper into this [formative assessment models] theme or to diversify' said one teacher (TN5a). Another teacher (TN5b) commented that he was worried 'about the dangers of formulaic reflection' as it might apply in their Classroom Based Assessments for junior cycle and the 'cynical' attitude of students and parents: (others in the discussion were not long in including teachers on a possible list of cynical users). This sparked extended discussion on strategies across all schools in the network. The discussion was serious and measured, as most schools were engaged on projects related to formative assessment or to student voice. The reference to 'formulaic reflection' found an echo in most schools present. It was a good example of the excavation and challenge that typifies high quality professional development.

Particularly in the context of a university based programme, the insights derived from Irish and international research should be (and are) a distinguishing characteristic of TL21. Accessing and applying such research can be difficult and off-putting for teachers, who are busy with many other concerns. The prompting and guiding of coordinators was interesting to observe, and rich in its variety of approach. One coordinator (CN9) gave brief, structured inputs, summarising key findings, raising issues and directing

participants to key sources. Another (CN7) regularly asked which members of the respective school teams had been working on the research end of things, an agreed operational strategy of the network. A further coordinator (CN8) deliberately refrained from frontloading a research input but systematically responded to participant contributions with appropriate references to the research literature.

The prominent figures of the international research field were regularly cited – Hattie, Black and Wiliam, Hargreaves and Fullan etc. – but of particular interest always were the quirky selection of less well known sources. Obscure Australian websites, research theses written by teaching colleagues, and specific papers downloadable through Google Scholar were variously referenced by teachers presenting their work to their networks peers. As one coordinator (CN5) remarked

> We've had some superb presentations from teachers, and teachers are now using the language of teaching and learning in a way that we weren't doing when I was teaching.'

In any sustained programme of professional development, there are calculations that must be made in respect of levels of critique and challenge. The first objective is invariably the establishment of some form of 'buy-in' and comfort with the process. After such confidence and safety has been achieved, the space for constructive critique becomes more secure. The judicious management of the process by the coordinators is a crucial component here. There were numerous examples of this process in action during the course of this evaluation. These were most impressive when the critique was actually presented by teacher colleagues rather than by the coordinators. Clearly the skill of the coordinator in bringing the group to such a level of interchange is highly accomplished one.

As noted earlier, there is a deep well of expertise and experience embodied in the team of coordinators. Consideration needs to be given as to how best to maximise and share this expertise within the group, and beyond this cohort of coordinators, to further personnel who will take on similar roles in TL21 and similar programmes in the future.

The quality of research and development that has been developed through the experience of TL21 is of great significance to Irish education. It constitutes 'the gradual accumulation of a body of insights that is capable of bearing up well under critical scrutiny and is worthy of the commitments and efforts of practitioners', as Hogan (2009, p. 156) described the best qualities of action research in education generally. Perhaps its greatest significance lies in its autonomous but connected existence, maintaining the tradition of academic freedom from which it derives its ethos, while remaining at all times engaged with, immersed in and totally connected to the living world of education policy and practice.

TL21 Evaluation: Conclusions and Recommendations

The TL21 programme is an ambitious and skilfully designed programme. It has evolved through a process of research-informed innovation, professional reflection and coordinated development. It has developed a grounded and credible model of collaborative professionalism among participant schools.

The TL21 model and the insights it has generated over sixteen years constitute an important and unique research base, with national and international significance and with implications for education practitioners, policy-makers and researchers in Ireland and elsewhere. This concluding chapter briefly summarises the main points of significance of TL21 and sets out some specific recommendations for the consideration of the DES and the partners involved in the initiative.

TL21 in the landscape of Irish education

TL21 speaks directly to some of the most important issues in educational policy pertaining to the teaching profession in Ireland today. It has immediate relevance for policy makers in respect both of the general relationship between national strategies and local initiatives, and of the specifics of facilitating post-primary schools and teachers in their engagement with development, review and evaluation.

Teaching profession

TL21 resonates positively with the *Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning*, designed by the Teaching Council (2016). That framework seeks to foster

> a culture of "powerful professional learning" based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning, for their benefit and that of their students (*Cosán*, p. 2, 2016).

TL21 provides a rigorous and demonstrably effective model for professional learning, in a partnership involving the university, the education centres and networks of schools. It also offers the potential for further constructive engagement in initial teacher education and with newly qualified teachers within the ambit of the NIPT *Droichead* programme.

The school as a focus for professional learning

The TL21 experience echoes that of other research and development programmes in this country and elsewhere, in highlighting the importance of the school as a learning community for teachers and students alike. Many TL21 schools have foregrounded the importance of teaching and learning through the explicit designation of responsibility for this domain in Deputy Principal or Assistant Principal job descriptions. Similarly, some schools have attested to the importance of this domain through the formal scheduling of teacher meetings for TL21 purposes. In terms of national policy, the TL21 experience adds weight to calls for specific time allowance to be given to teachers involved in professional development.

Centre and periphery

In and of itself, TL21 could never be the vehicle for the achievement of any single national goal or priority, nor could it aspire to be the chief contributor to such an enterprise. TL21 is essentially a peripheral initiative, supporting individual school communities in the attainment of their locally identified needs. However, the power of the periphery in any system is a potentially great one. Well-conceived and professionally implemented peripheral initiatives can exert powerful leverage on a central system, both in terms of shaping overall policy and also in modelling specific practices.

Student achievement

The thrust, orientation and indeed the ethos of TL21 have no direct link to specific international performance measurement instruments, such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or the IEA programmes, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) or the Programme in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The measurement of student achievement in specific domains has not been the focus of the initiative. However, in identifying school-based issues around which to develop their own projects, schools participating in TL21 frequently

address items that align with national priority initiatives e.g. digital strategies or items relating to STEM (or STEAM) implementation.

More generally, the demonstrable impact of TL21 in creating a positive school climate within participating schools is the most effective basis upon which improved student achievement in all areas can be realised. School climate is consistently identified in Irish and international research as one of the most important factors in improving the achievements of students.

The crucial achievement of the TL21 programme has been the enhanced sense of self confidence among participating teachers. This positivity is seen to be generated among the teams of teachers from each school. Extending beyond these teams to other teachers in the participating schools is an explicit objective of the programme. In some schools, this is seen to be very effective insofar as school policy has been adapted to take on a TL21-inspired initiative. In other schools this has been less immediately visible, but in all cases there has been a deliberate promotion and dissemination of the TL21 experience to all staff members. As noted elsewhere, a positive school climate is one of the core requirements for improved student outcomes. The cultivation of a positive school climate for learners is best achieved through a shared personal commitment to a caring learning environment. The TL21 experience, emphasising this cohesive teacher engagement on key issues, is a positive dynamic for reform and improvement.

Teacher education and the University
TL21 offers real opportunities not just for MU but also for other universities and other colleges in their provision of initial and continuing professional education for teachers and in forming collaborative partnerships with schools. TL21 provides a model of how best a university or other higher education institute can work in partnership with schools in a mutually beneficial manner. This partnership model extends beyond initial teacher education and encompasses school leadership, whole school policy and

collaborative professionalism. The Sahlberg reports (2012 and 2019) on initial teacher education in Ireland have consistently emphasised the importance of a teaching profession framed within a research culture. TL21 has developed a unique and effective model of such a culture in practice.

TL21 and national strategies

TL21 offers a distinct model of practice that responds to national procedures for school self-evaluation (SSE) and related procedures as set out in the DES quality framework for post-primary schools (*Looking at our School*, 2016). A major impact of TL21 can be seen in the cultivation of a positive school climate, in the promotion of instructional leadership in participating schools and in the fostering of collaborative professionalism among groups of teachers, all key determinants of improved student achievement.

The university base of the programme and the particular model of partnership that has been consciously developed between the university, the professional and administrative support system of education centres and the vibrant networks of participating schools, along with the active engagement and support of the DES, are defining features of the programme. This model and its implications for education are extremely valuable and should be fostered and promoted.

The nature of the relationship between the university and the other partners is a particularly rich one. The academic rigour and theoretical base of the programme ensures that the research component is a deep and meaningful engagement rather than a superficial gloss. At the same time, the role of the teacher as researcher is not experienced as an imposed extra demand on the teacher: rather it is adopted by participants as a tangible and organic element of their professional learning. The experience of the TL21 process deserves a wide dissemination through academic research channels as well as through professional learning experience.

Specific recommendations

The following recommendations are presented, arising from the findings of this evaluation project:

10. The TL21 programme should be maintained, sustained and developed by the MU Education Department within the principles, parameters and practices that have been established over the past sixteen years, and with the active support of the DES;

11. The programme should be financially and strategically supported by the DES as an autonomous initiative, not subject to national policy mandates but engaged in a constructive and critical relationship with those mandates;

    o Other sources of funding for the further development of TL21 should be sought. A specific approach to *Creative Ireland*, the government initiative to foster creative engagement for all, should be considered in respect of the innovative and creative capacities that TL21 fosters among teachers and students. Of particular relevance in this context is the cross-curricular nature of creative pedagogies. *Creative Youth*, Pillar 1 of the five-pillar Creative Ireland strategy, provides a context within which a case for TL21 funding support might be positively received.

    o The first phase of TL21 benefitted greatly from the funding of the Atlantic Philanthropies: while that source of support is no longer available, other sources of philanthropic support should be actively sought.

12. A Steering Committee should be established, with membership from MU, from DES and from cognate agencies, to work with and to advise the TL21 team: that Steering Committee should draw up and oversee a strategic plan for the next phase of TL21;

13. TL21 has displayed a commendable capacity to review and develop its operations on a regular basis. Strategic planning for the future is now timely, with a view to seeing how best TL21 might evolve into the future. Three specific domains are recommended for consideration:

    o Exposure to and engagement of student teachers on ITE programmes in MU: this could relate both to students' placement experience, where this occurs in a TL21 school, and to university-based modules in the appropriate ITE programme.

- Engagement of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) with TL21 in participating schools, tying-in with the NIPT *Droichead* programme as it operates currently.
- Continuity work with schools on completion of their two-year TL21 programme: this could be school-based and/or cluster-based; education centre directors should have a central role in this, working with the TL21 Director.

14. *The University*: The TL21 programme should be promoted and given high visibility within MU, and the university base of TL21 should be supported through direct subvention to secure appropriate professional time and expertise in the service of the programme;

- The academic vision and the professional energy for TL21 has been generated and sustained by the MU Education Department. TL21 requires high level professional leadership. At present, a disproportionate weight falls on the TL21 Director. This weight should be distributed through some or all of the following actions:
  - Time release for the TL21 Programme Director to facilitate increased research outputs, dissemination activities and ongoing coordination functions;
  - An extended group of MU Education staff should be invited to form a TL21 team, under the leadership of the programme director;
  - A concerted initiative to produce a suite of TL21 academic presentations and research papers should be undertaken, led by the TL21 Director and MU staff, and involving other key personnel, including education centre directors, coordinators and school leaders and teachers.
  - Graduate students should be recruited to engage in TL21-related research projects and fieldwork

- Other higher education institutions should be encouraged and incentivised to develop initiatives similar to TL21 with partner schools;

- DES should engage with Maynooth University to provide time release or support for the TL21 Director and colleagues in the production of a body of publications for the international research community;

o In light of the new landscape of internal management positions in schools, which gives scope for increased recognition of teaching and learning responsibilities, there should be a renewed promotion of postgraduate opportunities in MU for participating TL21 teachers i.e. Grad Dip/MEd (Innovative Learning) and doctoral programmes;

o Along with academic routes to university accreditation, other accreditation possibilities should continue to be explored with education centres;

15. *Coordinators*: Discussions should be undertaken within Maynooth University to explore the possibility of an 'adjunct' designated status for the coordinators, to recognise the professional expertise and experience that they bring to the programme: such a formal role, while involving no remuneration in itself, could facilitate some structured inputs into various ITE and CPD programmes within MU, as well as encouraging further TL21 research and publications.

o The team of TL21 coordinators should be supported in developing a collective portfolio of learning derived from their work in the programme;

o A system of advance identification and recruitment of coordinators should be developed by the TL21 director and education centre directors: consultation with other agencies such as JCT or NCCA might also be considered in this process;

o The possibility of limited or occasional release of teachers from school to act as coordinators should be explored.

16. *Education Centre Directors*: the design of TL21 identifies a key role for directors of education centres. They serve as a crucial point of connection between the coordinator and the network of schools, and between the network and the TL21 programme base in Maynooth. Key functions of the education centre director should include

- o Proactive recruitment of schools before commencement of each two-year programme;

- o Liaison with coordinators in the design and implementation of each regional workshop series;

- o Active engagement with and participation in TL21 workshops;

- o Participation where appropriate in school visits undertaken by TL21 Director and/or regional coordinator;

- o Ongoing collaboration with TL21 Director and with other education centres as appropriate;

- o Management of the accreditation scheme for participating teachers;

- o In conjunction with participant schools and TL21 Director, the design and planning of second-phase or 'follow-through' work, on completion of the two-year programme.

17. *Schools*: the heart of TL21 lies within the participating schools. A key feature of TL21 is the active participation of school leaders as part of the participating team from each school. Where feasible, certain initiatives at school level could further facilitate the professional learning orientation of the school, such as

- o Designation of certain DP or AP posts as carrying specific teaching and learning responsibilities;

- o Provision of structured professional time for planning and review purposes.

18. *Dissemination*: The programme of academic research publications noted above should be augmented by other dissemination activities, including

- o Showcases and other events: A series of highly impressive and influential showcases have been organised by TL21 over the years (2004, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2016). This series should be maintained, in the form of public events or showcases, featuring the learning experience of participant schools. Such showcases, seminars or similar events, involving

education centres and MU can be both centrally organised (in Maynooth or elsewhere) or have a regional or local orientation.

o A number of high-level international conferences should be organised, bringing TL21 into engagement with wider international practice. The already strong international reputation and connections of MU Education Department should be utilised for this purpose; participation should include significant actors on the international stage including organisations and agencies like OECD and EU, as well as leading academics, theoreticians and practitioners of international repute.

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Appendix 1:
Terms of Reference for an external evaluation of TL21

Introduction

The Department notes the review of the TL21 programme during the 2015-17 years. In considering further policy, planning and funding of the programme the Department is cognisant of other similar initiatives that that are in place and wishes to evaluate how the TL21 initiative aligns with such Department initiatives.

To assist the Department in its understanding of the impacts of TL21, the DES requires an external evaluation of the TL-21 programme to establish how its aims and objectives are being met and, in particular the impact the programme is having on teaching and learning in the participating schools. The Department will consider the evaluation report when deciding on further policy, planning and funding for the programme. The purpose of this document is to outline the main areas for the external evaluation.

Performance in schools is increasingly judged on the basis of enhanced outcomes for students and how effective leadership of learning can influence this. It is intended that the evaluation should inform how the participating schools are delivering on the programmes aims and objectives and on any feedback provided to the schools by the programme management. The evaluation should consider the professional environments involved, the underpinning professional collaboration that had been fostered, the tools used including School Self-Evaluation; and the professional capital that TL21 had generated in the school system.

Issues to be included in the evaluation:
- It will identify the extent to which the aims of TL21 address current Department and national priorities and establish and advise on its efficacy in meeting system priorities and impact on learning and teaching at classroom level
- How the programme links and responds to international education trends for example:
  - PISA
  - TIMSS & PIRLS
- The effectiveness of the various initiatives implemented by the programme and their effect on enhancing outcomes for students
- Does the programme meet the expectation of participants and develop their sense of teacher professionalism
- Does the programme meet the needs of the evolving departmental and education policy framework, including, amongst others, Cósan, Droichead, The Digital Strategy and the STEM agenda.
- The impact on the wider school community and the sustainability of the programme in the school following the completion of the two year cycle

- How the programmes own evaluation processes have informed the delivery and reform of the programme over the duration of its operation
- Identification of opportunities for interaction with government agencies like the PDST, CSL and JCT and synergies with other similar initiatives.
- Details of governance, accountability and reporting structure in place throughout the programme,
- The effectiveness of the programme's governance and implementation, including
  - Training for school leaders and teachers
  - Support from project partners and TL 21 itself
  - Communication with participants
  - Identifying and meeting the needs of participating schools

- Advise on the most efficient administrative options for the operation and oversight of TL21

Appendix 2: Fieldwork schedule and process

Field work for the evaluation took place from mid-January to early April 2019. Interviews were conducted over a period of 10 weeks from the middle of January 2019.

Table 2 (i) contains a list of workshops attended over the course of the evaluation. Workshops in all networks and sub-networks were attended, with the exception due to repeated scheduling clashes, of the Navan network: however, separate contact was made with some of the schools in that network.

Date	Network	No of schools	No of teachers
17 Jan	Drumcondra Dublin	4	10
23 Jan	Kilkenny	5	21
24 Jan	Cavan	3	15
28 Jan	Portlaoise	6	24
29 Jan	Monaghan	3	4
31 Jan	Kildare North	5	22
11 Feb	Dublin West	4	16
14 Feb	Blackrock Dublin	5	16
27 Feb.	Carrick-on-Shannon	3	8
25 Mar	Kildare South	6	24
27 Mar	Wexford	6	18
	Total	50	178

Table 2 (i): Workshop schedule

Table 2 (ii) consists of a list of interviews carried out with TL21 regional coordinators, key personnel central to the programme. With most coordinators, multiple conversations took place, aside from the more formal interviews recorded in the table below.

Date	Coordinator	Venue
21 Jan	Pauline Kelly	Radisson, Stillorgan
23 Jan	Martin Quirke	Kilkenny EC
24 Jan	Jim O'Connor	Loreto College, Cavan
28 Jan	Leo Hogan	Portlaoise EC
30 Jan	Tommy Lanigan	Wexford EC
31 Jan	Harry Freeman	Courtyard Hotel, Leixlip
11 Feb	Dr. Mark Fennell	Radisson Stillorgan
27 Feb	Gerry Kielty	Carrick-on-Shannon EC

Table 2 (ii): Regional coordinators

Table 2 (iii) provides a list of interviews conducted with directors of participating Education Centres. This includes one former director; informal conversations were also held with other directors and former directors.

Date	Education Centre Director	Venue
23 Jan	Margaret Maxwell	Kilkenny EC
29 Jan	David McCague	Monaghan EC
30 Jan	Lorraine O'Gorman	Wexford EC
6 Feb	Siobhán Kavanagh	Kildare EC
11 Feb	Máirín Ní Chéilleachar	Dublin West EC
12 Feb	Dr. Éadaoin McGovern	Navan EC
15 Feb	Dr. Susan Gibney	Blackrock EC
27 Feb	Karen Devine	Carrick-on-Shannon EC

Table 2 (iii): TL21 Education Centre Directors

The evaluator also attended and made a short presentation at a TL21 review meeting for coordinators and directors, organised and hosted by the TL21 Director in Maynooth University on 21 March 2019. Three meetings were held with the DES/MU management group overseeing the evaluation project; an interim report was also presented to this group (February 2019). Numerous discussions were held with the TL21 Director, Dr. Anthony Malone, who also provided full access to extensive internal programme documentation.

Interviews were held with the following individuals in schools or in institutions, organisations or agencies associated with the TL21 initiative:

> Clive Byrne (National Association of Principals and Deputy-principals); Gillian Casey (DP, Ashbourne Community School); Tony Collison (Principal, Rockford Manor Secondary School); John Cotter (Principal, Presentation Secondary School, Killina); Pádraig Kirk (Director, Junior Cycle for Teachers); John Kenny (DP, St. Patrick's Classical School, Navan); Aidan Lawless (DP, Presentation Secondary School, Killina); Dominic McEvoy (former Director, Kildare Education Centre) Professor Aidan Mulkeen (Deputy President and Registrar, Maynooth University); Máire Ní Bhróithe (Deputy Director, Centre for School Leadership); Mike O'Byrne (Principal, Confey Community College); Gary Ó Donnachadha, (Deputy Chief Inspector, DES); Ciara O'Donnell (Director, Professional Development Service for Teachers); Tomás Ó Ruairc (Director, Teaching Council of Ireland); Clare Wallace (DP, Coláiste Mhuire, Thurles).

Formal interviews were audio recorded with the permission of participants. These recordings were explicitly for the purposes of reference and recall. Preliminary letters were issued to interviewees with a draft schedule of topics for discussion (see below). Other interviews and discussions, carried out face-to-face or by telephone, were noted by the researcher contemporaneously. The numerous fieldwork interviews and

discussions held with individual teachers and groups of teachers, with school principals and deputy principals, with students and with others associated with the programme in various ways were conducted under terms of anonymity. All discussions, including those with the named individuals above, were conducted on the basis that no comments or quotes would be directly attributed to individuals.

Sample letter1: regional coordinator

TL21 Evaluation

Initial Meetings – Regional Coordinator

Dear Coordinator

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me as part of the external evaluation of the TL21 programme. I set out below a schedule of topics or points of reference for our discussion. This is purely a guide, not a firm agenda, as I hope our conversation will follow a natural organic route.

1. Personal background
   Professional experience, initial engagement with teacher support programmes, engagement with TL21, Prior experience of CPD …
2. Role of coordinator within TL21
   Estimate of time commitment per month, nature of tasks, Process of engagement with schools, communication channels …
3. Relationship with Education Centres
   Roles, responsibilities, support, accreditation …
4. Relationship with schools
   Principals/Deputy Principals; teachers (collectively or individually), school visits, staff meetings …
5. Relationship with Maynooth University
   Reporting, support, accreditation
6. Professional reflections:
   What are key characteristics of TL21? In what way is the TL21 experience different to other CPD experiences? What changes, if any – in the programme, in yourself, in teachers' expectations, in school attitudes etc – have you been conscious of, over the period of your TL21 work? …

With your permission, I'd like to record our conversation. This is to facilitate recall and reflection after the interview and to obviate the need for extensive note-taking while talking.

Participants will not be individually named or identified in the final evaluation report. Should any direct attribution be considered, agreement of participant will be sought in all cases.

Dr. Gary Granville
External Evaluator TL21
Jan 2019

Sample letter 2: school principal/deputy-principal

TL21 Evaluation
Principal/Deputy Principal

Dear Principal/Deputy Principal
Thank you for agreeing to talk to me as part of the external evaluation of the TL21 programme. I set out below a schedule of topics or points of reference for our discussion. This is purely a guide, not a firm agenda, as I hope our conversation will follow a natural organic route.

7. School background
    Professional experience, initial engagement with teacher support programmes, engagement with TL21, prior and parallel experience of CPD
8. Role of Principal/Deputy Principal within TL21
    Identification and selection of participating teachers – procedures, rationale etc; school support for TL21; Non-participating teachers? Pupil awareness; Parental awareness; BoM awareness
9. Relationship with Education Centre
    Roles, responsibilities, support, accreditation …
10. Relationship with TL21 Regional Coordinator
    Roles, responsibilities, support …
11. Relationship with Maynooth University
    Roles, responsibilities, support, accreditation …
12. Professional reflections:
    What are key characteristics of TL21? In what way is the TL21 experience different to other CPD experiences? What changes, if any – in the programme, in yourself, in teachers' expectations, in school attitudes etc – have you been conscious of, over the period of your TL21 work? …
13. Student perspectives
    An opportunity to meet and engage with some students would be welcome, if feasible. Such a focus group occasion would be designed to offer students a forum to discuss their experiences, reflections on and preferences as regards their learning. It is not envisaged that students would necessarily be aware of TL21 as such; rather the encounter would be designed simply to allow the young people talk about their schooling in general (no references to identified or specific individuals will be included).

With your permission, I may wish to record some conversations. This is to facilitate recall and reflection after the interviews and to obviate the need for extensive note-taking while talking.

Participants will not be individually named or identified in the final evaluation report. Should any direct attribution be considered, agreement of participant will be sought in all cases.

Dr. Gary Granville
External Evaluator TL21
March 2019

Sample letter 3: national education body

TL21 Evaluation

Meeting with National Education Body CEO

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this External Evaluation project which has been commissioned by the DES. A report is due for submission at the end of March 2019.

Schedule for discussion
The Evaluation project aims to capture the impact of TL21 and to outline what the implications of the TL21 experience might be for ongoing national policy and for local initiatives of a similar nature. Recent years have seen major developments in the educational environment for professional development for teachers in Ireland. It is important for the evaluation to locate TL21 within that broader landscape.

In that context, some of the following issues might serve to guide our discussion, but other issues will of course emerge organically:

1. Brief overview of role and structure of your organisation, with particular reference to professional development in post-primary education;
2. Your organisation's views on current and future CPD policies, needs and models;
3. Relationships of your organisation with national CPD initiatives;
4. Engagement of your organisation with TL21;
5. Perspectives on TL21 and similar initiatives?

With your permission, I would like to record our discussion. This is to facilitate my own recall rather than for citation in the report. While I do not envisage much reliance on direct quotations, any such usage in the final report would of course be cleared with you beforehand.

Dr Gary Granville
January 2019

Appendix 3: Coding system

All interviewees and discussants were promised anonymity. In reporting and citing from these sources, a coding system has been used. All interviewees and participant respondents were allocated a code. There are ten TL21 Networks, clustered around ten Education Centres: two of these networks are each split into two sub-networks (one formally funded as such, the other a more ad-hoc local arrangement). These networks have been coded N1 to N12 with no formal pattern, hierarchy or other meaning or correspondence, geographical or otherwise, attached.

Regional coordinators (C) and Education Centre Directors (D) are coded with the same numeric indicator: thus, CN9 is the Regional Coordinator for Network 9, while DN5 is the Director of the Education Centre in Network 5. Some Regional Coordinators work in more than one network, and some Directors have responsibility for than one network or sub-network. Some individual Coordinators and Directors are thus represented by more than one code.

Teachers (T) in each of the networks are similarly coded against the same numeric sequence, with an alphabetical code distinguishing teachers within any specific network – TN7c and TN7e are individual teachers in Network 7.

Personnel in schools (S) visited in the course of the evaluation are identified through a parallel numeric code, again randomly allocated. Thus PS2 is a principal or deputy-principal in School 2, while TS4b is a teacher in School 4.

Leaders of national agencies (A) or other national education bodies were coded similarly and assigned randomly – thus A2 is the Chief Executive/Director/Deputy Director of a specific national agency.

Gendered pronouns have been used interchangeably and arbitrarily throughout, to further secure anonymity. TL21 participants are named and specifically cited only in the few instances where extracts or quotations from TL21-related MEd (Innovative Learning) theses are referenced, as these are already on record.
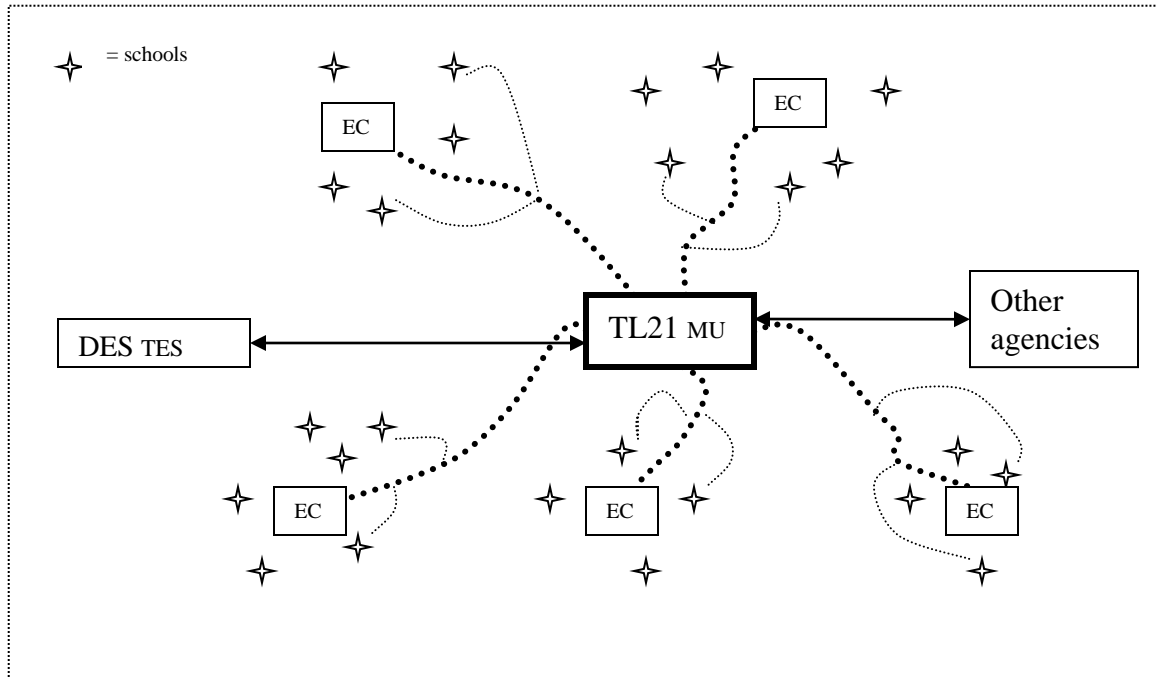
Networks of schools are clustered around individual education centres (EC), connected to those centres, to each other and to the central TL21 team (Director and coordinators). TL21 connects directly to the wider policy context through the DES – the Teacher Education Section (TES) of that department in particular – and through ongoing interaction with the various other agencies involved in education.