2011–12
IfL review of CPD
Making professional learning work

Dr Jean Kelly
This is the Institute for Learning’s fourth national review of continuing professional development (CPD) since 2008. A great deal has changed in that time, not least in terms of education policy, but the philosophy of professional learning that IfL defined in terms of CPD has remained a constant:

“Professional development means maintaining, improving and broadening relevant knowledge and skills in a subject or vocational specialism and in teaching and training methods so that it has a positive impact on practice and the learner experience. (IfL, 2007)

About the Institute for Learning (IfL)

IfL was formed in 2002 by further education teachers, unions and others, and is the professional body for teachers, tutors, trainers and student teachers in the further education and skills sector, including adult and community learning, emergency and public services, FE colleges, the armed services, sixth-form colleges, the voluntary and community sector and work-based learning. An independent professional body, IfL is governed by an elected advisory council and works closely with learning and skills organisations, unions and employer bodies. www.ifl.ac.uk

Terminology

Throughout this document, we use the term “teachers and trainers” or “teachers” to cover all those who directly support learning in further education and skills, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, assessors, instructors, tutors and trainee teachers. We use the term “FE and skills” to cover the range of publicly funded learning outside schools and higher education.

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Foreword

Since 2008, thousands of teachers and trainers across our diverse further education and skills sector have engaged with the Institute for Learning (IfL), supporting one another’s continuing professional development (CPD); taking part in subject-related and other online communities of practice, focus groups and events; networking with fellow professionals; and sharing their CPD with IfL and each other.

In that time, there has been steady progress in our ambitious attempt, as the professional body, to provide a collective and powerful analysis of professional learning with thousands of practitioners, and develop an evidence base to help teachers and trainers make informed choices about their CPD.

Since we conducted our first review of IfL members’ CPD, for 2008–09, we have seen positive progress in terms of members sharing their CPD with colleagues and employers; reflecting on their practice; and being able to articulate how CPD activities and critical reflection combine to make a difference to their teaching and training practice.

In this, IfL’s fourth annual review of CPD, our focus has been on the strategies employed by teachers and trainers to assess the impact of the professional learning and the evidence gained. Analysing practice in the classroom, workshop or workplace is integral to the professional learning process, and measuring impact helps identify CPD that improves teaching and learning and benefits learners most.

Participants in the six focus groups we held as part of the review were clear about the effectiveness of action research for planning and measuring impact, but expressed their concerns that it is not widely recognised by provider organisations as valid CPD. Many said that the measurements they make as individual teachers and trainers are invisible: a whole-organisation ‘learning culture’ would help ensure a deep understanding of the pedagogy being analysed and its impact.

IfL recommends that teachers should routinely gain feedback about their impact and that peer observations should be of learners and their learning, and the effectiveness or otherwise of different practices.

Teachers and trainers should engage in collaborative action research, and need to be supported by the leaders of their organisations to become learners and evaluators of their own and each other’s practice. They should be empowered and trusted to exercise their professional autonomy to learn collaboratively and deliver improvements in teaching and learning.

Maintaining and improving the quality of vocational education and training is dependent on teachers’ CPD, and IfL is committed to helping ensure that members have access to relevant CPD opportunities to support their dual professionalism, as experts in their subject or vocational area and in teaching and learning.

Following last year’s changes to the 2007 regulations, IfL is again operating as a voluntary professional membership organisation. Having started to make a real difference to the way the sector thinks about CPD, we are developing our support for members to include new professional training modules; action research; ‘how to’ guides; and subject-specific CPD, with options for accreditation.

Investing in CPD is in the best interests of learners in our sector and essential for developing the highly skilled workforce that our economy urgently needs.

Toni Fazaeli
Chief Executive
**Introduction**

This review of CPD for 2011–12 is the last in this series of four. IfL will work with the new FE guild on future ways to gain a sector-wide overview of the professional development being undertaken by teachers and trainers in England.

Since the removal of the 2007 regulations¹ in September 2012, it is no longer a requirement for all teachers and trainers in further education and skills to declare their CPD by the end of August every year. In line with most other professional bodies, IfL expects members to remain in good professional standing by staying up to date with their subject specialism and approaches to teaching and learning, to safeguard their reputation as committed professionals and meet the expectations of their learners for the highest standards of teaching and training.

We want to continue to produce valuable reports encouraging the most committed teachers and trainers to capture and share their CPD. Our next step is to consider, with our members, what kind of IfL review of CPD would have the most impact for their practice year-on-year. These will be some of the key questions:

1. Is it important for IfL to carry a summary or full record of CPD for every member?
2. If so, should IfL recognise this by formally giving a certificate verifying that the individual is remaining in good professional standing? Other professional bodies do this in one form or another, but given what we have come to know about professional learning, will it really make an impact on practice?

One of the members at our London focus group raised a very pertinent note of caution:

> You will never teach anything that you cannot assess, measure or test. Similarly, you will never take a CPD activity that does not have a measurable or testable outcome. However, sometimes the most unexpected thing you do will have the most impact.

The challenge for IfL, and part of our vision, is how to capture the unexpected and indefinable, and share it with others to assess its use.

In response to our members who have been calling for ‘accredited CPD’ in every IfL survey and focus group, we are developing programmes with leading and prestigious universities across the country, designed to cover the range of professional learning in a teaching career, from the early years of learning after qualification to the advanced and seasoned teacher writing for publication. Some are formally accredited with CATS points; some are not: the one significant factor is they all require the teacher or trainer to capture their own learning on the course and then articulate the impact this has made on practice and other learners.

This is the real treasure of excellent professional learning. If IfL as a professional body can collate the results of those gains and golden moments and pass them on to others so that they can be shared, imitated, modelled, cited and replicated through research and publication, video and podcast, then the outcomes of professional learning can be for the good of all, not just the few.

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Professionalism and professional learning: lessons learned

IfL’s definition of CPD embraces the identity of the dual professional, an idea that was adopted by IfL in 2002 from the work of Jocelyn Robson in the 1990s because it fitted so well with the demands of being a teacher in the further education sector of skills and professional learning.

In this model of professionalism, teachers who are already professionals in their specialist area (e.g. Accountancy, IT, Engineering, Nursing) are being supported to develop the dual professionalism of combining that with teaching expertise.²

The identity of FE professionals and indeed the sector itself is illuminated through this concept and it accurately describes both the complexity and the challenge of being professionally excellent because the definition puts the emphasis on continual improvement. It is not enough to be good at both your subject and in the way that you teach it: you need to be continually striving to become better and better at what you do and how you teach it.

In the winter of 2008, IfL commissioned a longitudinal study by Jocelyn Robson and her team at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) to assess the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of professional learning throughout the period of the first IfL review of CPD. The study, which took place over the period of one year, focused on a group of new members as they sought to address the CPD requirements put in place by the government regulations a year earlier.³

Bearing in mind that there was no regulation about qualifications until 2001 and no requirement to join a professional body until 2007, the findings of this study made interesting reading:

"Respondents’ conceptions of ‘professionalism’ varied. Some put the emphasis on being up to date, on having recognised qualifications or being ‘self-directed’. Some saw themselves as ‘dual professionals’, others did not … some (particularly those on part-time or fractional contracts) report significant constraints, mainly relating to the time required to reflect or record CPD activities.⁴"

But by the end of the study a year later, the majority of the respondents believed that membership of IfL had enhanced their sense of their own professional identity. They felt more able to take responsibility and control of their own career development and training.

"They felt able to focus on their own needs and not just those of their employer.⁵"

It is the idea of professional autonomy, judgement and choice that is being expressed here as an integral part of professional learning. It is about “active involvement in learning”⁶, the teacher as researcher of their own practice, and that is why the theory of experiential learning makes so much sense for teachers and learners in FE and skills.

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⁴ Ibid. 20.
⁵ Ibid.
The realisation of the cycle of “learning by doing” — the need to examine learning, make it explicit, test it against theory and then experiment with new ways of doing things is for some a revelation — student learning and professional learning is actually the same process.

For many professionals, this is the point at which they reflect on this and the multiple processes that occur in any learning situation: teachers learn from other teachers; teachers learn from their students; and students learn from teachers, but mostly they learn from their peers. What is vital is that everyone learns best when the evidence of the impact of learning is examined rigorously so that improvements can be made and the cycle continues — “knowing thy impact” is an essential part of that cycle.

In 2008, we offered an illustration (opposite) of how teachers and trainers might approach the professional learning cycle.

The excitement of learning about learning, the concept of metacognition, in the initial stages of professional qualification (which is mostly about theory into practice), soon gets left behind in the day-to-day busy life of most professional teachers and trainers and practice does not always go back to theory as in the Kolb cycle. An acronym (CPD) stands in place of professional learning; time for examining and building on the grounded evidence of practice is squeezed; and the result is a simplistic rather than a critically reflective version of professional learning.

Without the required support and time, it can be quicker and easier to “tick the box” for the employer and the individual rather than tracking changes in practice back into theory and out again into improved theory. The impact of what has been achieved (successful or not) can often be articulated, but without evidence to support the assertion.

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A personal CPD cycle for teachers and trainers based on the Kolb experiential learning cycle

**Step 1**
Look back at this year’s CPD record; talk to your colleagues, talk to your manager; what do you want to do this year; what will you do differently this time?

**Step 2**
Look forward and plan ahead; include new directions and time for the informal and opportune CPD as well as the obvious areas to address.

**Step 3**
Start recording your activities and describe what you did and what you learned in as much detail as you can – this will help you when you return to reflect on what difference this has made to your teaching and training. Try out REfLECT if you haven’t already done so.

**Step 4**
Share ongoing developments with colleagues for their critical perspectives on what you are doing; review appropriate websites and journals for information and updates; experiment with ways of doing things.

**Step 5**
Devises ways of collecting feedback from your learners and colleagues about changes you have made. Assess the impact of what you have done through focus groups, tailored questionnaires, tutorial groups, learner evaluations and other data.

**Step 6**
Review your descriptive practice in your logs and turn this into reflective practice – if you have completed 10, 30, or 60 hours – what does this really mean to you and your teaching and training? Set out the ‘so what’ and spell out the impact of your CPD.

**Step 7**
Declare how much work you have done to keep up that level of excellence in your professional practice so that your commitment to being the best teacher and trainer you can is recognised and we can share the difference CPD is making for the sector.
Articulating the impact of professional learning

Since the 1980s, many professional bodies have relied on an ‘input’ model of CPD and measured that input of conferences, workshops, lectures and so on by the attendance of an individual at an event. The professional then gained ‘points’ for inputs that were considered more likely to provide value, as they were formal, accredited, structured and often examined events.9

There is now a growing trend for professional bodies to move towards an ‘output’ model where the actual effect and impact of CPD has been seen to affect knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, even emotions.9

Early in its history, IfL’s approach to CPD has always been ‘outcomes’ focused as illustrated in its definition – measurement of impact is central to assessing what difference any professional learning has made to practice. This is fitting for the nature of the profession of teaching, as there is an aspirational intent behind professional learning: to be the best teacher one can be and beyond a minimum competence or threshold.

As a guide to support practitioners with this aspiration and their articulation of professional learning, we offered a model of dual professionalism (opposite) and a simple series of questions:

1. What professional development activities have you undertaken this year?

2. Have you reflected on the learning gained from carrying out these activities?

3. Have the activities and the reflection combined made a difference to what and how you teach or train?

4. Can you show evidence of what the difference has been and the impact it has made on your learners, colleagues or the organisation in which you work?

It was always understood that the questions were deceptively complex and we anticipated that a point at which the questions could be answered positively and in a confident way by the majority of teachers and trainers would take several years.10 In fact, IfL has seen year-on-year progress in responses through the four steps.

In the first review, for 2008–09, we saw quite clearly that question 1 was understood and demonstrated. All respondents could articulate the professional development activities they had carried out in the year.


However, only 28 per cent of the sample we reviewed identified the impact on learners in their supporting evidence, and reflection on the impact of CPD was usually absent or hesitantly expressed.

In 2009–10, positive progress had been made in terms of sharing CPD with colleagues and employers, although members identified – in our review of that year\(^\text{11}\) and a survey report – that having the time and space to reflect, plan experimentation, trial teaching and training methods and then critically review and evaluate the results gets the most impact, time and support for this kind of professional learning activity is a continuing challenge for most individuals.\(^\text{12}\)

It was obvious that question 2 about the importance of critical reflection on practice was understood and was the subject of debate and discussion.

In 2010–11, the third question was the focus of the review\(^\text{13}\) – have the activities and the reflection combined made a difference to practice? The review was designed to explore the link between the networked professional and professional communities of practice to see if a collective and collaborative assessment of CPD would highlight strategies of impact assessment.

A key finding was that:

> the impact of CPD is insufficiently theorised or prioritised as this is ‘deep learning’ that will affect a wide range of colleagues and learners.

The subsequent recommendation was for teachers and trainers to engage learners and peers in action research and supported experiments that deepen the relationship between teacher and learner, changes the balance of power and get beyond surface evaluations to deep learning about learning strategies that work.

This is powerful CPD in its own right and is effective in identifying CPD that actually improves teaching and learning and most benefits learners.\(^\text{14}\)

IfL has been ambitious in its attempt to provide a collective and powerful analysis of professional learning with thousands of teachers and trainers in what is a hugely varied and complex further education and skills sector, but there had been steady progress through the three years.

The most difficult of the four questions – about strategies employed by teachers and trainers to assess the impact of their professional learning and the evidence gained – was the focus for 2011–12. If we know that the analysis of practice, whether in classroom, workshop or workplace, is integral to the professional learning process, then the measurement of impact that process has had is the last part of the professional learning jigsaw.


\(^{14}\) Ibid. 9.
The evidence of impact in the 2011–12 CPD review

The overall evidence from more than 40,000 teachers and trainers in the 2012 declaration of CPD showed a similar pattern to previous years: an average of 53 hours was declared, 68 per cent of respondents shared their professional development with a colleague and employer, and, again, there was an almost equal split between activities based around teaching and learning and those based around subject specialism.

But our findings in year 3 had shown emphatically that small focus groups to expand on this overall data collection were both the way to illustrate tacit knowledge about the impact of development and a means to increase the understanding of the impact of collective reflection on practice. Focus groups are an invaluable addition to the research ‘toolkit’ and are a means of modifying concepts and perceptions – in this case about professional learning and providing that invaluable space for collaborative reflective practice.

As part of the fourth review, the focus groups were designed to ask members about their approach to CPD, with the emphasis this year being on impact and impact assessment. In preparation for the focus groups held in autumn 2012, we asked participants to bring with them:

- an example of where a CPD activity they had undertaken had really made an impact on themselves, their practice, their learners or their colleagues, or all four categories
- an example of where a CPD activity they thought was going to make a difference just did not have the impact they thought it would, and why.

The key questions in the focus groups to prompt discussion and debate were:

1. What was the gap in time between the CPD activity itself and the impact – when did you first notice that it had made a difference and what was that?
2. Was the impact you noticed expected (i.e. had you planned for this) or unexpected (entirely surprising)?
3. If it was an expected impact, to what extent had you chosen or adapted the CPD activity to meet a perceived need in your teaching and training?
4. If it was an unexpected impact, would you go back and redesign the CPD activity and if so, how? What might you have done differently?
5. What do you think would support you to gain maximum impact from a CPD activity?
6. Would a framework for identifying and measuring the impact of CPD help you, and if so, what would it look like?

There were six focus groups throughout September and October 2012, as always with a wide range of participants representing all parts of teaching and training in the sector.

The participants all came with examples of CPD that had made an impact, much of it planned beforehand and arising from perceived needs of the individual or their learners, and some of it unplanned and imposed by their organisation or awarding body.

The impact on each and every participant in terms of their own professional confidence and knowledge was clearly articulated, but it was less clear about the measurement of impact on learning and learners.

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In answer to our questions, the participants raised a number of points.

**Context**

The impact of any professional learning will depend on the context (where you teach in the sector and the type of learners encountered), on the subject you teach and the length of the interaction with learners (programme duration), and the planned outcomes (by self or organisation or external bodies) so was hugely variable and largely unpredictable.

Many participants taught only for a few days, or even hours in some cases, at a time; and many were part-time so did not always have the opportunity to follow up and analyse impact in any meaningful way.

**Action research**

The majority of participants agreed that a form of action research was the most effective way to plan and measure impact but that it was not often ‘recognised’ by many organisations, did not always fit in with the conventional idea of a CPD activity and, in order to carry it out effectively, "you need to plan a long way ahead".

This was, for many, an aspiration, not a reality.

**Models for analysing impact**

Some participants had their own models for analysing impact, from the use of force-field analyses, to peer observation feedback, to mind-mapping, to digital scrapbooking, to the use of the scaffolding in REfLECT, IfL’s e-portfolio for members especially designed to support professional learning ("you can go back and add reflections and evidence on impact at various stages of development").

All agreed that a flexible, ‘loose’ methodology that would allow the monitoring of the impact of professional learning at different stages – immediate; one week; one month; end of course or programme, was important, but few had planned out the use of a model or framework in advance and few used one systematically.

**Organisational framework**

All participants raised the need for organisations to have a framework in support of impact assessment.

Many said that a great deal of measurement by an individual is ‘invisible’, done in their own time and takes place without anyone knowing or seeing the results.

A whole-organisation ‘learning culture’ would ensure that teachers and trainers shared more than the results of evaluation forms. The support needed was from managers who were interested in the results of impact assessment and had an understanding themselves of the pedagogy being analysed.
Making professional learning ‘visible’

The results of our review of CPD this year show an understanding of the complexity and challenge in measuring the impact of professional learning, and therefore professional learning worth investing in ahead, but also a keen interest in moving beyond competence (the ticking the box of CPD) to something that has real benefit for individual teachers and trainers, organisations and learners.

IfL promotes awareness of educational research with members, including the acclaimed international research by John Hattie. Many of our IfL members are aware of and have read the work of Professor Hattie, who has long advocated “the importance of educators as evaluators of their impact”. In his latest analysis of this idea, Hattie claims that almost any intervention by a teacher can stake a claim to making a difference to student learning, but our role as professional teachers and so professional learners ourselves is to find out the most effective ones and to evidence how well they work.

Hattie’s research has produced over 800 meta-analyses of practice related to achievement, involving millions of students and representing the largest evidence-based research into what actually works in schools to improve learning.

He has ranked the effect sizes in order of the influence of a range of 150 interventions, to create a starting point for teachers and trainers to consider a) the spectrum of effects and b) those that have the most impact. This should lead to the question of exactly what professional development might be required in order to add the most appropriate interventions to their day-to-day teaching repertoire.

Some of the interventions are mostly appropriate to school teaching, but most are directly applicable to further education and skills. For example, one of the most influential interventions a teacher can make is to enable accurate self-assessment in self-reported grades and expectations; one of the least effective is matching teaching delivery to learning styles.

But there is a consistency to the overall message:

“The most remarkable feature of the evidence is that the greatest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching and when students become their own teachers.”

In October 2012, over 2,500 teachers and trainers responded to a detailed IfL survey on teaching and learning practice and showed they regularly used some of the strategies identified by Hattie as most effective:

- Eight out of 10 (81 per cent) said that they routinely gave feedback to learners about what and how they are learning and what kind of approaches worked best for them.
- Two-thirds (63 per cent) said they often or almost always took the time to help learners develop a conceptual understanding of how and what they are learning, helping them test their ideas by weighing up arguments for and against and asking them to reflect on how they are using these metacognitive skills.
- Seven out of 10 used learner self-assessment as a way of stretching their students.

If, as Hattie argues and our members seem to agree, the things that have the most significant impact are all about making learning visible (and explicit) to students, then it would follow that one of the major messages for this year’s CPD review is the power of teachers and trainers making their own professional learning visible to themselves and peers, learning from and talking to each other about teaching planning, success criteria, progression and the results of the analysis of impact.

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The analysis of practice, whether in classroom, workshop or workplace must be integral to the professional learning process – knowledge is deepened though trying things out and assessing the results.

For 2013, we need to put greater emphasis on the value of making learning visible:

A personal CPD cycle for teachers and trainers based on the Kolb experiential learning cycle

Step 1
What problems or challenges do I have in my teaching or training as I focus on each learner succeeding to the maximum possible level?

Step 2
How can I understand more about these problems or challenges, including feedback from learners?

Step 3
In the light of this, what expertise, knowledge and skills do I want to gain?

Step 4
How and when will I measure whether I have been successful in gaining expertise, knowledge and skills that make a difference to my learners?

Step 5
What kind of approaches would be best to gain this new professional learning (i.e. online learning and research, peer mentoring or observation, collaborative action research, etc)?

Step 6
How well did my professional learning work and how did it make an impact with learners and their progress? What did they say and their results show?

Step 7
What are the key learning points for me next time I am planning for my CPD?
Recommendations for 2012–13

The recommendations from this review are made in order to help teachers and trainers choose and value the professional learning they undertake from an evidence base. In this way, the practice of teaching and training becomes ‘deliberate’ and all teachers become evaluators and evaluate the effect of their teaching on students’ learning and achievement.

- Teachers and trainers should routinely gain feedback about the impact they are having. Peer observations should be not of the teacher but of the learners and their learning and the effectiveness or not of different practices. This feedback will be essential to the teacher or trainer for their analysis of CPD and resulting changes to practice.

- Expert teachers and trainers should identify the most important ways in which to represent the subject they teach and choose professional development activities to expand their repertoire of strategies accordingly.

- Teachers and trainers should be able to illustrate how they help their learners to become their own teachers: do their learners have self-assessment capability? Are the learners able to articulate what they are learning and how they will know when they have been successful? How can their learners understand metacognition – learning about learning?

- Teachers and trainers should engage in collaborative action research: a small group of colleagues devise learning intentions and success criteria for a series of sessions they intend to teach and together devise the end-of-series assessment. They monitor how this exercise impacts on lesson planning, teaching strategies, teacher conversations and the subsequent impact on learners’ achievement.

- Teachers and trainers should talk in meetings and professional conversations about learning – not teaching.

- Leaders of organisations should provide time and support for teachers and trainers to become learners and evaluators of their own and each other’s practice.
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