

Irish National Teachers' Organisation Submission

On the Review of the DEY Summer Course Programme

Vere Foster House
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
D01 ET35

Phone: 01 804 7700
Email: info@into.ie
Web: www.into.ie
General Secretary: John Boyle

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Submission on behalf of

Irish National Teachers' Organisation

to the

Department of Education and Youth

on the

Review of the Summer Course Programme



Introduction

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) represents over 53,000 teachers across the island of Ireland. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education and Youth's (DEY) consultation on their *Review of the Summer Course Programme*. The INTO brings a unique dual perspective to this review process—as both a long-standing provider of the summer course programme, and as the representative body for the teaching profession. This submission has been informed by recent in-person engagement and consultation with INTO members, as well as research on adult learning and broader INTO policy on teacher professional development.

This submission also draws on the extensive experience of INTO Learning, which was established 30 years ago following a resolution at INTO Congress, with the aim of providing high-quality professional learning opportunities for members. Since its inception, INTO Learning has developed and delivered courses across a wide range of formats, including online, blended, synchronous, and face-to-face models. This long-standing experience ensures that INTO's perspective is deeply informed by practice, and grounded in a clear understanding of what constitutes effective, engaging, and accessible professional development for teachers working in diverse contexts.

At the outset, the INTO acknowledges the DEY's *Review of the Summer Course Programme* as both timely and necessary, particularly in light of the significant changes underway in the primary school system, specifically the rollout of the new Primary Curriculum Framework. The summer course programme has long been recognised by teachers as a valuable and responsive avenue for professional learning, offering opportunities to deepen pedagogical knowledge, engage with evolving curricular and policy priorities, and reflect on practice in a meaningful way. INTO members consistently highlight the importance of high-quality summer courses in supporting their professional growth, enhancing classroom practice, and contributing to whole-school development. This review presents an important opportunity to ensure the programme continues to meet the diverse and evolving needs of teachers in a dynamic educational landscape.

The INTO welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important review and emphasises the need for ongoing engagement and consultation throughout the process. It is essential that any proposed developments to the Summer Course Programme are



carefully considered, mutually agreed upon, and clearly communicated to the teaching profession. Continued dialogue will play a vital role in maintaining trust and ensuring that changes reflect the lived realities of teachers and the diverse contexts in which they work. The INTO looks forward to working constructively with the Department to ensure that the Summer Course Programme continues to support high-quality, relevant, and accessible professional learning for all teachers.

In line with the DEY's *Terms of Reference*, the submission is structured to respond directly to each of the key areas identified for review: the modes and methods of course delivery, the quality and relevance of course content, and the alignment with national curricular and policy priorities.

The modes and methods of course delivery

INTO policy supports a broad and flexible approach to professional learning, recognising that teachers—like professionals in any field—have diverse learning styles, motivations, and priorities that shift throughout their careers. Research consistently highlights that effective adult learning (andragogy) is underpinned by principles of learner autonomy, relevance and self-direction. Teachers value flexibility and choice in how professional development is delivered^[1] and it is widely accepted that professional development is most impactful when it is responsive to teachers' contexts and allows for varied modes of engagement, including face-to-face, online, and blended formats.^[2]

Teachers consistently express a preference for having choice and flexibility in how they engage with professional development, particularly in relation to the mode of delivery. Teachers best engage with professional development courses when the modes and methods are flexible, relevant, and interactive, allowing them to fit their learning into their own schedules and focus on their unique professional needs. Teachers' preferences for professional development formats—whether face-to-face, online, blended, or synchronous—vary significantly depending on their years of experience and career stage.^[3] For example, early-career teachers often seek more structured, collaborative formats, while mid- and late-career teachers may prefer self-directed or flexible options that align with their existing expertise and personal commitments. Furthermore, teachers' sense of competence and challenge in professional development shifts across career stages, influencing their engagement and preferred learning environments.^[4]



Feedback from INTO members highlights the importance of choice and accessibility in how summer courses are delivered. While online courses are widely appreciated for their flexibility—especially during the summer months—members also emphasise the value of face-to-face learning, particularly for fostering dialogue, peer engagement, and collaborative reflection. However, the feasibility of attending in-person courses is often limited by geography, with teachers in rural or remote areas facing significant travel barriers.

INTO Learning's experience as a provider of summer courses across all delivery formats reinforces these findings: teachers consistently report that having access to a range of formats enables them to engage more meaningfully with content, balance professional learning with personal and school responsibilities, and apply new knowledge in ways that suit their teaching contexts. However, the INTO is open to exploring new and innovative modes of delivery, including blended learning models that combine the strengths of both online and face-to-face formats. This openness is grounded in the principle that new approaches should only complement—not replace—the current offering. A diverse range of delivery modes is essential to ensure that professional development remains accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of all teachers, regardless of their location, career stage, or personal circumstances.

Importantly, teachers should have genuine choice in how they engage with the Summer Course Programme, particularly given that it takes place during school closure periods and is undertaken at their own expense. Respecting this context means ensuring that a wide range of delivery modes remains available—excluding none—and that new and innovative formats continue to be explored to meet the evolving needs of the profession.

Maintaining a variety of formats allows teachers to engage in professional learning in ways that best suit their individual contexts, while also supporting broader system goals such as curriculum implementation, inclusion, and digital transformation.



Pilot Synchronous Course

In 2023, the Department initially proposed changes to the summer course structure which was met with strong opposition from INTO members. Many viewed the changes as an encroachment on their terms and conditions and on their professional autonomy as responsible adult learners. Members expressed particular concern about the loss of flexibility traditionally afforded during the summer period—flexibility that is especially important for those with caring responsibilities. This feedback underscores the need for any future developments in course delivery to be grounded in respect for teacher agency and their diverse circumstances. While innovation in professional development is welcome, it must be informed by teachers' experience, sensitive to the diverse contexts in which they work, and must not represent a step backwards in terms of flexibility, accessibility, or professional autonomy.

At the time, and in response to requests from the DEY, the INTO piloted a synchronous summer course to provide informed, evidence-based feedback on this model of teacher professional development. The course, *Understanding and Preventing Racism through a Global Justice Lens*, invited 48 participants to engage with asynchronous online modules alongside two live synchronous sessions facilitated on zoom.

However, it was initially challenging to incentivise participation so in order to encourage engagement, the course was offered free of charge, made possible through funding from an IHREC grant. Feedback from participants indicated a genuine appreciation for the blended format, highlighting its potential as a complementary approach to traditional summer course delivery. Teachers appreciated the interactive nature of the sessions, especially the opportunity to learn from peers in breakout groups, which added depth and richness to the learning experience. These key learnings demonstrated that, while the format was valued by some, it does not appeal to the vast majority of course participants.

Nonetheless, the synchronous approach has clear value as an additional course format option, rather than as a replacement for existing models. If the DEY is committed to promoting synchronous or alternative formats, it will be essential to provide dedicated funding to incentivise participation, particularly among teachers who may be hesitant to engage with new or unfamiliar formats.



The quality and relevance of course content

The INTO welcomes the commitment in the review to ensuring the quality and relevance of course content. We are confident that a robust and rigorous quality assurance process is already in place—from the DEY’s course approval procedures to the Inspectorate’s evaluation and review of courses during the summer period. The INTO has consistently welcomed Inspectorate feedback, which is generally positive, validating, and constructive in nature. This feedback plays an important role in maintaining high standards and supporting continuous improvement in professional development offerings.

At a time of significant policy and curricular redevelopment in primary education, the INTO views the summer course programme as a valuable pathway to support teachers in responding to their evolving professional learning priorities in the context of the redeveloped primary school curriculum. However, the INTO also acknowledges that the summer programme alone cannot, and should not, be expected to meet all professional learning needs currently present in the system. The programme must be recognised as one of many complementary avenues that will support teachers over the coming years. For curriculum implementation to be truly effective, it must be accompanied by sustained, collaborative, and contextually relevant professional development opportunities throughout the school year.^[5] The NCCA document *Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change* also stresses the importance of teacher agency and identity in their engagement with professional development. Notwithstanding its limitations, the summer programme can serve as a valuable complement to DEY-led, system-wide professional development initiatives supporting the implementation of the redeveloped primary curriculum.

While the INTO acknowledges that the redeveloped primary curriculum should be a central focus of the summer course programme, it should not be the sole focus, especially in light of the many additional initiatives and expectations being imposed on teachers across the system. Teachers are working within an increasingly complex educational environment that includes priorities such as inclusive education, wellbeing, digital learning, and leadership development. To be truly effective, the summer programme must reflect this complexity and offer flexible, relevant professional learning



opportunities that support teachers in addressing the full spectrum of these evolving expectations.

The INTO agrees that summer course content must be relevant to teachers' current practice. However, given the ever-expanding remit and responsibilities of teachers, the scope of what constitutes relevant professional development is broad and continually evolving. In this context, it is essential that course categories remain sufficiently broad and flexible, allowing for the development of offerings that reflect the diverse realities of school contexts and the varied professional learning needs of teachers at different stages of their careers. For example, a teacher working in an urban DEIS Band 1 school may seek a course focused on supporting pupils experiencing homelessness, while a teacher in a rural setting may require professional development tailored to the unique pedagogical demands of teaching multiple class levels simultaneously. Both are valid and necessary, yet vastly different in focus—highlighting the need for a programme of professional development that accommodates this diversity.

In this way, the summer programme needs to serve as a complementary and responsive support, contributing meaningfully to curriculum implementation while also recognising the broader professional development landscape.

The alignment with national curricular and policy priorities

The INTO acknowledges the requirement to embed DEY priorities and policies as a central element of all teacher professional development, particularly DEY-approved summer courses. However, the INTO does not support the practice of inserting content that is not meaningfully aligned with the course objectives. While key priorities should inform and enhance course design, the inclusion of material that feels forced or irrelevant can dilute the overall quality and coherence of the learning experience for participants. Professional development should remain purposeful, contextually appropriate, and responsive to the real needs of teachers and schools.

For example, a summer course focused on enhancing teachers' skills in delivering the Visual Arts curriculum may be required to include content on the Department's Digital Strategy for Schools. While digital literacy is a vital cross-cutting priority, its inclusion in



a course centred on tactile, creative, and analogue artistic processes may feel misaligned if not carefully integrated. In such cases, the digital strategy content risks appearing tokenistic or tangential, rather than enriching the core learning outcomes of the course.

It is essential that course categories within professional development programmes are sufficiently broad and responsive to the current learning needs of teachers. A notable example of misalignment occurred in Summer 2025, when the DEY did not include a course category for mathematics, despite the ongoing implementation of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum (PMC). This omission was particularly concerning given the scale of change involved in the redeveloped curriculum and the clear need for targeted professional development to support teachers in navigating new approaches, methodologies, and learning outcomes in mathematics. The absence of a dedicated category not only limited the ability of providers to respond to this need, but also sent a confusing signal about the prioritisation of curriculum support within the summer programme.

Therefore, the INTO recommends that course categories remain broad and flexible. This approach is essential to ensure summer courses can be developed in response to the diverse and evolving needs of teachers and schools. Overly narrow or prescriptive categories risk excluding valuable content that addresses real challenges in practice. Broad categories enable professional development to reflect the varied contexts in which teachers work, the different stages of their careers, and the wide range of expectations placed upon them.

General Feedback

Expanding EPV Eligibility

Teachers value the opportunity to engage in meaningful professional development during term time, particularly when courses are relevant to their current classroom practice. There is a clear appetite for ongoing learning opportunities beyond the summer window, which could enhance engagement and impact on teaching and learning.

During the INTO's consultation with members, one of the most consistent and overarching pieces of feedback was the call to expand EPV eligibility to recognise



professional development undertaken during the school term. Teachers expressed a strong desire for greater flexibility in how their engagement with CPD is acknowledged, particularly when that learning is timely and directly applicable to their classroom practice.

The INTO urges the DEY to broaden the scope of courses eligible for EPV days beyond the traditional summer programme. Research consistently highlights that professional development is most effective when it can be implemented immediately, and the high participation rates in the INTO's autumn professional development schedule reflect teachers' appetite for meaningful learning opportunities during the academic year. Recognising term-time courses for EPV would support more relevant and sustained professional growth, aligning better with the realities of teaching and learning.

Additionally, the INTO calls on the DEY to extend EPV day entitlements to all teachers participating in the in-school summer programme (formerly July Provision). This would serve as a meaningful and necessary recognition of the critical work teachers undertake in supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils in our education system. It would also help ensure consistency of experience for pupils, many of whom benefit significantly from being supported by familiar staff in their own school environment.

It is unacceptable that currently Principals and teachers delivering summer provision in the following categories remain excluded from EPV eligibility:

- Pupils with complex special educational needs and/or pupils at risk of educational disadvantage enrolled in mainstream classes;
- DEIS Summer Camps / Cúrsaí Samhraidh;
- Home-based summer provision.

This exclusion has contributed to persistent staffing challenges, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Extending EPV entitlements would provide a practical incentive, help ensure greater teacher participation, and promote continuity of care and learning for pupils during the summer period. The INTO urges the Department to act fairly and proactively to address this gap in recognition and support, and to ensure the continued success of a programme that plays a vital role in supporting our most marginalised and vulnerable pupils.



The INTO believes that all teachers working on the Summer Programme should receive EPV day entitlements at the same rate of one day per week. This would represent a fair and consistent recognition of the professional contribution teachers make during the summer period, often in challenging and high-need contexts.

Paid Substitutable Cover for all EPV absences

Schools benefit greatly from teachers who participate in the summer course programme, as it supports the ongoing development of professional practice in line with Cosán, the national framework for teacher learning. These courses contribute to school improvement and enhance teaching and learning across the system. However, the INTO believes that teachers availing of their EPV entitlements, as outlined in Rule 58 of the Rules for National Schools, should be provided with paid substitutable cover. This is essential to minimise disruption to teaching and learning and to ensure that schools do not experience any negative impact as a result of teachers engaging willingly in professional development during their own time and at their own expense. The provision of paid substitutable cover for EPV days was introduced as part of the COVID-19 emergency response, and the INTO maintains that this should now be standardised. It is INTO policy that all teacher absences should be covered by paid substitution as failing to provide such cover places undue pressure on schools, disrupts continuity for pupils, and undermines the value of professional learning.

The INTO calls on the Department to support teacher development through a practical measure such as paid substitution that would uphold school operations and respect teachers' entitlements.

Review of Timelines in the Summer Course Programme

The timeline for running summer courses should be reviewed to allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness to school contexts. The current 1st July start date is overly rigid, particularly when compared to the flexibility afforded to schools running the in-school Summer Programme, which can begin in late June once the school holidays commence. It is reasonable to expect that similar flexibility should apply to summer



courses. This issue is especially pronounced for face-to-face courses, many of which do not now begin now until the second week of July, limiting access for teachers who may be available earlier or who have other commitments later in the month. A more adaptable timeline would support greater participation and ensure that professional development opportunities are more accessible to teachers across different settings.

The timeline for course applications and approvals also plays a critical role in determining the quality and effectiveness of professional development offerings. If high-quality courses are to be designed and developed, providers must be given adequate time following approval to recruit expert course designers, incorporate Departmental recommendations and guidelines, and conduct a thorough process of review and trial. When timelines are compressed, these essential steps are compromised, and the overall standard of professional learning is put at risk.

Rushed development not only affects the depth and relevance of course content, but also limits opportunities for meaningful collaboration, feedback, and refinement. Teachers deserve professional development that is thoughtfully planned and rigorously designed to meet their needs. The INTO strongly recommends that the Department ensures the course approval schedule allows sufficient time for providers to engage in a robust and reflective development process. A realistic timeline is not just a logistical necessity—it is a cornerstone of quality assurance and a key factor in delivering impactful learning experiences for teachers.

Tutor remuneration

Tutor pay within the summer course programme remains unacceptably low, and this has direct implications for the quality and sustainability of course delivery. If the DEY is committed to maintaining high standards in professional development, it must recognise that experienced and expert teachers are essential to facilitating meaningful learning experiences—particularly in face-to-face courses, where the demands are greatest.

The current rate of pay for tutors, as administered through Education Support Centre's Ireland (ESCI), is long overdue for review. Without appropriate remuneration, the role becomes increasingly unattractive to practising teachers, many of whom are already



balancing significant professional and personal commitments during the summer period. This risks undermining the quality of courses and limiting the pool of skilled facilitators willing to engage. Increasing tutor pay would not only help retain and attract high-calibre, teachers, but also signal a genuine commitment to valuing teacher expertise and ensuring that summer courses continue to meet the evolving professional learning needs of the teaching workforce.

Guidance on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Going forward, clear and consistent DEY guidance on the use of AI in summer courses is essential for providers, as monitoring its use has become increasingly complex. While the INTO makes use of AI detection tools, we remain aware of their limitations in terms of reliability and accuracy. We appreciate the DEY's existing guidance on plagiarism in the provider handbook and believe that similar guidance on AI use would be both timely and valuable. While it may not be feasible to prohibit AI use entirely, it is important that its application is ethical and transparent. Course posts and assignments should demonstrate clear evidence of being contextualised, humanised, and personalised, reflecting genuine engagement and professional learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the INTO appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Education and Youth's review of the Summer Course Programme and acknowledges the recognition of its value in supporting teacher professional development. This submission has outlined key recommendations to enhance the accessibility, relevance, and quality of the programme, including broadening course categories, expanding EPV eligibility, ensuring realistic timelines for course approval, and maintaining diverse delivery formats. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, it is vital that any changes to the summer programme are carefully mediated through ongoing consultation with the teaching profession. The INTO strongly encourages the Department to maintain open and collaborative dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that future developments are informed by teacher experience, responsive to school contexts, and aligned with the shared goal of strengthening professional learning across the system.



^[1] Sauer, E. R. (2011). *Teacher preferences for professional development delivery models and delivery model influence on teacher behavior in the classroom*. Walden University.

^[2] Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning policy institute.

^[3]

Keyes, C. L. (2022). *Teacher Preference in Professional Development* (Doctoral dissertation, Arkansas Tech University).

^[4]

Tillmann, T., Weiß, S., Scharfenberg, J., Kiel, E., Keller-Schneider, M., & Hellsten, M. (2020). The relationship between student teachers' career choice motives and stress-inducing thoughts: A tentative cross-cultural model. *Sage Open*, 10(2), 2158244020927016.

^[5] NCCA (2022) *Supporting Systemwide Primary Curriculum Change*