TransformED
Empowering Teachers, Improving Outcomes
THE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FUND

Introduction

1.1 Professional development is essential for effective teaching and school improvement. Effective professional development empowers educators to continually refine their practice, adapt to evolving pupil needs and implement evidence-based strategies that enhance learning outcomes.

1.2 When teachers engage in sustained, collaborative and well-designed professional development, they deepen their subject knowledge, strengthen pedagogical skills, and build confidence in applying innovative approaches. This not only improves individual classroom performance but also fosters a culture of collective responsibility and continuous improvement across the school.

1.3 Effective professional development should be seen as a key driver not only of staff development, but also of recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and school improvement.

"Every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better."
Dylan Wiliam

1.4 The TPL Fund is a key commitment within the Department of Education's TransformED NI Strategy and Delivery Plan, which prioritises investment in teacher professional development to improve teaching quality and pupil outcomes.

1.5 This guidance document outlines the key principles, eligibility criteria for expenditure and procedures for accessing and utilising this additional funding. It is accompanied by a TPL Fund leaflet which provides a short overview of the Fund.

What is the Teacher Professional Learning Fund?

2.1 The TPL Fund is designed to provide schools with dedicated funding to support professional development over three academic years between 2025/26 and 2027/28. The Fund allocates annual earmarked funding to each grant-aided school, calculated on a per teacher basis, to ensure equitable and sustained investment in teacher professional development.

2.2 The Fund aims to provide every school with funding to access high-quality professional learning opportunities and to support school leaders to design and implement professional learning programmes that are directly aligned with the specific learning needs of their teachers, in line with the Learning Leaders Strategy.

2.3 The three-year cycle allows for strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of professional learning programmes and provides certainty for the period.

2.4 Schools can use the Fund to support a wide variety of professional learning through various methods, including utilising external expertise, or structured in-house development activities.

2.5 Schools can supplement the funding provided with other funding available to schools for example via the Common Funding Formula.

2.6 Schools may also wish to utilise the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)[1] in Northern Ireland, who offer accredited, research-informed professional learning opportunities aligned with the aims of the TPL Fund.

[1] Queen's University College, Belfast, St Mary's University College, Belfast, Stranmillis University College and Ulster University.

PROGRAMME AIM

To enhance teacher effectiveness and improve educational outcomes for all pupils by providing funding for targeted evidence-based professional learning opportunities that build capacity and skills across the workforce.

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

- **Enhance Teacher Expertise:**
  Support professional development to improve subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and classroom practice.
- **Promote Equity:**
  Ensure all teachers and schools have access to high-quality teacher professional learning opportunities.
- **Raise Pupil Attainment:**
  Drive better academic and non-academic outcomes for pupils through improved teaching quality.
- **Foster Collaboration:**
  Encourage partnerships between schools, teachers and external providers to share best practice.
- **Support Retention:**
  Improve teacher morale and retention by investing in their professional growth.

Funding allocations

3.1 Annual earmarked funding has been calculated for each grant-aided school on a per teacher basis. The funding allocated is based on the cost of two days' substitute cover per teacher, per day, though this in no way indicates that substitute cover should be the primary focus for use of the funding.

3.2 Funding is provided up to a maximum allocation of £24,000 per academic year for a school with fewer than 70 teachers and at a maximum of £30,000 for those with more than 70 teachers (2024-25 statistics).

3.3 The Fund includes a minimum funding guarantee for smaller schools whereby each school receives a minimum allocation of £2,500 per academic year. Where a school's calculated funding falls below this amount, their allocation has been uplifted to £2,500.

3.4 Schools can find details of their proposed allocation for each of the next three financial years by clicking here.

Operation of the Fund

4.1 To access the TPL Fund, schools are required to submit an annual TPL Strategy Statement to the Department on the planned use of their allocation for the next academic year. Once the Strategy Statement is agreed by the Department, the allocation will be made by the Education Authority (EA) into the school account.

4.2 The Statement is a short document and is not intended to be onerous or time consuming for schools to complete. It is intended to clearly link planned activities to school improvement goals and pupil outcomes. It will outline:
- the school's learning priorities and needs;
- how the funding will be used;
- the rationale for chosen programmes;
- alignment with the School Development Plan;
- expected impact on teaching practice; and
- how impact will be monitored and evaluated.

4.3 It is intended that schools will each identify their intended outcomes and success criteria and will monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme. This planning is crucial because it ensures that the TPL is purposeful, coherent and aligned with strategic objectives – maximising the value of funding and driving meaningful improvements in teaching quality and pupil achievement.

4.4 To assist schools in this process, the TPL Strategy Statement will be completed on a new TPL Planner Tab within the TSN Planner. The Planner will guide schools through completion and is designed to be straightforward to use.

4.5 Schools are required to complete the TPL Planner for the 2025-26 academic year by **Monday 29th September 2025.**

4.6 The TPL Strategy Statement must be completed on the planner and agreed by the Department in order to receive funding. Please note funding is available for all schools – this is not a competitive bidding process. To see the breakdown of funding per school by academic year click here. Schools are simply required to complete the planner and receive approval from the Department.

ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURE

4.7 The TPL Fund is a targeted investment designed to enhance the quality of education by supporting the ongoing professional development of teaching and other school staff. Its primary focus is to ensure that educators have access to structured, evidence-informed learning opportunities that improve their subject knowledge, teaching strategies and leadership skills. This focus on continuing professional development is critical for raising standards in the classroom, closing attainment gaps, and fostering a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement across schools.

4.8 While health and wellbeing are undeniably extremely important for both staff and pupils, the TPL Fund is not intended to support general wellness activities such as mindfulness workshops, wellness sessions, wider school celebrations or staff social events. These initiatives, although beneficial, do not directly contribute to the enhancement of teaching practice or pupil learning outcomes and are not considered eligible expenditure. Ring-fencing the TPL Fund for professional learning, aims to ensure measurable impact on professional growth and educational attainment.

4.9 The online TPL Planner will ask schools to indicate how the TPL funding will be used. The eligible expenditure categories are set out below and schools will be asked to identity proposed expenditure categories when submitting their TPL Strategy Statement through the online planner. It is recognised that these categories are not always mutually exclusive and schools should select the best fit for each item of expenditure. It is likely schools will have expenditure across a range of categories.

4.10 It is understood that costs may be estimates at this stage and that some items of expenditure may appear to fit more than one category. Schools should simply choose the category which fits best. This is understood and the planner is designed to give an overview of the proposed approach rather than being entirely prescriptive. It is accepted there may be minor changes to costs and activities during the academic year.

4.11 Schools should note that travel and subsistence costs, including travel and accommodation to conferences and courses, as well hospitality and venue costs, must account for no more than a maximum 10% of a school's total expenditure from the Fund.

ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURE CATEGORIES

1. **Accredited professional learning leading to recognised, professionally relevant certification or qualification.**
   Examples (but not limited to) include:
   • Postgraduate study
   • Other accredited courses delivered by Northern Ireland HEIs
   • Chartered Teacher Status

2. **School-based professional development activities**
   • In-house training sessions led by senior staff or external experts
   • Collaborative planning time for curriculum development or pedagogical improvement
   • Peer observation and feedback cycles
   • Action research projects within the school

3. **Externally-delivered courses and conferences** (online, face-to-face, blended)
   • Attendance at regional or national education conferences
   • Enrolment in subject-specific workshops or other professional development courses
   • Costs for online professional development platforms and webinars

4. **Resources and materials**
   • Purchase of books, toolkits and teaching guides linked to professional development
   • Subscriptions to professional journals

5. **Staff release and cover costs**
   • Supply teacher costs to cover staff attending professional development
   • Additional hours for part-time staff participating in professional development
   • Travel and accommodation for off-site professional development (if reasonable and necessary – up to a maximum of 10% of total funding)

6. **Collaborative networks and partnerships**
   • Participation in learning communities or school clusters professional learning events

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

4.12 In addition to the eligible expenditure categories above, schools will also be asked in the 2025-26 academic year to demonstrate within the TPL Planner strategic alignment with the key system wide priorities set out in the TransformED Strategy and SEN Delivery Plan. Professional learning should focus on one or more of the following strategic priorities set out in the table below.

TPL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2025-26

• Teaching and learning, including pedagogy, subject specific learning and behaviour management.
• Improving literacy and/or numeracy outcomes.
• Curriculum design and development.
• Assessment.
• Self-evaluation leading to improvement (schools may wish to refer to the ETI Empowering Improvement: New Framework for Inspection as a focus for school improvement activity).
• Tackling educational disadvantage.
• Special Educational Needs.

INELIGIBLE EXPENDITURE

4.13 Schools will note that the TPL Fund is designed specifically to support professional learning. Ineligible expenditure includes:

- General school operational costs (utilities, maintenance) even when associated with hosting professional learning events;
- Non-education related training or development such as wider emotional health and wellbeing activities for staff;
- Equipment or resources not directly linked to professional development activities; and
- Any other costs not directly related to professional learning and development.

Ensuring High-Quality Teacher Professional Learning

5.1 Not all professional development is equally effective. Helping teachers to improve their practice takes thought, planning and effort.

5.2 As set out in the diagram below, schools may find it useful when planning their professional development programmes to distinguish between direct professional development which links clearly to improved practice and improved pupil outcomes and more indirect professional development which contributes to improving the overall running of the school. Professional development should not be confused with administrative briefings or systems for teacher monitoring and appraisal.

What is direct professional development?

DIRECT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Directly seeks to improve specific pupil outcomes (academic and wider)

IMPROVED PUPIL OUTCOMES

IMPROVED PRACTICE

INDIRECT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Links to pupil outcomes less clearly, and may contribute by helping to improve the running of a school by developing teachers in other ways. Indirect professional development could include, for example:

- leadership development;
- training in operational or procedural tasks;
- attending education conferences to increase awareness of new ideas; or
- statutory training around particular approaches.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

BRIEFING AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION EXCHANGE

There is an important place for briefing, administrative information exchange and statutory updates, however, this is not the same as professional development and should not be seen as part of the time or resource allocated to it.

APPRAISAL AND MONITORING OF TEACHING

Systems for appraisal and monitoring of teaching are necessary, and can help to determine starting points for professional development. In themselves, they are not direct teacher development processes and should not be seen as part of the time and resource allocated to them.

Care should be taken so that these systems do not impede effective professional development by reducing motivation, undermining trust or generating excessive workload.

5.3 While professional development can take many forms, the best available research shows that the most effective professional development practices share similar characteristics.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

RELEVANT AND REFLECTIVE: FOCUSED ON IMPROVING AND EVALUATING PUPIL OUTCOMES AND ENCOURAGING TEACHERS TO EVALUATE AND ADAPT THEIR PRACTICE

Professional development is most effective when activities have a clear purpose and link to pupil outcomes. In particular, effective professional development:

- has explicit relevance to participants being designed around: individual teachers' existing experience, knowledge and needs; the context and day-to-day experiences of teachers and their schools; and the desired outcomes for pupils;

- makes the objectives clear and shows the links between activities and the intended outcomes;

- ensures individual activities link logically to the intended pupil outcomes;

- provides structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and receive feedback to improve implementation;

- involves ongoing evaluation of how changes in practice are having an impact on pupil outcomes.

EVIDENCE-BASED: UNDERPINNED BY ROBUST EVIDENCE AND EXPERTISE

Professional development is most effective when informed by robust evidence, which can be from a range of sources. In particular, effective professional development:

- develops practice and theory together;

- links pedagogical knowledge with subject and specialist knowledge;

- draws on the evidence base, including high-quality academic research, and

- utilises robustly evaluated approaches and teaching resources;

- is supported by those with expertise and knowledge to help participants improve their understanding of evidence;

- draws on expert input to ensure that activities are clear about how and why practices work in different contexts; and,

- draws out and challenges teachers' beliefs and expectations about teaching and how children learn.

INCLUDES COLLABORATION AND EXPERT CHALLENGE

Professional development that aims to change teachers' practice is most effective when it includes collaborative activities with a focus on the intended pupil outcomes. In particular, effective professional development:

- builds-in peer support for problem solving; includes focussed discussion about practice and supporting groups of pupils with similar needs;

- challenges existing practice, by raising expectations and bringing in new perspectives; and

- includes support from someone in a coaching and/or mentoring role to provide modelling and challenge.

SUSTAINABLE: SUSTAINED OVER TIME, DESIGNED FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT, NOT ONE-OFF SESSIONS

Professional development is most effective when activities form part of a sustained programme of at least two terms. In particular, effective professional development:

- is iterative, with activities creating a rhythm of ongoing support and follow-up activities;

- ensures complementary one-off activities are part of a wider coherent package; and

- provides opportunities for experimentation, reflection, feedback and evaluation.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

5.4 Effective practice is underpinned by, and requires that professional development must be prioritised by, school leadership. As a priority, leaders commit to and invest in their own professional learning and development, creating the conditions where professional learning can thrive – space, time, culture and trust.

5.5 When designing their TPL Strategy, leaders may wish to reflect on and consider the following:

- **Leadership of Professional Learning:** Develop a strategic vision that leads and supports learning for all staff, positioning professional development as a key lever for improvement.
- **Professional Development as a Core Expectation:** Champion high-quality professional development as an entitlement for all staff, embedding it into school improvement processes.
- **Needs Assessment:** Engage teachers, classroom assistants and other school staff to identify specific professional learning needs. Use data such as student performance metrics, teacher surveys, or teaching audits to pinpoint gaps in skills, knowledge, or practice.
- **Balancing Priorities:** Strike a balance between whole-school goals, subject-specific needs and individual teacher development priorities.
- **Impact on Pupil Outcomes:** Clearly articulate how professional development activities will lead to measurable improvements in teaching quality and student achievement.
- **Learning Culture and Ethos:** Cultivate an environment based on trust, honesty, challenge and support—one that promotes the growth of professional capital and encourages reflective practice.

- **Alignment with Curriculum and Vision:** Ensure that TPL complements a coherent, ambitious curriculum and supports the school's broader vision for pupil success.
- **Time, Support, and Resources:** Allocate sufficient time and resources to enable meaningful, sustained professional learning, including opportunities for collaboration and coaching.
- **Coherence Across Plans:** Ensure that school, subject and individual development plans are aligned and mutually reinforcing, creating a unified approach to professional growth.

SELECTING EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

5.6 Identifying the right TPL courses and providers can be challenging due to the sheer volume and variety of options available, each offering different approaches, formats, and claims of effectiveness.

5.7 The key considerations below may be helpful in supporting schools to purchase good quality TPL programmes. School leaders are extremely busy and time is limited – the list is intended to be helpful rather than a requirement. In addition, a sample **Quality Assurance Checklist for External Providers**, which schools may wish to ask external providers to complete to inform their decision making, is attached at **Annex A**. Schools may wish to consider the HEIs as potential external providers, who offer high-quality professional learning opportunities aligned with the aims of the TPL Fund.

1. **Define Clear Objectives and Focus for the Professional Learning Programme**
- Identify clearly school and teacher needs and core areas of focus.
- Establish measurable goals for the professional learning programme. For example: increasing teacher proficiency in differentiated instruction; improving pupil engagement through evidence-based strategies.

- Ensure objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).
- Communicate these objectives to potential providers to ensure their offerings align.

2. **Research Potential Providers**
- Verify the provider's qualifications, including experience in education, certifications and track record with similar schools.
- Look for providers with expertise in evidence-based practices.
- Examine reviews, references and seek feedback from other schools that have worked with the provider.
- Request case studies or evidence of impact, such as improved teacher practice or pupil outcomes.
- Compare provider costs to ensure value for money.
- Request a clear breakdown of costs, including fees for materials, travel, or follow-up sessions.
- Ensure the provider is reliable and can meet agreed-upon deadlines.
- Review contract terms, including cancellation policies, deliverables and timelines.

3. **Explore Delivery Methods**
- Assess whether the provider offers flexible formats (e.g., in-person workshops, virtual sessions, blended learning, or ongoing coaching).
- If considering online or hybrid professional learning, ensure the provider's platform is user-friendly and accessible.
- Ensure the delivery method suits your teachers' schedules and learning preferences.
- Check for additional resources (e.g., toolkits, lesson plans, or videos) that teachers can use post-training.

4. **Evaluate Content and Approach**
- Ensure the provider's content is grounded in research and aligns with best practices in adult learning and pedagogy.
- Check if the provider incorporates active learning, collaboration, and opportunities for teachers to apply new skills in their classrooms.
- Confirm if the provider can tailor content to your school's unique needs, pupil demographics and teaching context.
- Sustainability: look for providers that offer follow-up support, such as coaching, peer collaboration, or resources to reinforce learning over time.
- Consider whether the training builds capacity within the school (e.g., training teacher leaders to sustain the work).

5. **Engage Stakeholders in the Selection Process**
- Consider forming a selection committee to review proposals and observe sample sessions or demos from providers.
- Solicit input from teachers to ensure the professional learning will be practical and engaging.

6. **Pilot and Monitor Effectiveness**
- If possible, test the provider's services with a small group of teachers before committing to a school-wide programme
- Use the pilot to assess the provider's ability to deliver high-quality, relevant professional learning.
- Define how you will measure the success of the professional learning (e.g., teacher feedback, classroom observations, student performance data).
- Monitor short-term and long-term impacts to ensure the training leads to meaningful change.
- Collect teacher feedback after sessions to assess engagement, relevance, and applicability.
- Use surveys, focus groups, or informal discussions to gauge satisfaction and areas for improvement.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Schools may find some of the further reading provided below useful as they plan their TPL Programmes.

Strategy document
The Department's Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning – "Learning Leaders"

Empowering Improvement: New Framework for Inspection
ETI's new framework for inspection.

Effective Professional Development | EEF
Effective Professional Development – Guidance Report (Education Endowment Foundation) offers practical recommendations for designing and selecting professional development that improves teaching practice.

Home - Standards 2022
Standards for Professional Learning (National Education Association) defines key standards that support high-quality teaching and improved student outcomes.

Great professional development which leads to great pedagogy
A research-based review presenting nine evidence-informed claims about impactful professional development.

Planning, facilitating and evaluating professional learning | Leading professional learning | Professional Learning | Education Scotland
The national Scottish model for planning, facilitating, and evaluating professional learning in schools.

Professional Learning in Effective Schools: The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Professional Learning
Guide outlining seven principles of effective professional learning for school improvement

Funding allocations

6.1 Schools should maintain records of how the TPL funds are spent and their impact on teacher development, which they will use to complete an annual online reporting survey in June of each year.

6.2 Funding for the next academic year will be contingent on completion of the annual online reporting survey each June.

6.3 Required information will include an overview of the key activities undertaken, the number of teachers participating and the impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The key information required is set out in the TPL Fund Reporting Framework attached at Annex B.

6.4 Having a robust reporting framework that incorporates feedback and evaluation is essential for schools to maximise the impact of the TPL Fund. By systematically gathering insights from staff and assessing the outcomes of professional learning activities, schools can ensure that resources are directed toward initiatives that genuinely enhance teaching practice and pupil achievement.

6.5 It is anticipated that these feedback mechanisms allow the opportunity to reflect on the relevance and effectiveness of training, while evaluation data—such as changes in classroom practice or pupil progress—provides evidence of value for money.

6.6 This continuous loop of reflection and improvement empowers schools to make informed decisions about future investment ensuring that TPL funding drives meaningful and measurable improvement.

6.7 At a system level, ETI will carry out an evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the Fund during each year of its operation.

Support and further information

7.1 For additional guidance on the operation of the Fund, schools can contact the Department of Education's Teacher Education and Professional Learning Team at: **teachereducation@education-ni.gov.uk**.

7.2 Schools may also wish to discuss their TPL priorities with their District Inspector.

REMINDER – KEY STEPS

1. Check School's Proposed Allocation for 2025-26.

2. Complete Online TPL Planner by **29th September 2025**.

3. Plan agreed by DE.

4. Funding allocated by EA.

5. Completion of Annual Online Reporting Survey (June 2026).

Annex A
Quality Assurance Checklist for external providers

This Checklist serves as a guide to support school leaders in their decision-making and can be shared with private providers to help them demonstrate how their programme meets the aims of the TPL Fund. Schools can choose to use all or some of the questions based on their needs. There is no requirement to utilise the checklist to assess providers but it may be helpful.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROVIDERS

For each category, please provide a brief explanation of how your programme meets the criteria, using examples where possible. Schools may use a rating system or qualitative assessment to determine alignment with their needs.

Category 1 – Relevance and Alignment
- What is the focus of your professional learning programme?
- How does it support and align to the school's specific needs, linking to the School Development Plan?

Category 2 – Quality and Credibility
- What evidence or research underpins your programme?
- What are the qualifications and experience of your facilitators?
- What examples do you have of similar successful programmes?
- What feedback can you provide from participating schools / teachers relating to previous programmes?

Category 3 – Engagement and Collaboration
- How does the programme ensure active participation beyond the initial session(s)?
- How does it encourage collaboration among teachers?

Category 4 – Lasting Impact
- What follow-up support or ongoing development do you offer after the programme ends?
- How do you ensure teachers can apply their learning in the classroom?

Category 5 – Access and Inclusion
- How do you ensure accessibility for all staff?
- Are there digital or remote participation options?

Category 6 – Measurable Impact
- How do you measure improvements in the teachers' learning?
- What success indicators do you use?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

While schools may adapt this checklist to their specific priorities, key elements such as programme relevance, quality, impact and accessibility should always be considered. Schools are encouraged to engage with providers to clarify any aspects of the programme before making a decision.

USING A RATING SYSTEM

Schools may choose to use to rate provider's responses to each category on scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

For example:
1-2: Limited alignment with school needs, minimal evidence of impact.
3: Some alignment, but gaps in quality, accessibility or impact.
4-5: Strong alignment, backed by evidence, engagement and measurable outcomes.

A programme scoring consistently high across multiple categories may be considered a strong option for investment.

Annex B
TPL Fund: Reporting Framework

To ensure accountability and assess the impact of the TPL Fund, schools are encouraged to document how funding has been used and its effects on teaching and learning. Schools may adapt this framework based on their reporting requirements.

1. OVERVIEW OF TPL ACTIVITIES
- Brief description of the professional learning activities undertaken.
- Name of the provider(s) and programme(s) funded.
- Number of staff who participated.

2. ALIGNMENT WITH SCHOOL PRIORITIES
- How did the funded programme align with the School Development Plan?
- Which specific teaching and learning priorities did it address?

3. IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING
- What changes in teaching practice have been observed?
- How has pupil engagement and achievement been affected?
- Provide examples or case studies of impact, where possible.

4. STAFF FEEDBACK AND ENGAGEMENT
- What feedback have teachers provided on the programme's effectiveness?
- How has collaboration among staff been enhanced?

5. SUSTAINABILITY AND NEXT STEPS
- How will the school build on the learning from this programme?
- Are there plans for follow-up professional learning?

6. EVIDENCE AND EVALUATION
- What data or evidence has been collected to measure impact?
- Include key performance indicators, testimonials, or assessment results.

7. FINANCIAL SUMMARY
- Total TPL Fund expenditure.
- Breakdown of costs (e.g., course fees, materials, substitute teacher cover, etc.).