Rethinking continuing professional development in further education

Eight things you already know about CPD

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Please note that the term further education (FE) has been used throughout this document to encompass the full range of learning and skills sector providers, ie FE colleges, work-based learning providers, offender learning providers and community learning providers.

The term teacher has been used to encompass teachers, lecturers, tutors and trainers in these providers.
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Sue Crowley of the Institute for Learning and John Stone, Colin Taylor and Jamila Jones at LSN for their helpful comments and feedback in the development of this publication.
Introduction: applying what you already know

Let’s start with a thought experiment. Imagine that you meet the director of your local social services. She is troubled by the overall performance of her team. Her team mainly consists of social work and social care professionals applying specialist domain knowledge and working with a sometimes challenging client group. They have performed reasonably well in their recent inspection – largely due to the better data systems, supervision practices and quality process she has put in place – but the next steps towards excellence elude her. What do you recommend?

As a professional educator with substantial skills development expertise, you probably argue that her solution lies in developing her people. You may contend that she should change the way she thinks about learning and development – develop and refresh her people’s domain knowledge, develop their skills in interacting with the client group, ensure they are conversant with the latest in social-care policy requirements – making the impact of the service better in every interaction with the client group.

Hopefully, this would seem credible enough to win you a reasonable piece of direct-delivery work with a local employer. You may well have had this conversation with numerous local employers, trying to get across the benefits of a strategic approach to continuing professional development (CPD).

You can probably see where this thought experiment is going. The social services department is a simple analogy for an FE provider, the domain knowledge is subject pedagogy, the client group are learners, for supervision read observation and so on.

The purpose of the thought experiment is not to ask the obvious question: ‘Is the solution you would propose for your own organisation the same, and if not, why not?’ Rather, it is to establish that in the FE system, we are in fact experts at CPD. It’s the day job.

Therefore, the purpose of this booklet is to explore eight ideas that you probably already know about CPD. So why take the time to write them down?
Because ‘Physician, heal thyself’ is, in fact, not always easy. It can be harder to apply your judgement as an educator to the development of your own staff. Consequently, it might be helpful to think about continuing professional learning¹ rather than CPD. This aims to make explicit the link between what you already know as educators about both learning and the development of skills, expertise and capabilities – and the professional development of your staff.

This booklet does not claim to be the definitive LSN approach to CPD. Instead, the aim of the authors is to deliberately provoke discussion on the issue, question some current shibboleths, identify some potential approaches and explore the potential positive impact of the new entitlement.

¹ With thanks to Jean Kelly of the Institute for Learning for coining the phrase.
1 The management of CPD is a strategic function

It can be argued that a strategic approach to CPD at the highest levels is essential for the core business – the improvement of teaching and learning. A strategic approach does not simply mean a CPD policy that has been signed off by the senior management team, but an actual, actively managed strategy that is used to drive improvements in performance.

The rationale for such a strategy is as follows. Almost all FE organisations are clear that their strategic purpose is to create better outcomes for learners, communities and employers. But how is this to be achieved? How will organisations continuously improve teaching and learning, retention, achievement, progression, employer engagement and so on? An approach to deliver on these issues would, of course, include quality improvement processes, the better deployment of technology, the development of better data systems and the full range of other possible strategic interventions.

However, as in the thought experiment, after you have done everything else, you are reliant on the performance of individuals at the coalface to achieve the organisation’s strategic goals. Indeed, as Thompson and Wiliam (2007) point out, there is ‘a growing research base on the influences on student learning, which shows that teacher quality trumps virtually all other influences on student achievement’. Following this, it is simple to contend that the best way to improve teacher quality is through supporting the development of individuals. This requires a fully strategic approach if the organisation as a whole is to continuously improve.

There is also the issue of compliance. The government has set the requirement for all full-time teachers in the sector to engage in 30 hours of CPD annually (part-time teachers to undertake pro-rata amounts of CPD with a minimum of six hours) and articulated the need for managers at all levels to enable this. There is a case that only actively managing something because you’ve been told to – when there is a strong case for doing it anyway – is the worst of all possible approaches. Consequently, this paper will wait until the last section before tackling the regulations in detail.

2 Is it time to rethink the simple INSET-day model?

Let’s return briefly to the thought experiment. Imagine that the director of social services has been persuaded by your argument that a major programme of CPD should be central to their strategy for service improvement. Now you have to propose a programme that really works to drive up the performance of the organisation. It will be fully-paid direct delivery work, so you don’t have to worry about the mechanics of getting paid from Train to Gain. If you applied everything you knew about curriculum design and developing and transferring skills, expertise and capabilities – what would the programme look like?

Perhaps you’ve started with a full training needs analysis, followed by a blended learning model to develop domain knowledge, using a mix of face-to-face teaching, group and e-learning work over a period of time. Perhaps you’ve included the development of coaching skills to build in a cascading model and the development of interpersonal skills. You may have also proposed development for embedding the process of reflective practice needed to become lifelong learners. It’s likely to have started with some form of assessment and then the broad mix of approaches, methods and teaching strategies that would follow on from such an assessment and be designed for maximum impact.

Did you propose a simple set of one-day, in-house training for the whole organisation? Probably not: because, as professional educators, you know that it can’t possibly work. At least, it can’t work anything like as well as the approaches you have proposed, and you know this.

This begs the question: ‘If you know it’s an ineffective model for a third party trying to take a whole organisation approach, how could it possibly work for INSET days, as applied by some FE institutions?’

To be fair to many FE institutions, there has been a trend away from one-off short CPD courses in recent years to more integrated CPD programmes that are linked to personal and wider action plans within providers. But the pure INSET model does persist in some out of sheer custom and practice.
Is it time for a rethink of the simple INSET model? Short courses can have their place – as the Institute for Learning guidelines\(^3\) suggest: ‘Awareness raising events are useful for absorbing information and updating knowledge but are not likely to lead to skills development.’ Although it is clearly better than nothing at all, and effective in updating information, everything you know about how to develop skills, expertise and capabilities tells you that a simple INSET model can’t possibly work as the sole approach.

\(^3\) www.ifl.ac.uk
Good CPD is like good teaching and learning

Have you ever sat through a badly taught training day on good teaching? Suffered death by PowerPoint on a programme for innovative uses of e-learning? Attended a didactically taught course on active learning? Been taught differentiation strategies in the same way as everyone else on the course? Bitter irony notwithstanding, it can be argued that good CPD should practise what it preaches. Why should the sector accept development activities that don’t reflect in their delivery what you already know about good teaching and learning?

There is a broader point here too. You already understand that the time in front of the teacher is just ‘the visible part of the iceberg’ in the process of teaching and learning. In the same way, effective CPD applies a full armoury of techniques to effectively develop domain knowledge, skills and reflective practice.

In particular, it involves critical reflection on different learning experiences and resulting action-planning, which represent development as a teacher. IfL has developed an online tool ‘REfLECT’ that supports this process as well as allowing teachers to track and monitor their CPD over time – this is explored in more detail in Appendix A. The IfL guidelines also provide a non-exhaustive list of CPD activities that can be used to create a blended approach. Teachers and managers in FE will be familiar with these – perhaps under another name – from the options available to them as they develop their approaches to teaching their learners.

The IfL list includes:

- peer coaching
- Subject Learning Coach training
- accredited courses or programmes related to teacher development
- mentoring new colleagues
- peer review
- peer observation
■ work-shadowing
■ team-teaching
■ team/department self-assessment
■ carrying out and disseminating action research
■ evaluation of feedback (learners and peers)
■ significant input at team meetings
■ engagement in structured professional dialogue/learning conversations
■ preparation for and evaluation of appraisal
■ membership of committees, boards, steering groups related to teaching and/or your subject area
■ partnership activities (schools, employers, other providers)
■ visits to community organisations
■ curriculum design/development/validation
■ e-learning activities
■ accredited CPD courses or programmes
■ reading journal articles
■ reviewing books or articles
■ updating knowledge through the internet/TV.

Many of these approaches require active engagement by the teacher’s line manager to involve the teacher in the activity. This in turn will only be likely if senior management can provide the strategic structures, organisational ‘permissions’ and leadership examples that enable them to do so. There is also a clear internal communications need. All levels of management and human resource (HR)/staff development managers can provide an awareness of how the sheer range of opportunities can be made available.

In the past, some managers have seen CPD courses as a distraction from core teaching and learning activities. It takes time and it costs money, so it is pursued with reluctance. One important facet of the list above is that it demonstrates that much individual CPD can be embedded in the everyday activities of a subject team or department.
This paper has explored the strategic role of CPD in improvement and stressed the importance of applying your existing understanding of teaching and learning to your organisation’s CPD activities but how do you begin to generate an approach? Start with making the CPD that you plan purposeful.

**The individual purpose**

The IfL guidelines state that the fundamental purpose of CPD is maintaining the professional standing of all teachers, trainers and tutors in the sector. This involves continuously learning about:

- what they teach (updating their subject specialism)
- how they teach (refreshing teaching approaches)
- and the relevance of where they teach and the kinds of learners they teach (the institutional and national policy context).

The first two areas comprise the teachers ‘dual professionalism’. As professionals, teachers have a fundamental personal responsibility to plan and engage in CPD. This individual professionalism involves demonstrating development to:

- oneself – through recorded reflective practice
- learners – action research and evaluation
- colleagues – collaborative learning and professional dialogue
- the professional body IfL – for continuing registration as a teacher in the sector.
If the final responsibility for CPD rests with the teacher as a professional, then what can managers and senior managers do to support this process? Senior managers can provide support through providing leadership influence and appropriate structures. Line managers have a key role in giving teachers the confidence to do this. It may involve supporting the teachers in generating their individual development plans, suggesting broader models of CPD than simple courses, and encouraging teachers to engage in stretching professional activity such as self-assessment, membership of committees and partnership working.

The institutional purpose

If CPD is truly strategic, the organisation will have clear objectives for staff development in line with organisational priorities and goals. Development needs may also be driven externally by the latest policy trends and changes – such as the introduction of the Diploma or the need to develop skills that support employer engagement. Approaches to this are explored in more detail in sections 5 and 7.

The ‘even trade’

Do both these purposes coincide? Often they do. For example, an individual teacher’s CPD activity might contribute to a provider self-assessment rating. An individual might contribute to the development of new curricula or the validation of new qualifications that form part of a provider development plan.

These happy coincidences will be far more frequent if both provider needs and individual needs are clearly articulated, and synergies are actively sought and managed. Teachers need a structured, management-supported process to develop their individual CPD plans that takes into account both their professionalism and the institutional and policy contexts.

However, there will be times when individual interests (wants) are requested but do not necessarily rank among the priorities for the provider. There will also be times when the organisation will need to develop their staff for a purpose set by the external policy agenda – with limited interest from individual teachers. Might these be best seen as trade-offs, not conflicts – where the search for an ‘even trade’ will lead to purposeful CPD?
Provider development plans normally address the future development of services and the resources required to develop them. These resources can include capital-build projects, investment in new equipment and so on. A new build without the appropriate workforce will have little lasting impact.

There is a case for including organisation-wide workforce development planning as either an embedded part of, or concurrent with, the process of generating your provider development plan. Not only will this ensure a strategic approach to CPD, but it may also add to the evidence base you would present under ‘capacity to improve’.

Workforce development applies to all levels: support staff, teachers, middle managers and senior managers. There needs to be an ongoing training needs analysis at the provider level and associated development planning. Clear resources need to be allocated to workforce development and aligned with the provider’s goals. This could include CPD plans for:

- readiness to deliver the Diplomas as part of 14–19 provision
- employer responsiveness as part of World Class Skills
- improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

Such a process must also take into account all CPD opportunities from departmental / subject team based development activities to participating in national development programmes.

IfL has case studies on its website[^1] that describe how providers have developed CPD approaches that directly support specific aspects of their provision. For example:

- EAGIT Limited describes how they embedded Subject Learning Coaching across the organisation to improve their work-based learning delivery.
- Oaklands College describes how they developed a team of student e-mentors to embed e-learning in their provision.

[^1]: www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd/case-studies
6 Use a distributed model of CPD leadership

Everyone is involved in some way with CPD activity – support staff, teachers, middle managers and senior managers – or at least, they should be. Consequently, there is a case to be made for a distributed model of leadership for effective CPD.

In a traditional model, a staff development manager (senior/middle manager) holds a fund to which individual teachers apply – usually with the support of their line manager. The staff development manager then coordinates the rationing of that fund and possibly also coordinates and delivers internal training courses.

In a distributed model, a senior management team member is responsible for CPD, planning activity strategically in consultation with a wide range of senior and middle managers. Middle managers at subject and other levels hold responsibility for identifying needs with individual teachers and set these in the strategic context. Individual teachers also hold responsibility as professionals for maintaining themselves in good standing.

However this structure is formed, the key is that leadership is distributed. This enables strategic planning of CPD to reflect provider needs, ensures the full involvement of subject team managers and ensures that teachers develop their individual CPD plans within a strategic context.

The Wolverhampton College case study on the IfL website is a good example of distributed CPD leadership.
It would be fair to say that FE providers operate in a ‘policy-rich environment’. There are unprecedented changes occurring in the FE sector and the demands made on it. For example:

- the Leitch Agenda and the continued progress the sector needs to make in employer responsiveness
- the effects of the credit crunch and the demands on providers to train the unemployed for the future
- the self-regulation agenda and the opportunities available to providers
- the opportunities for providers to create their own qualifications relevant to local/national employer need
- the opportunity for colleges to validate their Foundation Degrees
- the challenges and opportunities of the 14–19 agenda and associated partnership working
- the challenge to deliver anywhere-anytime learning through new technology.

CPD can play a key role in equipping all staff to thrive in a changing environment. There are a wide variety of formal programmes to support the implementation of new initiatives, such as the national programmes sponsored by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. Such programmes are a valuable resource for FE providers as they try to negotiate the changes in the ‘policy weather’.

More intriguing still are the opportunities now available to providers acting on their own initiative. Previously, managers have only reacted to national initiatives, engaging with them once they are established rather than driving their development. The de-regulation agenda provides an opportunity for providers to get ahead of the game and develop approaches to their CPD that allow them to meet local needs.
Move from compliance to opportunity

The move to professionalise the FE workforce changes everything – and arguably for the better. In the 2006 FE White Paper *Raising skills, improving life chances*,\(^5\) the government announced its intentions to introduce new regulations as part of a policy to professionalise the FE workforce. The regulations came into force on 1 September 2007 and are described in DIUS guidelines.\(^6\) Funding has been provided through the Learning and Skills Council.

The detail of your role as a manager is set out in the LLUK information pack for the FE sector.\(^7\) Significant highlights include:

- providers should have systems in place to ensure that all teaching staff undertake at least 30 hours of CPD per year (or reduced amounts for sessional, fractional or part-time staff – pro rata with a minimum of six hours), and ensure all teaching staff maintain a record of their CPD activities
- those responsible for HR and staff development should have systems in place to support and provide CPD for all teaching staff
- teacher trainers and educators should, where appropriate, contribute to plans for the delivery of CPD within the framework developed by the IfL.

Teachers, tutors, trainers and lecturers also have responsibilities:

- undertake at least 30 hours of CPD per year (or reduced amounts for sessional, fractional or part-time staff – pro rata with a minimum of six hours)
- agree with their line management an appropriate CPD programme and the support to be received during the training and development
- maintain a record of the CPD activities undertaken and regularly consult line management to ensure needs are met.

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\(^5\) *Further education: raising skills, improving life chances* (March 2006)


The words requirement and entitlement are used interchangeably in the sector to describe this. However, it can be argued that the most appropriate term is *opportunity*. The availability of the equivalent of four days for CPD is a new concept to many full-time teachers in the sector and a resource that should be highly valued.

Beyond these fundamental requirements is a range of exciting opportunities to make CPD purposeful for the individual and provider, and to maximise the benefits to all involved. Managers should ensure that teachers are:

- aware of the entitlement
- given the time to use it
- aware of the range of CPD opportunities
- given the best opportunities to use this time within the context of whole-provider and sector development
- encouraged to own their CPD.
CPD is increasingly seen as an essential driver in raising the standards of teaching and learning in the sector. Requirements and processes have been set in place by LLUK and IfL to ensure that every teacher engages in it – but it should be on your list of things to actively manage anyway and seen as an opportunity.

This paper aims to encourage you, as a professional educator, to begin to apply your expertise about good teaching and learning to your thinking on CPD. It is hoped that you have new ideas to debate and discuss in your organisation on CPD and that you can question CPD activity that does not practise what it preaches.

At LSN, we will continue to explore the link between professional development activity and good practice in teaching and learning in our new thinking, our programme delivery and our services.
Appendix A  **The REfLECT tool**

IfL’s REfLECT tool is an online facility enabling teachers to record their CPD activity and to submit it to IfL for continuing registration purposes. REfLECT enables teachers to create records of their CPD and their wider learning experiences. The records remain private to individual teachers but can be shared selectively and, for a limited time, with peers, mentors or managers.

This is where REfLECT has massive potential to make a lasting contribution to provider development through the involvement of managers. For example, if all teachers in an FE college, engaged in the first phase of Diploma roll-out, were to make their experience available to their group and the appropriate managers via REfLECT, there would be an immediate sharing of a body of experience that would enrich the experience of the next cohort of learners.

Similarly, this could apply to teachers and managers involved in progressing employer engagement across a provider and the individual subject teams. Bodies of knowledge and experience would be created that would outlast individual teachers, leaving legacies for others to build on. The loss of key teachers would become less of a worry, with new teachers being able to use this resource to ‘hit the ground running’.

The REfLECT tool can be found at www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd/reflect
Continuing professional development (CPD) is increasingly seen as an essential driver in raising the standards of teaching and learning in post-16 education and training. Requirements and processes have been set in place by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and Institute for Learning (IfL) to ensure that every teacher engages in CPD – but is it getting the strategic attention it deserves in every organisation?

This paper aims to provoke discussion on the issue, question some current shibboleths, identify potential approaches and explore how to make the most out of the new CPD entitlement. It also aims to encourage you, as a professional educator, to begin to apply your expertise about good teaching and learning to your thinking on CPD.