

**New Digital Strategy
For Schools
Focus Group
Consultation
Report 2021**

November 2021

Compiled by H2 Learning on behalf of the Department of Education

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DoE) held a series of Focus Groups with 9 stakeholder groups between 12th and 21st October 2021. These Focus Groups are one of the key elements of an extensive wide-ranging Consultation Framework designed to assist in the overall development of the new Digital Strategy for Schools, which will build on the existing Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020. The Focus Groups were held online with each session lasting 90 minutes.

The purpose of the Focus Groups is to ensure that the voices of key stakeholders are heard on particular issues, which have emerged from the other phases of consultation and to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to inform the new Digital Strategy for Schools.

The Focus Group questions were informed by earlier stakeholder feedback provided through the Digital Strategy consultation. A series of prompt questions was designed for each of the Focus Groups and provided to participants in advance. These formed the basis for discussion during the Focus Group sessions.

The Focus Groups were organised and coordinated by the Teacher Education Policy – Teacher Supply & Digital Unit, who identified and contacted the participants and moderated the sessions. H2 Learning facilitated the technical design and delivery of the focus group sessions online and subsequently analysed the discussion transcripts and compiled the Digital Strategy for Schools Focus Group Consultation Report.

This report provides a high-level overview of the perspectives that were shared by the participants across the 9 focus groups. The participants shared a wide range of views, and these were initially categorised as either observations or suggestions. Observations were merely statements in relation to a particular topic, while suggestions hinted at an action that could be taken to improve that topic or issue. This report shares these observations and suggestions under a number of headings, before commenting on the potential impact of these on the next Digital Strategy for Schools.

FOCUS GROUP CONSULTATIONS

In preparation for the Focus Group sessions, the Teacher Education Policy - Teacher Supply & Digital Unit analysed the key themes and considerations arising from earlier consultation phases. This analysis identified a range of issues that the DoE wanted to further explore, and this was the main purpose of the Focus Groups. Subsequently a set of key questions were developed in relation to these issues so as to gather additional perspectives from stakeholders. The Focus Groups (see Table 1) were held online between October 10th and October 21st and each lasted 90 minutes.

Table 1: Focus Group Consultation Dates and Groups

Date	Focus Group
12/10/21	Post-Primary Principals
14/10/21	Primary Principals
14/10/21	Post-Primary Teachers
15/10/21	Primary Teachers
18/10/21	Industry
19/10/21	NGOs & Agencies
20/10/21	ITE/HEIs
20/10/21	Post-Primary Students
21/10/21	Primary Pupils

Format of Focus Groups

Participants were identified by the DoE in consultation with relevant stakeholders and supported by the Digital Strategy Consultative Group. The participants were circulated with the discussion topics (see Appendix 1) in advance of their session. Each session commenced with a brief overview of the purpose of the session and embedded it within the context of developing a new Digital Strategy for Schools. The etiquette for running the session was also outlined (figure 1) at the outset and participants were encouraged to share their views through the microphone or the chat facility. Participants were informed that their contributions would be anonymous and that the session would be recorded only for clarification purposes and to facilitate the subsequent writing of this report to ensure all views were accurately captured.

Participants were encouraged to use the chat facility to add comments during the discussion. At the end of each Focus Group session, participants were invited to provide their 2 key points on what the new strategy should address on the Focus Group Padlet. H2 Learning personnel took detailed notes of the contributions during the live sessions and these were further enhanced after each session by listening back to the recordings.

Digital Strategy Focus Group

This is a focus group, so please...

- Selectively mute– stay on mute unless you want to say something
- Use the reactions handsup if you want to speak
- Use the chat facility for questions or comments
- Engage and participate in the discussions
- If you can, keep your camera on

And remember...

- Share your experiences
- There are no right and wrong answers
- We are recording the session purely to assist notetaking
- Allow time for others to contribute, be succinct in sharing your views

An Roinn Oideachais | Department of Education



Figure 1, Focus Group Etiquette

The prompt questions were used to guide the discussions and each group provided valuable insights into their experiences of the Digital Strategy for Schools. H2 Learning met with the Teacher Education Policy – Teacher Supply & Digital Unit after the workshops concluded and identified the emerging themes.

Analysis Approach

On the conclusion of each Focus Group H2 Learning created a report on each session and captured the key contributions by each group under the question prompts. Subsequently all 9 reports were amalgamated into one document, which was shared with the DoE. There was quite a lot of overlap in the contributions from the groups so further analysis was carried out using a thematic review approach.

During this phase, the original contributions of the participants were recorded, and these were subsequently edited and extrapolated to capture the full meaning of their contributions. To avoid repetition, similar contributions from across the focus groups were amalgamated. Subsequently each contribution was assigned a thematic label, which was derived and informed from the prompt questions. The labels are as follows:

- Inclusion
- Connectivity
- CPD
- Teaching, Learning & Assessment
- Devices & Access
- Funding & Procurement
- Initial Teacher Education
- Innovative Practice
- Leadership & Planning
- Safety & Wellbeing
- Technical Support

The analysis phase identified that contributions were typically observations or suggestions. Each statement was duly labelled as an observation or a statement. In the final analysis stage, each contribution was categorised under the headings of the previous Digital Strategy for Schools, which had the following 4 headings:

- Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT
- Teacher Professional Learning
- Leadership, Research and Policy
- ICT Infrastructure

A master spreadsheet was developed that captured the contributions and the thematic labels and an analysis of this data will be presented in the following section.

FEEDBACK FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

This section provides a summary of the key observations and suggestions that were identified, and these are presented under the four themes as outlined in the Digital Strategy for Schools, 2015-2020. Therefore, we are presenting the findings under the four thematic areas of the previous strategy and a brief commentary is provided in relation to how the observations and suggestions might impact on the new Digital Strategy for Schools. The Prompt Questions for each of the Focus Groups are provided in Appendix 1.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT

Focus Group Contributions

The current Digital Strategy for Schools leads with the theme of Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT. This theme sees ICT or digital technologies playing a central role in transforming teaching, learning and assessment practices for teachers and students, in a high-quality 21st century education system. The participants made the following observations and suggestions in relation to elements of this wide-ranging theme over the course of the 9 focus groups.

Table 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT – Key Observations

Key Observation	Category
Students find digital very good for communication and collaboration with peers and their teachers.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Students like using digital for CBAs in Junior Cycle and this has helped them develop their digital competencies.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Students like a balance between using digital and using traditional books and paper.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Many schools are providing time for teachers to create their own content as an alternative to textbooks.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Digital technology is enabling more effective assessment and feedback to students.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Schools now use a wide range of platforms (e.g. Google, Office365, SeeSaw), management systems (e.g. Aladdin, CloudSchool, VSWare), applications and web-based tools (e.g. Kahoot, Mentimeter, Socrative, Khan Academy) to support teaching, learning, assessment and student administration.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Senior cycle students are more comfortable using pen and paper rather than typing as they are required to prepare for the Leaving Cert written exam.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Digital is often seen as something extra and not all teachers see it as core to their role.	Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The reform of the Junior Cycle has provided for and improved engagement with the use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment.	Teaching, Learning and Assessment
Teachers enthusiastically engaged with digital technology during Covid.	Teaching, Learning and Assessment
Diverse experience of use of digital technologies across the school system with school context very important.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Primary schools would like to see more digital classroom and CPD resources available as Gaeilge.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Effective use of digital technology encourages engagement.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
There is a presumption that young people are digitally literate because they have access to social media, yet they lack the basic digital competences to support their own learning.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
For some students, digital tech is their only means of accessing curriculum and actively participate in their learning.	Inclusion
There are challenges in terms of the digital divide for those with lower socio-economic circumstances in terms of access to devices and appropriate digital infrastructure both at home and at school.	Inclusion
Digital learning has been very positive for supporting children with various needs.	Inclusion
The affordance of digital technology allows all students to present evidence of their learning in multiple ways.	Inclusion
There are a limited number of suppliers for assistive technology and getting quotes can be difficult.	Inclusion
Due to the specialised nature of assistive technology and the nature of use, timely technical support can be an issue. Time delays mean that students are without the technology for long periods of time.	Inclusion
Build on the great work of the last strategy and provide opportunities for communities of practice for special school contexts.	Inclusion
Learning supports at primary and Junior Cycle are typically facilitated using assistive technology. Similar supports are required through to Leaving Cert level.	Inclusion
Perception among pupils is that that resource teachers don't always get necessary access to digital technology when required and then also that it is not necessarily as up to date as what is in the classroom itself.	Inclusion
Some students do not have access to a device at home and had to work off a phone screen to complete work online.	Inclusion
Students reported that it can be difficult sometimes to find the cut off between school and home time.	Safety & Wellbeing
Pupils at primary level have a reasonable understanding of Internet safety and are aware of the dangers and precautions.	Safety & Wellbeing

Post-primary students feel that there is less emphasis on online safety at post-primary compared to primary.	Safety & Wellbeing
Post-primary students would like more lessons to develop their own digital skills, doing research online and responsible use.	Safety & Wellbeing
Teenagers are being bombarded with a lot of digital and this is adding to their anxiety.	Safety & Wellbeing
Post-primary students feel that social media can be a distraction for schoolwork when using a device.	Safety & Wellbeing

In addition to the above observations the participants made the following suggestions.

Table 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT – Key Suggestions

Key Suggestion	Category
A key driver for the use of digital technology in schools is its alignment with the curriculum. It is important that existing and new curriculum specifications provide clear opportunities for digital learning and assessment, thus providing teachers with a clear rationale for using digital technology.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Devise a process to engage with publishers on how to maximise the use of their digital content in schools and homes.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Publishers currently publish their digital content on their own proprietary platforms. Can publishers share their content using a standardised approach?	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Teachers would like to be able to locate and download digital teaching and learning resources from a central repository (Scoilnet) directly into the school learning platform (e.g. Google Classroom, Teams etc).	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
In the development of the new Primary Curriculum, it will be important to align the use of digital technologies with curriculum activities in all areas and specifically in Numeracy and Literacy activities.	Teaching, Learning & Assessment
More holistic set of supports required for SEN students moving beyond the provision of a device.	Inclusion
Schools are unaware that they can use their DL funding to support SEN students if required, including the provision of appropriate assistive technology.	Inclusion
Universal Design for Learning should be the foundation of content design/delivery by publishers and teachers.	Inclusion
More guidance and advice on pedagogical strategies for using assistive technology with SEN learners and managing devices in the classroom for learners with SEN rather than just focussing on tools.	Inclusion
The new strategy should be poverty proofed to ensure access and equity to digital technology for all learners.	Inclusion
The use of assistive technology with SEN can be difficult and requires specialised training for teachers and SNAs.	Inclusion

Considerations

Many of those in attendance at the focus group events stressed the key role digital technologies play in teaching, learning and assessment activities. The participants noted that digital technologies can support them, depending on their role within the education system, to manage, to teach and to learn. They see that digital technologies have the potential to create a more inclusive education system for all learners.

However, despite this obvious potential many observed that digital technologies are not being embedded across the curriculum and are often viewed as an additional activity or the responsibility of interested or digitally competent teachers. Many teachers still struggle to see why they should or could use digital technologies with their learners, particularly when this is not clear in the curriculum and assessment guidelines. Teachers and principals also reported that the lack of time is the biggest obstacle for them to engage effectively with digital technology and to embed it across their planning and teaching.

Teachers still need further support on how and when to use these powerful technologies in their context. Where digital technology is embedded into curriculum specifications, such as with Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) and Art at post-primary level, there is greater use of digital technology and similar calls were made in relation to the new Leaving Certificate and Primary Curriculum specifications.

Participants noted that there is a need for a more holistic approach to digital education. Quite often it is still viewed separately in terms of funding allocations, curriculum and assessment activities, content, and teacher professional development. Certain cohorts, such as those in Special Education, would like to see a more holistic set of supports, including the provision of additional time, that enables schools to procure and better utilise digital technologies in their context.

Ultimately participants are seeking a more holistic approach to digital education, one that embeds digital into all aspects of school life. Digital education involves multiple stakeholders and there is a need to further align policies, support, content, funding, and teacher CPD to truly embed it into the lives of school leaders, teachers and learners.

Teacher Professional Learning

Focus Group Contributions

The previous strategy recognised that teachers, along with principals, are instrumental in ensuring that digital technologies are embedded into all aspects of school life and that there is a need to ensure that ALL teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to integrate ICT into their practice. Teacher professional learning continues to be a key issue for all stakeholders and here are the main observations and suggestions from across the focus groups.

Table 3: Teacher professional Learning – Key Observations

Key Observation	Category
CPD provided by staff within a school, e.g. peer-to-peer learning is most effective, particularly when facilitated by an external support.	CPD
Schools are accessing digital learning CPD from a range of providers, both public and private.	CPD
CPD provided on a one-off basis with no follow-up or embedding of practice is of limited benefit to schools.	CPD
There is still a wide range of staff digital competence in schools, ranging from highly computer literate to basic skills and those that still fear technology.	CPD
Peer learning within schools from other teachers is very beneficial - particularly for subject-specific advice and in the case of more reluctant teachers. Importance of communities of practice and collaboration was stressed both in school and across the system.	CPD
Teachers often lack confidence as to how digital technology can enhance teaching and learning. Many teachers don't see it as core to their teaching and leave digital education practices to interested staff.	CPD
Supporting Teacher Professional Practice is a complex issue that requires strong school leadership to make it a priority.	CPD
There are multiple sources of excellent CPD available, but many staff don't see the relevance of engaging with CPD in this area.	CPD
Scoilnet is viewed as an underutilised resource for teacher CPD and support.	CPD
With the increased use of digital technology in schools, parents require further support and training on how to best support their children's learning.	CPD
Generally, ITEs have discrete digital education modules in addition to Electives for students who wish to specialise in ICT, rather than embedding digital education into all modules.	Initial Teacher Education
Many ITEs are considering moving to embedding digital into all modules under Céim. Currently only some education faculties embed digital into pedagogical and subject specific modules, but this is not mandatory and varies by institution.	Initial Teacher Education

<p>The role of the Treoraí (formerly the Coordinating Teacher) in School Placement is key to ensuring students can use digital technology in schools. If the Treoraí and the School Placement Tutor don't support digital education, then it has knock-on impact for the ITE providers and for the quality of digital learning experience for the student teacher.</p>	<p>Initial Teacher Education</p>
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In addition to the above observations the participants made the following suggestions.

Table 4: Teacher professional Learning – Key Suggestions

Key Suggestion	Category
<p>Schools require a range of holistic supports to assist their Digital Strategy teams embed digital learning across the school.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Time is required to allow staff develop professional learning communities to learn from each other by sharing professional practice, e.g. school level, subject department, digital champion etc.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>The new Digital Strategy needs to address how best the Department can support engagement in peer-to-peer learning.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>In catering for the wide range of digital competencies in schools, there is a need to provide a range of CPD supports ranging from basic to advanced, rather than primarily focussing on basic skills.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>The CPD options available should focus on embedding technology, so that particular apps or tools are highlighted in specific classroom contexts and subject areas.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Schools require flexibility so that CPD can be provided in a timely fashion to address actual school needs.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Provide a wider range of CPD options, e.g. attend conferences, collaborate with other schools, TeachMeets, communities of practice, curated content etc. to help staff to keep on the cutting edge of technology.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Provide incentives to teachers to engage with professional development, particularly for teachers who need to upskill and improve confidence. It was suggested that CPD could have a mandatory element.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Schools should be encouraged to avail of services provided through the Education Centres, and the Department should consider expanding services provided by the Education Centre network.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Schools need training and support around copyright and data protection legislation, in the context of the use of online tools, platforms and resources, including the provision of templates akin to AUP.</p>	<p>CPD</p>
<p>Provide support for teachers to develop their own digital resources and provide information and opportunities to share those resources.</p>	<p>Teaching, Learning and Assessment</p>

<p>There is an opportunity for the DoE, or their representatives in the support services, to engage with senior management in the HEIs to stress the importance of taking a holistic approach to digital education in ITE programmes.</p>	<p>Initial Teacher Education</p>
<p>The role of the Treoraí and the School Placement Tutor will be central within Céim to the embedding of digital technology across ITE programmes and in school placement. There is a need to consider how best to incentivise these key individuals to ensure all students have an opportunity to embed digital technology into their placements in a meaningful way. There is a need for policy alignment here to ensure this occurs.</p>	<p>Initial Teacher Education</p>

Considerations

Teacher professional learning continues to be a key issue. The observations and suggestions capture the complexity of ensuring that ALL teachers and principals have access to a range of professional learning activities that best meet their needs. Addressing this issue is not easy as there are a wide range of needs in relation to embedding digital technologies across our education system. The focus groups captured that not all teachers are clear on why they should use digital technologies and many still see it as something extra that interested, or digitally competent teachers engage in. Many of these teachers struggle to see the relevance of digital education and why they should be engaged in it.

Schools are seeking greater flexibility and choice when it comes to in-service CPD. They would like to have greater autonomy and discretion to identify the types of professional learning they would like to participate in and when. Participants recognise that they need access to a wide range of professional learning supports so that they and other support staff in schools are confident and competent to use digital technology to support teaching, learning and assessment activities.

The initial teacher education (ITE) providers reported that they offer a range of professional learning opportunities to their students, ranging from mandatory courses to elective courses where they specialise in digital education. Many ITE providers plan to move to a more embedded or integrated approach across the entire institution as part of Céim. While welcoming Céim and the renewed emphasis on digital education many noted that other factors, such as school placement use of digital technology, will require further supports and attention. It was reported that many student teachers struggle to use digital technologies on placement because of issues in schools and with providing adequate supervision and support for these students.

Ultimately there is a need for a holistic set of professional learning supports that will enable all key stakeholders in schools to embed digital technologies into their practice. While significant supports are already available to schools there is also a need to explore how the system can raise awareness of available supports and incentivise teachers and other educational personnel to avail of these supports as there seems to be a significant lack of awareness throughout the system of available supports.

Leadership, Research and Policy

Focus Group Contributions

The previous strategy recognised the need for distributed leadership, regular research and evaluation, in addition to providing guidance and related supports for the effective, safe and ethical use of ICT to school leaders and teachers. The focus groups captured the following observations and suggestions in relation to these areas.

Table 5: Leadership, Research and Policy – Key Observations

Key Observation	Category
Leadership in school is vital to successful and effective use of digital technologies in schools.	Leadership & Planning
The Digital Learning Framework has been effective in providing a focus for digital learning enhancement in schools.	Leadership & Planning
The effective implementation of the Digital Learning Framework requires substantial time investment.	Leadership & Planning
Primary principals increasingly rely on school management platforms, such as Aladdin, in gathering school enrolment data and in monitoring student achievement.	Leadership & Planning
Schools are using digital systems to monitor and track student enrolment and to support school decision making processes and applications to DEIS and other DoE units. Schools see student management systems as key to digital education in their schools.	Leadership & Planning
Schools require certainty of digital learning funding to facilitate effective planning.	Leadership & Planning
Initiatives such as the Schools Excellence Fund Digital are important in providing schools with opportunities to investigate innovative uses of digital technology.	Innovative Practice
Industry has been very supportive of digital learning in schools, however collaboration with schools is often provided on an ad hoc basis. A framework to for industry collaboration would be helpful for schools and industry to support innovative practice in schools.	Innovative Practice

Table 6: Leadership, Research and Policy – Key Suggestions

Key Suggestion	Category
The role of the Digital Learning Coordinator (DLC) is an important post in schools to support the embedding of digital education. Time is needed so the DLC can work with staff to embed the DLF into their practice and to support staff use of digital technology for teaching and learning activities.	Leadership & Planning

The Digital Learning Coordinator (DLC) is not a recognised post of responsibility in most primary schools. This should be a dedicated post focussed on pedagogical approaches rather than providing technical support to colleagues.	Leadership & Planning
Schools want the DoE to invest in these teachers and change their role from fixing wires and computers, to primarily focusing on how digital technology can support teaching, learning and assessment practices.	Leadership & Planning
Staff require recognition, preferably in the form of time, to work with colleagues in their school.	Leadership & Planning
Provide accessible templates to assist schools utilise the DLF as a planning tool.	Leadership & Planning
Primary schools are seeking a greater role for student management systems as they see as valuable tools to support digital education. They are also seeking greater support, in the form of training, to maximise the usage of such platforms.	Leadership & Planning
Industry has a role in supporting and advising DoE and schools on latest technologies available. A means to facilitate this should be examined.	Innovative Practice
The collection of data, research and evaluation at school and national level is key to monitoring impact.	Innovative Practice
There is a need to enable tertiary level and industry to engage with schools to support the development of their innovative digital capacity.	Innovative Practice
Provide opportunities for ITE providers to work with schools in the design and implementation of innovative digital education practices and make provision for this in future innovative funding calls.	Innovative Practice

Considerations

Schools believe that the Digital Learning Framework has been effective in providing a focus for digital learning in schools and they believe they require additional time to consider it and to embed it into their school improvement plans.

The role of the Digital Learning Coordinator (DLC), formerly known as the ICT Coordinating Teacher, was referred to frequently and is an area that requires further consideration and clarification. Currently teachers in this role are often left to address all digital education issues, including the provision of technical support to colleagues when devices are not working properly. There was general agreement that teachers in this role should focus primarily on providing pedagogical support to their colleagues, rather than fixing wires and devices. DLC teachers would welcome some recognition, in the form of additional time to carry out these duties. Currently these teachers are trying to provide such support services to colleagues while teaching and this is often challenging.

Several ITE providers referenced previous school-based research initiatives, such as Schools Integration Project (SIP) and the more recent Schools Excellence Fund Digital. They noted that school-based research projects are extremely valuable and that ITEs typically don't play a key role in the design and the implementation of such research projects. It was suggested that they could play a more strategic role in future school-based digital research projects by being more involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of such projects.

The issue of student management systems has to date been outside the remit of previous digital strategies. It may now be timely to review this issue and consider if student attendance and associated services such now be included in any future digital strategy for schools.

ICT Infrastructure

Focus Group Contributions

The previous digital strategy recognised the importance of providing sufficient broadband, WIFI and digital devices to schools. This remains a key issue for all schools and the focus groups captured the following observations and suggestions in relation to this key issue.

Table 7: ICT Infrastructure – Key Observations

Key Observation	Category
Access to broadband is key, however broadband speed is still a challenge with an increasing number of devices in schools.	Connectivity
Wi-Fi connections in school can be an issue when all students are connected. Students sometimes need to use their own mobile data for internet connectivity while in school.	Connectivity
Broadband connectivity is particularly challenging at primary level.	Connectivity
Schools that want to embed digital technology often struggle to do so with the Wi-Fi infrastructure in schools.	Connectivity
During Covid-19 it was noted that home school communication was enhanced when it was facilitated by a digital device as parents were able to monitor student work and communicate with the teacher.	Devices & Access
Access to broadband at home is an issue for some students.	Devices & Access
There is a growing trend towards schools allowing students to use their phones in school on a limited basis or for specific work.	Devices & Access
Primary pupils like having a mix of technology and books and don't have a preference of one over the other.	Devices & Access
The sharing of devices by children and parents presented a challenge for some during school closures.	Devices & Access

The practice in primary schools is to purchase a set of devices that is shared among pupils. This often results in pupils sharing a device, which can impact on group work.	Devices & Access
Space in classrooms can restrict project/creative work.	Devices & Access
Underutilisation of available technology is an issue where schools have devices but are not making effective use of them.	Devices & Access
There is some concern about families having to pay for prescribed digital devices in some schools.	Inclusion
Digital divide exists between schools as well as between households.	Inclusion
Multiannual funding provided in the last Digital Strategy for Schools has allowed principals to be able to plan strategically for digital learning.	Funding & Procurement
Time is an ongoing challenge to procure and upkeep digital technologies.	Funding & Procurement
The technical support needs of schools are very different, and it is difficult to find a one size fits all solution. Technical support is often best delivered at local level, but this needs to be quality checked, so that schools can be confident that the support they are getting is appropriate, timely, and cost effective.	Technical Support
Many teachers who lead digital learning in their school spend their time trouble shooting technical issues rather than supporting professional practice.	Technical Support
Schools want to be able to access quality technical support regardless of school size or location.	Technical Support
The provision of digital equipment in primary schools is an ongoing challenge due to the cost of equipment. Many primary schools often have no choice but to continue using older legacy equipment which requires ongoing technical support.	Technical Support

Table 8: Teacher professional Learning – Key Suggestions

Key Suggestion	Category
Schools require enterprise level broadband and Wi-Fi connectivity.	Connectivity
All schools should have the same level of access to ICT and technical support so that there is a level playing field.	Devices and Access
Funding for Digital Learning needs to factor in the cost of replacement of staff and student devices every 4 to 5 years.	Funding & Procurement
Schools find the digital equipment procurement process very time consuming and would welcome some flexibility within the purchasing frameworks to be able to purchase equipment in a timely manner to suit their needs.	Funding & Procurement

Expansion of procurement frameworks to include more infrastructure and software including cloud computing, learning platforms, etc.	Funding & Procurement
Primary schools are located in their communities who they rely on for financial support in running their schools. Schools are of the view they should support their local businesses in relation to digital education, both in terms of purchasing digital equipment, its maintenance and in relation to ongoing technical support. They are requesting that they are given more flexibility and discretion to procure digital equipment and services locally.	Technical Support
Primary schools require advice on the kinds of equipment and services they should buy so that they can make more informed decisions when procuring equipment and services at local level.	Technical Support
The provision of technical support is a major issue in primary schools and a real recurring cost. Schools want relevant and timely advice so they can find local suppliers to provide such services.	Technical Support
A more structured approach to technical support could be provided through a regional support model.	Technical Support
Schools require technical support to maintain and support their technical infrastructure and equipment so that teachers can focus on teaching and learning.	Technical Support
Advice and support provided to schools needs to address the interaction between Digital Learning Planning and infrastructure investment.	Leadership & Planning

Considerations

The over-arching goal of the previous digital strategy was to embed the appropriate use of digital technologies into all aspects of school life. In order to achieve this schools would, at a minimum require:

- Access to broadband, Wi-Fi and appropriate digital technologies
- Digitally competent staff and learners

The focus groups reiterated the need to provide schools with access to high-speed broadband, industry grade Wi-Fi and the ongoing funding to purchase and update appropriate digital technologies. Some primary schools were forced to cancel their plans to embed digital technologies across their school because of issues around inadequate broadband and Wi-Fi within the school. Previous strategies highlighted the role of other departments in ensuring high speed broadband is rolled out to schools and primary schools acknowledged the current role of National Broadband Ireland in this regard.

Schools welcomed the funding provided by the DoE in recent years to procure digital technologies, while also noting that the procurement of such technologies is time consuming and can be challenging. Ideally schools would prefer not to be engaged in procuring equipment and in

obtaining quotes etc. as it is time consuming. However, schools value the flexibility to decide what kinds of technology they wish to procure for their teachers and learners. Furthermore, primary schools would like additional flexibility and choice in procuring equipment and associated services from local suppliers. Schools rely on local community support to operate effectively, and many believe that they should in turn support local community businesses who they know are reliable and accountable to the school. To enable them to make well informed decisions locally they would need access to timely advice in relation to the specifications of a range of technologies and services that are typically deployed in schools.

Similarly, schools recognise the importance of technical support services to ensure their equipment and services are fully operational. Schools are typically procuring such services from various commercial providers, usually at local level and this can be both costly and time consuming. However, there was limited support for the provision of regional technical support models as schools want to retain ownership and control of these services and ensure timely support when it is required. At primary level they want the autonomy to find local suppliers who are qualified and competent to provide such services, as they are often dealing with legacy equipment that is typically not supported by the equipment manufacturers any longer. Schools envision a range of supports, such as courses on maintaining equipment in schools to the provision of advice on technical support matters, helping them to address this challenging issue.

Schools are pragmatic and realise that there is no easy solution to this issue with no one size fits all solution, and they also realise that they may need to implement several approaches to ensure staff and learners have constant access to reliable and effective digital technologies and services.

PROMPT QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

1. Primary Principals – Areas for discussion

1. Leadership

What have been the successes or challenges for you as a leader in implementing digital technologies in your school?

2. Embedding digital technologies

How are you utilising the digital learning framework to plan for the embedding of digital technologies in your school? How are digital technologies used in your school to support teaching and learning?

3. CPD

How do you identify your CPD needs and that of your staff and do you consider that there a gap in provision and if so, how might this be addressed?

4. Assessment

In what ways does your school use digital technologies to support assessment?

5. Procurement

What information and supports do you use currently to procure appropriate equipment and infrastructure?

6. Technical support models

How can technical support be provided at the school level?

2. Primary Teachers – Areas for discussion

1. Embedding digital technologies

What does embedding digital technologies look like in your classroom?

How do students in your classroom use digital technologies to support their learning?

2. CPD

What forms of CPD do you require to embed digital technologies in your practice?

Do you consider there is a gap in provision and if so, how might this be best addressed?

3. Content

Where do you go to source digital content for use by your pupils?

4. Assessment

Are you using digital technologies to support assessment practices and feedback?

5. Safe responsible use of technology

How can teacher's best support pupils to engage in the digital environment in a responsible, safe and ethical manner?

6. Technical support models

How can technical support be best provided to address your needs and those at the overall school level?

3. Primary Pupils – Areas for discussion

1. Initial ice-breaker

Introduce yourself giving your first name only and tell us one thing you like to do when you are not in school.

2. Technology in your classroom

Do you get a chance to use technology in your classroom?

What do you use it for?

What do you like about using technology in the classroom?

What do you not like about using technology?

What do you think it is important to be able to do using technology at school?

3. Using technology at home and for homework

Do you use technology when you are doing your homework?

What do you use it for? How does it help you?

Do you use technology at home for fun?

What do you enjoy doing online?

What do you think it is important to be able to do using technology at home?

4. Safe and responsible use of technology

Do you learn about being safe online in school?

Can you explain some things that you have learned?

If you are searching for information, do you know how to check that it is telling you the truth?

Do you know what to do if you see or hear something online that upsets you?

What do you think people your age should learn about being safe online?

4. Post-Primary Principals – Areas for discussion

1. Leadership

What have been the successes or challenges for you as a leader in implementing digital technologies in your school?

2. Embedding digital technologies

How are you utilising the digital learning framework to plan for the embedding of digital technologies in your school? How are digital technologies used in your school to support teaching and learning?

3. CPD

How do you identify your CPD needs and that of your staff and do you consider that there is a gap in provision and if so, how might this be addressed?

4. Assessment

In what ways does your school use digital technologies to support assessment?

5. Procurement

What information and supports do you use currently to procure appropriate equipment and infrastructure?

6. Technical support models

How can technical support be provided at the school level?

5. Post-Primary Teachers – Areas for discussion

1. Embedding digital technologies

What does embedding digital technologies look like in your classroom?

How do students in your classroom use digital technologies to support their learning?

2. CPD

What forms of CPD do you require to embed digital technologies in your practice?

Do you consider there is a gap in provision and if so, how might this be best addressed?

3. Content

Where do you go to source digital content for use by your pupils?

4. Assessment

Are you using digital technologies to support assessment practices and feedback?

5. Safe and responsible use of technology

How can teacher's best support pupils to engage in the digital environment in a responsible, safe and ethical manner?

5. Technical Support models

How can technical support be best provided to address your needs and those at the overall school level?

6. Post-Primary Students – Areas for discussion

1. Technology in your classroom

Do you get a chance to use technology in your classroom? What do you use it for (e.g. collaboration, research, creating projects etc.)?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using technology in the classroom?

Do you think you participate more or less when using technology?

What skills do you need to be able to use technology at school?

Do you get a chance to learn these skills in school?

Do you have assessments or tests using technology?

Do you get digital feedback on your work?

Do you use technology to help build your TY portfolio? How does this help you?

2. Using technology at home and for homework

Do you use technology when you are doing your homework?

What do you use it for? How does it help you?

How do you use technology in your free time?

3. Safe and responsible use of technology

Do you learn about being safe online in school?

Can you explain some things that you have learned?

If you are searching for information, do you know how to check for the reliability or bias of the information?

Do you know what to do if you see or hear something online that upsets you or affects someone else?

Are you familiar with the work that Webwise do? Have you ever seen or consulted their materials?

What do you think people your age should learn about being safe online? When should you start to learn these skills?

7. Industry and Teacher Professional Network – Areas for discussion

1. Digital Strategy priorities

Are there particular areas where industry engagement with the Department and its teacher support services would assist in progressing embedding of digital technology in schools?

2. Industry support to the Department

Are there particular areas where industry engagement with the Department and its teacher support services would assist in progressing embedding of digital technology in schools?

3. Industry support to schools

In what way could industry engage with and support schools in their use of digital technologies, in line with Department policy and requirements?

4. Industry collaboration

Are there ways in which better industry collaboration and coordination could result in improved support for schools?

8. Non-Government Organisations and Agencies – Areas for discussion

1. Inclusive learning

What are the successes and challenges of using digital technologies to support inclusive learning in schools?

2. Differentiation

How can the use of digital technologies support differentiation and the needs of all learners?

3. Embedding digital technologies

To what extent has the current Digital Strategy for Schools helped facilitate an accessible, inclusive learning environment in schools?

4. Support models

What supports are needed at school level to embed digital technologies and enhance inclusion?

5. Stakeholder collaboration

Is there opportunity for better collaboration between relevant stakeholders to improve the use and accessibility of digital technologies in schools?

6. Digital Strategy priorities

In terms of your sector what should be included as priorities in the new Digital Strategy for Schools?

9. Initial Teacher Education/Higher Education Institutions – Areas for discussion

1. Digital Education

How is digital education being addressed within your ITE programme?

2. Embedding Digital Technologies

What is your view of current digital learning practice in schools?

3. Céim

Do you feel the introduction of Céim will support and improve the integration of digital education across the ITE programme?

4. Digital Strategy priorities

How can the Department, in collaboration with the Department of Further and Higher Education, better support you in terms of embedding digital education across your teacher education programmes?

5. Digital Learning Framework

How has the Digital Learning Framework for Schools informed the content of your ITE programmes?