

01 September 2025

To: Chairs of Boards of Governors and
Principals of Catholic Maintained Schools

Re: THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS – 2025/26

Dear Principal

RE: THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS – 2025/26

Please find attached Threshold Assessment Guidance and Application details to take effect from 1 September 2025.

Eligible teachers, having completed periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate of satisfactory service; on point 6 of the Main Pay Scale, who wish to seek progression to the Upper Pay Scale, must apply for assessment against the Northern Ireland Threshold Standards, which remain unchanged.

Decisions to move teachers to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025 will continue to be based on the professional judgement of the principal. There will be no external assessment.

In making your assessment you will need to analyse the teacher's performance in the four threshold standards, taking account of the two most recent PRSD review statements for 2023/24 and 2024/25. Verification of evidence will continue to be required for all applicants.

This letter must be read in conjunction with the guidance – Performance Threshold Standards Assessment – Guidance for Schools.

Applications from eligible teachers for threshold assessment must be made to the principal, **no later than Friday 3 October 2025**. Applications submitted after this date will not be accepted. Any teacher successful in their application will progress to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale effective from 1 September 2025.

Please find enclosed:

[A Quick Guide](#)

[Guidance Notes](#)

[Application Form](#)

[Sample Record form for Principal](#)

[Feedback form for Teachers](#)

[TR268 \(UPS1\)](#)

[Handbook for Threshold Assessment for issue to teachers](#)

This documentation not only provides the necessary forms but also useful advice and guidance on the process.

It is recommended that you hold an induction meeting with eligible staff as soon as possible and issue application forms and supporting information to them. You should also explain how you intend to proceed with your assessment of their application, for example, discussion with Heads of Department; observation of lessons delivered etc.

All application forms should then be assessed by you and the outcome notified to the Board of Governors; and Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team (TPPT), Orchard House, 40 Foyle Street, Londonderry, BT48 6AT, using the multiple entry form TR268 (UPS1) **no later than Friday 24 October 2025**. Email addresses for TPPT are included on the forms, if you prefer to scan and send electronically. TR268 (UPS1) forms received in TPPT after this date will not be processed.

If you need any further clarification or assistance please contact your CCMS HR Adviser on 028 9201 3014.

Yours sincerely

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
CCMS**

QUICK GUIDE – THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT FOR SEPTEMBER 2025

1. The threshold assessment process is for eligible teachers who have completed periods of employment of at least 26 weeks in aggregate of satisfactory service over the past 12 months; placed on point M6 of the teacher's Main Pay Scale on or before 1 September 2024.
2. There is no external assessment of applications, Decisions on whether a teacher should move to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale (UPS) with effect from 1 September 2025 will be made by the principal.
3. The four threshold standards are unchanged.
4. Applicants must complete the appropriate application form.
5. Teachers who were previously eligible to apply but chose not to apply, may apply now.
6. Teachers who were deemed "not yet met" in previous years may re-apply.
7. Successful teachers will progress to point 1 of the UPS effective from 1 September 2025.
8. Teachers working in non-standard settings (e.g. advisory teachers employed by the Education Authority) may apply. However, in such cases the issue of eligibility will be determined by their employing authority. In such settings, the term 'Line Manager' or its equivalent should be substituted for principal.
9. **Completed application forms must be returned to the Principal no later than Friday 3 October 2025. Application forms submitted after this date will not be accepted.**
10. Teachers are not obliged to apply for threshold assessment. All applicants must provide evidence to show that they meet the required standards. Both the application process and the provision of evidence are the responsibility of the applicant.
11. Principals should ensure that every teacher serving in the school is informed of the eligibility criteria; the procedure and the deadline for making an application to the principal.
12. Principals should also ensure that those teachers who are absent, e.g. on maternity leave, sickness, career break etc, are informed of the eligibility date; the procedures for making an application and the deadline for making an application to the principal.
13. Teachers who decide not to apply for whatever reason should be asked to advise the principal in writing of their decision not to apply – reasons are not required.
14. Applicants deemed as "not yet met" have the right to appeal this decision, through the school's salary appeals procedures.

Principals must ensure that the completed multiple entry TR268 (UPS1) forms are returned to: Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team, Orchard House, 40 Foyle Street, Londonderry, BT48 6AT, no later than Friday 24 October 2025. Email addresses for TPPT are included on the forms, if you prefer to scan and send electronically. TR268 (UPS1). Forms received after this date will not be processed.

PERFORMANCE THRESHOLD STANDARDS ASSESSMENT

Guidance for Schools

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Attachments:

Quick Guide 2025/26

Application Form

Sample Evidence Request Form

Sample Feedback Form

Multiple Entry TR268 (UPS1)

Handbook for Threshold Assessment (for teachers)

Threshold Assessment Northern Ireland

1. General Information

- 1.1 This guidance is intended for Principals / Line Managers conducting threshold assessments and teachers who decide to apply for threshold assessment. For teachers not working in schools (non-standard settings) substitute 'Line Manager' wherever 'principal' appears in this guidance. Likewise where it states 'school,' substitute 'non-standard setting.'

2. Summary of the key points for those teachers to apply for threshold assessment in 2025/26.

- 2.1 There is no external assessment of threshold applications. Applications will be assessed by the principal. In making decisions the principal will take account of the teacher's performance in the four threshold standards, the two recent Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) review statements for 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 2.2 Teachers who wish to apply for threshold assessment must do so, to the Principal, **no later than Friday 3 October 2025. Applications submitted after this date will not be accepted.**
- 2.3 Applications must be made on the attached application form.
- 2.4 The four threshold standards remain unchanged.
- 2.5 Teachers can only apply for threshold assessment once in any school year.
- 2.6 Appeals against not being recommended for movement to the Upper Pay Scale will be dealt with through the school's salary appeals procedures which all schools are required to have, or through an organisation's internal processes if the teacher is employed in a non-standard setting e.g. within the Education Authority.
- 2.7 Successful teachers will move to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025.
- 2.8 Teachers who were eligible to apply in previous years but who chose not to do so may apply. If successful they will be placed on point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025.
- 2.9 Teachers who were unsuccessful in previous years (and teachers who have not yet been notified of the outcome of their appeal) may also re-apply. If successful they will be placed on point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025.

3. Background to Threshold

- 3.1 Threshold assessment is part of a framework of pay and standards that provides a focus for a teacher's career and professional development. The threshold assessment process for eligible teachers who have completed periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate of satisfactory service in the past 12 months; placed on point M6 of the teacher's Main Pay Scale on or before 1 September 2024 may commence immediately.

- 3.2** The threshold assessment process is operable when an eligible teacher has completed one year on point 6 of the Main Pay Scale and wishes to be considered for movement to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale.

Movement to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale is not automatic

- 3.3** Threshold assessment normally works alongside performance review and staff development arrangements and information from PRSD review(s) including information from classroom observation – provides an important part of the evidence to support threshold applications (PRSD Scheme 5.10).

4. Threshold standards

- 4.1** The threshold standards (and advice on appropriate evidence sources to support them) and supplementary information is provided in the Threshold Assessment Northern Ireland handbook, a copy of which is attached.

- 4.2** To 'cross the threshold' teachers must also demonstrate that they have met all four standards of effective teaching. The standards relate directly or indirectly to teaching and learning:

- core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge;
- teaching and assessment of learning;
- contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement;
- effective professional development.

- 4.3** The threshold standards embody the high professional expectations appropriate for experienced teachers. A teacher who is able to demonstrate effectiveness in each of these standards will be effective overall.

- 4.4** In order to achieve this, teachers need to have good knowledge of the subjects they teach and a clear understanding of the educational initiatives and developments that impact on them and their pupils.

- 4.5** Teachers applying to 'cross the threshold' will be assessed against the four standards on evidence of performance.

5. Duty on Governing Bodies and Principals/Line Managers

- 5.1** The Governing Body has no direct involvement in the assessment of applications for threshold. However, the principal must report the outcome of the process to the Governing Body. The Governing Body will have responsibility for any appeals against the principal's decision by unsuccessful applicants.

- 5.2** Principals have a duty to assess threshold applications (including those from teachers currently absent from school for any reason and those who have left the school after submitting their application) in line with their professional responsibility for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the school. Where a teacher has cited evidence from more than one school, principals should consult the previous principal(s).

6. Eligibility to apply for threshold assessment and progression to point 1 on the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025.

6.1 Threshold assessment is open to all qualified teachers who:

- are statutorily covered by the agreements reached on pay and conditions of service within the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC);
- have completed periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate of satisfactory service within the past twelve months;
- on or before 1 September 2024 were paid on point M6 of the Main Pay Scale for qualified classroom teachers; relevant points are those for qualifications and experience, including experience points awarded on a discretionary basis by Governing Bodies;
- meet all the above conditions on the date when they apply; and
- apply to the Principal **no later than Friday 3 October 2025.**

6.2 Threshold assessment is also open to qualified teachers who:

- would have met the above criteria had they not been temporarily paid on the leadership pay scale at the time their application is due;
- have stepped down/will be stepping down to the classroom teachers' pay scale.

6.3 Where eligibility is not clear principals should refer to the appropriate employing authority for advice.

7. Applications

7.1 Threshold assessment is a voluntary process and entirely a matter of choice for individuals who are eligible to apply. Teachers are responsible for applying for threshold. Teachers who choose not to apply should inform the principal of their decision in writing.

7.2 Eligible teachers must submit their written application to their current principal **no later than Friday 3 October 2025. Applications submitted after this date will not be accepted.** All successful applicants will move to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale effective from 1 September 2025.

8. Notifying Teachers' Pay & Pensions Team (TPPT)

It is the responsibility of the principal to complete and return the multiple-entry TR268 (UPS1) form **no later than Friday 24 October 2025** notifying TPPT of which teachers should be progressed to UPS1 effective from 1 September 2025. Email addresses for TPPT are included on the forms, if you prefer to scan and send electronically.

TR268 (UPS1) forms received after this date will not be processed.

9. Evidence Period

- 9.1** It is the teacher's responsibility to provide summarised evidence – in the form of concrete examples from their day-to-day work – to demonstrate that he/she has worked at the level indicated by the threshold standards for a sustained period immediately before the application is submitted. Normally, the evidence should cover at least two years and not more than three years leading up to and ending at the date of their application. In certain exceptional circumstances evidence collated over a period of up to five years can be taken into account (e.g. for teachers on secondment or on career break).
- 9.2** For the purpose of the evidence period, a year is defined as when a teacher has completed periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate within the twelve-month period, with the total 2–3 year relevant evidence period ending at the date of the application. Queries regarding eligibility in this area should be directed to the appropriate employing authority.

10. The mandatory evidence requirement

- 10.1** In assessing evidence provided by teachers some fluctuations in performance are only to be expected, but principals will be seeking to determine whether the evidence is accurate and is indicative of the teacher's overall performance against the threshold standards. Principals must also take account of the teacher's two most recent PRSD review statements as appropriate as part of their decision-making.
- 10.2** There is no requirement to prepare portfolios of supporting evidence. However, teachers must have access to all evidence cited and any key supporting material such as feedback from classroom observation, pupils' work, their own records or schemes of work. They should also take account of information in their two most recent PRSD review statements.

11. Absence

- 11.1** Teachers who have not been teaching children in grant-aided schools in the two years immediately preceding applying and who are not covered by the specific absences (see 10.2 for examples), but who have worked for an aggregate period of at least two years in the five years preceding their application, should cite evidence from the most recent 2–3 year period ending at the point when they last taught children in grant-aided schools. Teachers should not cite evidence more than five years old.
- 11.2** The type of absence where the need to look back over a five-year period might arise could be as a result of the teacher being absent on a secondment; study leave or because they took a career break.
- 11.3.** All teachers must be in-service on the date of their application to be eligible to apply. Teachers can be absent from work on the date of application but in-service, such as on maternity or similar leave; study leave; sickness absence; career break or secondment etc.

12. Teachers who work in two or more schools simultaneously

- 12.1** Where a threshold applicant is simultaneously employed to teach at two or more schools (e.g. part-time teachers simultaneously employed in two or more schools) the teacher should submit their application to the principal of the school at which the applicant spends most time and the principal of that school should normally assess the application, with appropriate input from the principal(s) of the other school(s). Where the applicant spends equal time in every school, the teacher should submit their application to the principal of the school at which the teacher has been employed the longest and the principal of that school should normally be responsible for making the assessment. The assessing principal should consult with the other principal(s) in assessing the application and they should participate in the assessment. Where all the relevant principals agree, it is also possible for any one of them to assess the application. The assessing principal must have access to all evidence required to make his/her decision.
- 12.2** Teachers can only make one application, regardless of the number of schools they work in. Regardless of the number of principals who contribute to the assessment, only one should decide whether each of the standards has been met.

13. Teachers who have worked in two or more schools during the evidence period

- 13.1** Teachers who cite evidence from more than one school (e.g. teachers who have changed jobs) should submit their application to the principal of the school they are contracted to work in on the date of submission of their application. That principal should consult with the principal(s) of the other school(s) in assessing the application and all should participate in the assessment. The assessing principal must have access to all evidence required to make his/her decision, including PRSD review statements.

14. Teachers in non-standard settings

- 14.1** Eligible teachers directly employed, for example, by the Education Authority and employed under teachers' terms and conditions of service should have their threshold assessment carried out by whoever the Education Authority designates as the person with management responsibility for the applicant.
- 14.2** Teachers working in a support or advisory capacity will draw on evidence that relates to their specific role. Where they do not have direct contact with pupils, they should demonstrate that they meet the standards through the advice and support that they provide.

15. Feedback

- 15.1** Teachers should be promptly notified of the outcome of the assessment and, in all cases, within 20 working days of the date of their assessment. All teachers should receive oral feedback from their principal on each standard and the reasons for the outcome of their applications. They should receive advice on aspects of performance that would benefit from further development.

15.2 Feedback should be sensitive, informative and developmental. Feedback should link effectively to the school's performance review and staff development arrangements and should enable the teacher to identify clear priorities for future professional development.

16. Unsuccessful threshold applicants - written feedback

16.1 In the case of unsuccessful applicants, principals should give written feedback on the reasons for the outcome of the application, standard by standard, including those where the standards have been met, within 20 working days of their decision on the application. A sample feedback pro-forma is attached.

16.2 Principals should record details of any additional evidence they use in determining that the standard(s) are not yet met. A sample pro-forma on which feedback may be based is attached at Annex A.

16.3 In all cases the aim of feedback should be to give clear advice about how the teacher needs to develop in order to reach the standards. If, in discussion with the teacher, it has been necessary to amplify the comments then the key additional points made should be confirmed in writing.

17. Confidentiality

17.1 Principals should keep the contents of threshold applications and all other documents associated with an application confidential and should not disclose details to anyone who is not involved in assessing or reviewing the application.

18. Equal opportunities

18.1 All teachers must be treated in accordance with current equal opportunities policies and must not be discriminated against on the basis of age; disability; gender; nationality; race; religion; sexual orientation or whether they are full/part-time staff. The review process should be used to promote equality of opportunity by encouraging all participants to fulfil their professional potential. It is vitally important to be aware of the potential for unconscious discrimination and to avoid assumptions about individuals based on stereotypes.

19. Individual teachers' right to appeal

19.1 Teachers who, after feedback from the principal, believe that they have been wrongly assessed have the right to appeal against this decision under the appeals mechanism within their school's salary policy. **Grievance procedures should not be used for appeals against pay decisions.**

- 19.2** If a teacher 'crosses the threshold' on appeal, movement to the first point of the Upper Pay Scale will be backdated as appropriate. If the appeal confirms the original assessment the teacher will be able to re-apply for assessment in the following year.
- 19.3** All relevant bodies – both Governing Bodies and other employing bodies where they are the relevant body – must have a salary policy. It should be reviewed annually and be kept up-to-date to take into account any legal changes.

Summary

Eligible teachers, on point 6 of the Main Pay Scale, who wish to seek progression to the Upper Pay Scale, must apply for assessment against the Northern Ireland Threshold Standards, which remain unchanged. Decisions to move teachers to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025 will continue to be based on the professional judgment of the principal. There will be no external assessment.

In making your assessment you will need to analyse the teacher's performance in the four threshold standards. Verification of evidence will continue to be required for all applicants, including use of the two most recent PRSD staff review statements.

SAMPLE - THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT - FEEDBACK TO TEACHERS

Teacher: _____

TR No: _____

Following your recent application for threshold assessment, effective from 1 September 2025, please find below my comments relating to :

- (a) your performance in each of the four threshold standards, and
- (b) your most recent Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) review statement(s).

These comments have been provided in the interests of your further professional development.

(a) Threshold Standards:

1. Core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge
2. Teaching and assessment of learning
3. Contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement
4. Effective professional development

(b) PRSD Review Statement(s)

Principal: _____

Date: / /2025

THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT APPLICATION FORM

(For teachers eligible to progress to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale from 1 September 2025)

Name: _____

TR Number: _____

I certify that I was on point M6 of the Main Pay Scale for teachers on or before 1 September 2024 and am eligible to apply for movement to point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale with effect from 1 September 2025; I have completed periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate over the past 12 months.

I understand that the decision on my progression will be based on my performance within the four Threshold Standards taking into account my two most recent Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) review statements.

PRSD Review Statements for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years should be used, along with other evidence as required, to make a decision to progress to the Upper Pay Scale; if there is not one available for the 2023/24 or 2024/25 years then the most recent one (within the past 5 years) should be used.

I have provided a summary of the evidence from my teaching practice below that I believe demonstrates how I have met the threshold standards. (However, where evidence is available from a PRSD review statement the information may be used to complete the relevant section in the application form).

Teacher signature: _____ Date: _____

I have provided a summary of the evidence from my teaching practice that demonstrates how I believe I have met the threshold standards.

TO BE RETURNED TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL NO LATER THAN FRIDAY 3 OCTOBER 2025. APPLICATIONS RETURNED AFTER THIS DATE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

1. Core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge.

Principal's decision: *met / not met

2. Teaching and assessment of learning.

Principal's decision: *met / not met

3. Contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement.

Principal's decision: *met / not met

4. Effective professional development.

Principal's decision: *met / not met

*Delete as appropriate

PROGRESSION TO POINT 1 OF THE UPPER PAY SCALE FROM 1 SEPTEMBER 2025

(For principal's use to record decision on progression - to be *retained securely in school records – for audit trail purposes*)

School: _____

Teacher Name and TR No: _____

I have reviewed the performance of the above-named eligible teacher in accordance with the guidance issued.

1. My assessment within the four threshold standards is as follows:

Standard	Met Yes/No
Core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge	
Teaching and assessment of learning	
Contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement	
Effective professional development	

2. Use of Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Review Statement(s);

PRSD Review Statements for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic year should be used, along with other evidence as required, to make a decision for an eligible teacher to progress to the Upper Pay Scale; if there is not one available for the 2023/24 or 2024/25 years then the most recent one (within the past 5 years) should be used.

I have used the most recent PRSD review statement(s) to help inform my assessment under the four threshold standards.	*Yes / No
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3. In assessing the overall performance of the eligible teacher I have also taken account of the following:

4. I recommend that _____ (teacher) be **PLACED / *NOT PLACED *(delete as appropriate)* on point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale with effect from 1 September 2025

Signed: _____(Principal) Date / /2025

THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT - FEEDBACK TO ELIGIBLE TEACHERS

Teacher: _____

TR No: _____

Following your recent application for threshold assessment, effective from 1 September 2025, please find below my comments relating to (a) your performance in each of the four threshold standards and (b) your most recent Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) review statement(s). These comments have been provided in the interests of your further professional development.

(a) Threshold Standards

1. Core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge.

2. Teaching and assessment of learning.

3. Contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement

4. Effective professional development

(b) PRSD Review Statement(s)

Principal: _____

Date: / /2025

MULTIPLE ENTRY TR268 (UPS1)

Name of School: _____ School Reference No /

The teachers listed below have met the eligibility and threshold standards and are authorised to be paid on Point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale (UPS) from the date shown in Column (5) below.

The completed form must be returned to Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team, Orchard House, 40 Foyle Street, Londonderry, BT48 6AT.

1 Name	2 Teacher's Reference Number (TR No)	3 Date Placed on Point 6 of the Main Pay Scale	4 Revised Salary Placing on Upper Pay Spine	5 Effective Date of Payment on Upper Pay Spine Point 1	(6) For Use by Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		
			1		

Signature of Principal: _____ Date:
(on behalf of Board of Governors)

*Countersignature of Employing Authority: ¹ _____ Date:

**To be signed by the Employing Authority in respect of a school which does not have a fully delegated budget.
To be copied to the Employing Authority in respect of a school which does have a fully delegated budget.*

For Office Use Only	Received	Input (AO)	Checked (EOII)
Signature			
Date			

This form must be returned to the address overleaf no later than Friday 24 October 2025

NOTES

¹ For VGS & GMI the Employing Authority is the Board of Governors

Please note the following points carefully when completing form TR268 (UPS1).

1. After one year's service on Point 6 of the Main Pay Scale on or before 1 September 2024, and completion of periods of employment amounting to at least 26 weeks in aggregate of satisfactory service in the past 12 months, teachers are eligible for consideration for progression to UPS1 in accordance with the agreed threshold arrangements.
2. Form TR268 (UPS1) should be completed in respect of eligible teachers who have met the threshold standards.
3. Schools with **fully delegated budgets** should send a copy of the form to their Employing Authority.
4. Schools which **do not have a fully delegated budget** should send the original TR268 form to their Employing Authority for authorisation and onwards transmission to Waterside House.
5. TR268(UPS1) forms must be returned to the address below no later than ***Friday 24 October 2025.**

Teachers' Pay and Pensions Team
Orchard House
40 Foyle Street
Londonderry
BT18 6AT

Or, please use the relevant Email address for TPPT, if you prefer to scan and send electronically:

easchools.teacherspay@education-ni.gov.uk
ccmsschools.teacherspay@education-ni.gov.uk
otherschools.teacherspay@education-ni.gov.uk
temporarysection@education-ni.gov.uk

6. ***TR268 (UPS1) forms received in TPPT after this date will not be considered.**

HANDBOOK FOR THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT

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- 5. ELIGIBILITY**
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Teachers
Principals
Governors

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1. INTRODUCTION

This handbook is for teachers in Northern Ireland who are eligible to apply for threshold assessment under the Threshold (Northern Ireland) arrangements. It has its genesis in the agreement between the Teachers' Side and Management Side which created a mechanism to facilitate the movement of teachers on to point one of the upper pay scale.

Threshold Northern Ireland sets teachers eligible for threshold assessment a new challenge, but it also offers them a new opportunity.

It requires those who decide to apply to review what they have done as teachers in the past two or three years against the four agreed threshold standards, and to select evidence from their practice to demonstrate that they have been working broadly at these standards during this time. PRSD review statements and the wider knowledge and understanding the principal has of the teacher's work also plays an important part in the decision-making process.

2. THE CONTEXT

Thirty years – a teaching generation – ago, the world was a different place. Change was minimal and great educational value was placed on the stability of tradition. Parents expected schools to be like those they attended, and the outcomes of formal education were not expected to alter greatly with the passage of time.

The world of the 21st century is very different. We recognise now that, if young people are to be well prepared for their futures, schools, and the practice within them, have got to change.

But change in schools can only be achieved through teachers and, if they are to change what they do too, they need career-long professional support, something that is not occasional, but which arises directly from their critical reflection about what they do in the context of their own schools.

Threshold Northern Ireland gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on their practice, and use it to provide evidence to demonstrate that they are effectively meeting the needs of their pupils and to gain a tangible reward for their efforts as a result.

It is consistent with established good practice in performance review and professional development and will be a key element in the wider programme of changes designed to raise the status and professionalism of teaching here.

3. AIMS AND PURPOSES

Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland should:

- contribute to the overall process of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools;
- support the further development of teachers as reflective professionals and thereby contribute to the growth of self-evaluating schools;
- build on the sound practice already established in the early professional development of teachers.

Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland will:

- give recognition to the high calibre of Northern Ireland teachers and allow those with relevant experience to gain due reward for their professionalism in the classroom;
- be based on four standards which reflect the significant characteristics of effective teachers
 - core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge
 - teaching and assessment of learning
 - contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement
 - effective professional development
- focus on the individual teacher rather than the school;
- promote equality of opportunity throughout the profession

4. AN OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

The process of Threshold Assessment can be viewed as consisting of two phases: **APPLICATION** and **ASSESSMENT**.

Threshold Northern Ireland is designed to help eligible teachers to review their classroom practice against agreed standards, to select evidence from that practice which demonstrates that they meet the four agreed threshold standards and to submit an **APPLICATION** on the appropriate form.

The evidence which eligible teachers present on their threshold application will be **ASSESSED** by the principals of their schools who will be able to take into account, when making their judgements, PRSD review statements, the wider knowledge they have of each teacher and their understanding of the contexts in which they work.

5. ELIGIBILITY

The first stage of the process involves identifying the teachers in each school who are eligible to apply for threshold assessment. Teachers are strongly advised not to proceed to the application stage before eligibility has been established.

- applications may be made by all teachers (including those acting as Principals and Vice-Principals at the time of application), apart from principals and vice-principals, who were on point M6 for experience and qualifications before or at the appropriate date ;
- salary points awarded for additional responsibilities should not be included, but those who were on point M6 for qualifications and experience before or at the appropriate date who also hold such additional responsibility points are eligible to apply for threshold assessment;
- full-time, part-time teachers and temporary teachers are eligible to apply;
- queries about eligibility should be referred, in the first instance to the principal, ultimately it will be a matter for the employing authority;
- for teachers in non-standard settings e.g. peripatetic teachers employed by the EA, eligibility will be determined by the employing authority.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

For threshold to work effectively teachers and principals need to have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and to work closely together. A summary of the main roles and responsibilities follows.

TEACHERS

No teacher is required to apply for threshold assessment.

Eligible teachers who decide to apply for threshold assessment will need to:

- select the evidence from their professional practice during the past 2 to 3 years which they believe demonstrates that they have worked at the four agreed threshold standards;
- complete the application form and submit it to the principal of their schools.

N.B. These responsibilities apply equally to teachers employed on a temporary basis.

PRINCIPALS

Principals have both the legal and the professional responsibility for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the schools they lead and for ensuring that there are proper standards of professional performance.

Principals have access to existing school monitoring systems and to their wider knowledge of the teacher, in coming to a judgement as to whether the evidence submitted is accurate and indicative of overall performance.

Principals have direct knowledge of the context in which teachers teach; they are therefore best placed to make the judgements on threshold applications submitted by teachers in their school.

In order to be able to carry out this responsibility effectively, they will need to:

- provide in-school briefings for all eligible teachers;
- distribute application forms to all eligible teachers;
- give teachers sufficient time to complete their application forms;
- receive completed applications by an agreed date;
- assess the completed applications against the four agreed threshold standards, as 'met' or 'not yet met';
- inform all applicants of the outcome of their application;
- provide feedback to all applicants.

GOVERNORS

Governors have **no formal role** in threshold assessment but they should be aware that it is happening and have an interest in its implications for the teachers in their schools.

Following assessment, the Chairperson of Governors will receive a report on the threshold assessment process in the school from the principal. Governors, through their role in the school salary committee, will also be involved with any appeals against the principal's assessment by unsuccessful applicants.

7. THE STANDARDS

An Introduction

There are four standards that teachers eligible to apply for threshold assessment have to show themselves able to meet if they are to be successful.

Teachers eligible to apply for threshold assessment must show themselves able to meet all four of the standards.

The four threshold standards in Northern Ireland are:

- core values, understanding of the curriculum and professional knowledge;
- teaching and assessment of learning;
- contribution to raising standards through pupil achievement;
- effective professional development.

Each standard deals with a different aspect of the work of a teacher, but, taken together, they reflect recognised professional principles and practice, and there is throughout a strong emphasis on teaching in the classroom.

Much will depend on the context within which a teacher works, the age range of the pupils, the resources available, the range of subjects and courses offered, the extent to which the teacher is classroom based, and perhaps most importantly, the educational backgrounds and needs of the pupils in the teacher's care. All of these factors should be taken into account and reflected in the application form.

When making an application for threshold assessment, eligible teachers will be expected to provide *evidence that they have worked at these four standards during the previous two to three years* of their careers. PRSD review statements should be used as an important source of evidence of effective performance.

THE FIRST STANDARD

CORE VALUES, UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRICULUM AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

What does this standard deal with and how can it best be interpreted to take account of different school contexts?

To meet this standard, eligible teachers will have to provide evidence from what they have done *in the previous two to three years* to show that they:

- are effective professionals
- have up-to-date knowledge of their subject(s) or specialism(s)
- take account of wider curriculum developments that are relevant to their work as teachers

What will teachers need to do to demonstrate that they meet this standard?

(a) to demonstrate that they are effective professionals, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show through their teaching that they:

- care for children;
- seek the development of the whole child;
- are committed to the rights of the child and the promotion of equal opportunities;
- are able to adapt to changing circumstances and new ideas;
- have vision, energy and perseverance.

(b) to demonstrate that they have *up-to-date knowledge of the teaching of their subject(s) or specialism(s)*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show *through their teaching* that they:

- have relevant, up-to-date knowledge and understanding of their subject(s) or specialism(s) within the framework of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and/or the Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education;
- know their subject(s) or specialism(s) in sufficient depth to be able to teach them effectively;
- understand the range of factors (social, emotional, cultural, psychological) that affect pupils' learning and take them into account in their planning and preparation.

(c) to demonstrate that they *take account of wider curriculum developments that are relevant to their work*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show *through their teaching* that they:

- have a working knowledge of the major strategies and initiatives introduced in Northern Ireland (such as, for example, the Northern Ireland Education Technology Strategy);
- include a cross-curricular dimension to the work they do with pupils.

THE SECOND STANDARD

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

What does this standard deal with and how can it best be interpreted to take account of different school contexts?

To meet this standard, eligible teachers will have to provide evidence from what they have done in the previous two to three years that they

- consistently and effectively plan to meet pupils' individual learning needs
- use a range of appropriate learning and teaching strategies
- effectively monitor and evaluate pupils' learning

What will teachers need to do to demonstrate that they meet this standard?

(a) to demonstrate that they *consistently and effectively plan to meet pupils' individual learning needs*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show *through their teaching* that:

- their planning takes account of the need for them to set realistic, but challenging, goals for their pupils;
- these goals are communicated to and shared with their pupils.

(b) to demonstrate that they *use a range of appropriate learning and teaching strategies*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show *through their teaching* that they:

- use learning activities which take account of a variety of learning styles and include learning outside the classroom by making appropriate use of, for example, homework, project work, field trips;
- take account of pupils' previous learning;
- make effective use of a range of resources to support learning;
- use ICT effectively and appropriately to help them achieve their learning objectives for their pupils, due account being taken of the facilities and training opportunities available;
- provide positive, appropriate and targeted support for pupils with specific learning needs;
- maintain high levels of behaviour and discipline in their classrooms;
- provide a positive and purposeful learning environment for pupils by, for example, rewarding pupils appropriately, celebrating their progress and achievement and displaying examples of their work.

(c) to demonstrate that they *monitor and evaluate their pupils' learning effectively*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show *through their teaching* that they:

- implement their school's policies on assessment, recording and reporting;
- take appropriate account of both Northern Ireland and individual school targets for achievement;
- set their pupils realistic, but challenging, targets for improvement;
- report appropriately to pupils, parents, other teachers and the principals of their schools on their pupils' progress, identifying any action required;
- establish learning partnerships with, for example, pupils, parents, teaching colleagues or other members of the community.

THE THIRD STANDARD

CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING STANDARDS THROUGH PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

What does this standard deal with and how can it best be interpreted to take account of different school contexts?

To meet this standard, eligible teachers will have to provide *evidence from what they have done in the past two to three years* to show that, as a result of their work, their *pupils have continued to achieve in a manner consistent with the targets set by their schools in the light of relevant information.*

Pupils' achievements can be related to their personal, social and academic achievement, but *must be demonstrated by evidence.*

What will teachers need to do to demonstrate that they meet this standard?

It will be for *each school principal to make a professional judgement as to whether the progress made by a teacher's pupils is at least within the range expected* in light of the school's local and regional context.

School principals will make their judgements on the basis of evidence submitted by teachers.

In order to demonstrate to their principals that they meet this standard, eligible teachers will need to present evidence which:

- shows that there has been *appropriate development, relative to their prior attainment and expected achievement*, for the great majority of the pupils for whom they are responsible;
- is *representative of the broad range of the teacher's work* and takes account of any particular circumstances which affect that work;
- demonstrates that *care and attention are given to all the teacher's pupils*;
- indicates that *the level of progress made by the teacher's pupils compares favourably with what might reasonably have been expected for such pupils*, taking the school's context and setting into account.

THE FOURTH STANDARD

EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What does this standard deal with and how can it best be interpreted to take account of different school contexts?

To meet this standard, eligible teachers' will have to provide evidence from what they have done *in the previous two to three years* that they:

- take responsibility for their own professional development;
- use the outcomes of their professional development to improve their teaching and their pupils' learning;
- make an active contribution to the policies and aspirations of the school.

What will teachers need to do to demonstrate that they meet this standard?

(a) to demonstrate that they *take responsibility for their professional development*, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show that they:

- engage in on-going professional self-review;
- understand and are aware of the importance of critical reflection in evaluating and, where possible, improving their professional practice.

(b) to demonstrate that they use the outcomes of their professional development to improve their teaching and their pupils' learning, teachers at the threshold level must be able to show that they:

- have identified areas in which they need to develop in order to meet their school's as well as their own personal development needs;
- have taken appropriate action to enhance their professional knowledge, expertise and skills;
- have shared the outcomes of their professional development with others in their working teams.

(c) to demonstrate that *they make an active contribution to the policies and aspirations of their schools*, eligible teachers must be able to show that they:

- have participated in the formulation and implementation of the school's development plan and other whole school policies and can function as members of professional teams;
- promote the ethos of the school.

8. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

PRINCIPLES

For the application process to work smoothly and effectively, it is essential that certain basic rules and principles are not only understood by all those involved but also adhered to at every stage. If these principles are followed at each stage, the climate of trust that is so important to the success of the threshold process as a whole is much more likely to be developed and the process itself is much more likely to be worthwhile and productive.

These basic principles deal with five key issues:

- equality of opportunity
- confidentiality
- professionalism
- openness and transparency
- sensitivity.

Equality of opportunity

Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland is *open to all eligible teachers, whatever their circumstances*.

Those involved in the assessment process must not act unfairly to any individual or unlawfully discriminate against any applicant on the grounds of his or her age, gender, marital status, nationality, race, disability or sexual orientation.

Eligible part-time or temporary teachers must not be treated any less favourably than eligible full-time permanent teachers.

Threshold assessment is open to eligible *teachers working in a variety of non-school settings*, such as, for example, peripatetic teachers or teachers based in referral units.

Teachers absent from school, for example, on maternity leave or sick leave are also entitled to apply and their applications must be treated in the same way as those of teachers remaining in that school.

Confidentiality

Each eligible teacher's application should be treated in confidence.

Application forms will be seen only by the assessing principal and by any member of the school management team whom the principal thinks it appropriate to involve in the assessment process.

Professionalism

Teachers applying for threshold assessment are expected to behave professionally when completing their applications: they are expected not only to make a declaration that they are eligible for assessment but also to submit evidence in their application forms that is accurate and open to verification.

Principals are responsible for making the assessments on the basis of the evidence summarised on the application forms, PRSD review statements and their wider knowledge of each applicant, the contribution he or she has made to the achievements of the school and the particular context in which the teacher is working:

In drawing on and making use of this wider knowledge and determining whether the evidence submitted by each applicant is both accurate and indicative of his or her overall performance, principals must maintain the highest professional standards.

Openness and transparency

It is important that threshold assessment is an integral part of the continuing professional development of teachers.

One of its fundamental aims is to contribute to the overall process of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools, but it also aims to 'give recognition to the high calibre of teachers and allow those with relevant experience to gain due reward for their professionalism in the classroom.'

If threshold assessment is to achieve these wider aims, it is essential that all those involved in it, and school principals in particular, are open and straightforward about their actions at all stages.

This means that:

- all teachers in the same school should be treated in the same way and given the same opportunities to apply for threshold assessment;
- every application should be assessed in the same fair and consistent manner;

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- the briefings that teachers are given about threshold assessment in their schools should be clear, straightforward and helpful;
 - any centrally-held school information on which teachers applying for threshold assessment might wish to draw should be made easily available to them;
 - teachers should be given opportunities to consult their principals or other senior colleagues about their application forms;
 - completed application forms should be assessed as quickly as possible;
 - confidentiality must be fully respected;
 - the opportunities that principals have to draw on and use their wider knowledge of applicants and their contributions to the achievements of the school should not be used unfairly;
 - eligible teachers who decide to apply for threshold assessment should know how the principals of their schools intend to use this wider knowledge and information and be confident that they will use only such additional information as can be verified.

Sensitivity

Teachers may find some aspects of the assessment process difficult to come to terms with and principals will need to take time to form a clear and confident understanding of their responsibilities.

It is therefore very important that all those who have key roles in the threshold assessment process in Northern Ireland are sensitive to the concerns, apprehensions and uncertainties of others.

Teachers should bear in mind that principals have very important responsibilities, especially for assessing applications against the threshold standards in a fair and consistent manner and satisfying the external assessors asked to verify the process that has been used.

Principals should bear in mind that many teachers will need time and assistance to help them make their own way through the process and understand exactly what it means for them.

If all those involved understand, sympathise with and are sensitive to the needs, apprehensions and uncertainties of the others, the fundamental aims of Threshold Northern Ireland are very much more likely to be achieved.

MAKING AN APPLICATION

Eligible teachers who decide to apply for threshold assessment are advised to:

- keep their applications *factual and concise*;
- *read all the information provided about the four agreed threshold standards carefully* before starting to think about the evidence they might include in their application forms;
- *make sure that they know what each of the four standards deals with* and requires of them;
- *select from the evidence available that which illustrates what they have typically done* or are doing as teachers;
- read and *pay careful attention to the additional guidance* provided along with this handbook;
- keep in mind that the *examples given in the completed application forms must be open to verification*: there is no requirement for teachers to make or keep portfolios of evidence, but they must be sure that any source of information referred to in their application forms can be verified, if necessary.

SELECTING THE EVIDENCE

It is the teacher who is responsible for applying for threshold assessment. This means that it is the eligible teacher who is responsible for completing the application form.

The eligible teacher who decides to apply for threshold assessment needs to:

- provide a *summary of evidence* to show that he or she meets each of the four threshold standards in Northern Ireland (citing PRSD review statements where appropriate);
- use this evidence to *demonstrate that he or she has worked at the standards required over the previous two to three years*;
- present the summary of the relevant evidence selected in the form of *concrete examples of his or her day-to-day practice*;
- be able to *demonstrate that all four of the standards have been met*.

9. ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

It is the responsibility of the principals of the schools at which eligible teachers work to:

- *make an assessment of each application form* submitted and *form a judgement* as to whether the four agreed threshold standards have been met or not;
- *make notes about any additional information used* to inform the assessment that has been made ie PRSD review statements;
- *note areas for each teacher's future professional development*, whether or not the application has been assessed as successful;
- write comments on the final page on:
 - the accuracy and relevance of the applicant's evidence;
 - any additional evidence which has been obtained.

In carrying out these responsibilities, principals are expected to exercise their professional judgement and to *keep very much in mind the basic rules and principles* that apply to all those involved in the threshold process in Northern Ireland.

10. AFTERWARDS

FEEDBACK

Because Threshold Northern Ireland is set in the context of professional development generally, eligible teachers who apply for threshold assessment should receive feedback on the outcome of their application from the principals of the school in which they work, based on development issues arising from the application forms.

Successful Applicants

Eligible teachers whose applications for threshold assessments are successful will be *notified by the principal of the outcome of their application within 20 working days of the date of their assessment*.

They will be placed on point 1 of the upper pay scale from 1st September in the calendar year in which they make their application.

Successful applicants will also receive *professional feedback from the principal of their school*. This feedback will be based on the evidence presented in their application forms, the comments made by the principals about the assessments they made of the evidence submitted against the four threshold standards and any other relevant information. Its purpose will be to inform the teachers' further professional development.

Unsuccessful applicants

Eligible teachers whose applications for threshold assessment have not been successful will be *notified of the outcome in writing by the principal within 20 working days*.

Unsuccessful applicants will be *entitled to make a further application* for threshold assessment in the following year, provided they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

They will also be entitled to have *professional development feedback from the principals of their schools*. This feedback will reflect the assessments made of the evidence submitted on the threshold application forms, the notes made by the principals about areas for further development and any other relevant information.

The *purpose of this development feedback is to help teachers whose applications have been unsuccessful to understand what more they need to do to meet the four agreed threshold standards* (or those of them that they have not been able to meet) and how they can gather the evidence that will demonstrate that they have done so.

APPEALS

Eligible teachers whose threshold applications are 'not yet met' will be able to appeal the decision through the appeals mechanism within the school's / service's pay policy.