2010–11
IfL review of CPD
CPD for the future: the networked professional
The concept of professionalism and professional development changes over time. As the professional body for teachers and trainers, the Institute for Learning (IfL) wants to engage our members and the wider sector in thinking about what professionalism means and to maximise the benefits that IfL can bring to teachers’ practice.

This review looks back at the kind of continuing professional development (CPD) that IfL’s members undertook in 2010–11 and also looks forward to the kind of professional learning that really works for individuals and their learners and the part IfL can play in making sure all our professionals are networked.1

CPD is vital for maintaining standards of professionalism:

“Just because someone has a certificate to show they are a professional – a teacher, a doctor, a physiotherapist – does not automatically mean they are competent and trustworthy. They may have been up to date the day they qualified, but who is to say that 10, 20, even 40 years later that individual is still up-to-date and has the expected range of competencies?”

Andy Friedman, managing director of PARN (Professional Association Research Network)2

And CPD is the hallmark of the professional:

“CPD performs a pivotal role in ensuring that professionals maintain and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their careers and so maintain public confidence in the services they provide.”

Andy Friedman, managing director of PARN

About the Institute for Learning (IfL)

IfL was formed 10 years ago 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.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the IfL members and reviewers who took part in the CPD focus group around the country from September to November 2011.

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Publisher

Published by the Institute for Learning, January 2012. © Institute for Learning (IfL).
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Introduction

Thousands of teachers and trainers have shared with their professional body, the Institute for Learning, the kinds of continuing professional development (CPD) that work – and those that don’t.

All good teachers and trainers invest their time in professional learning, and good colleges and providers invest in supporting at least 30 hours a year of CPD that has impact on professional practice for each teacher or trainer.  

The evidence in this report guides us all on how to invest time and money wisely in CPD that makes a difference. A major finding is that directed CPD is not necessarily effective and that more space is needed for self-directed and collaborative development opportunities. The culture and management practices in a college can promote or hamper professional learning leading to excellent teaching and training practice.

I recently visited Birmingham Metropolitan College, which has committed to full membership of IfL. Drawing on our evidence of effective professional development, it has set aside every Wednesday afternoon for collaborative professional development, and teachers drive the priorities for using this free space to create team and cross-team powerful professional development.

Teachers value critical reflection, sharing and testing practice and learning from each other. However, many employers over-manage and structure CPD for teachers and trainers – thereby squeezing out the very thing they seek – highly effective development leading to brilliant teaching practice.

I hope that this report and the evidence of professional learning that works spark a movement so that next year in our sector it is normal, not exceptional, that teachers and trainers network for themselves, using time and space given for the professional development that practitioners find most powerful.

Releasing energy and creativity through collaborative professional development brings innovation and improvements to practice and the experience and success of learners in our sector. A wise investment.

Toni Fazaeli
Chief Executive

IfL’s definition of CPD:

“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.
CPD for the future: the networked professional

Continuing professional development has been at the heart of professional practice for over 30 years, but in the light of a new economic and political context, is it time for a change to what professional learning means?

Although the CPD concept originated in the UK in the late 1970s, it was only formally adopted and defined by professional bodies during the 1980s.

During that time, many professional bodies relied on an ‘input’ model of CPD, and measured the input of conferences, workshops, lectures, practice sessions 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 activities.

In the second decade of the 21st century, there is 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 or emotions, behaviour, professional practice and client, patient or employer conditions.

Impact is of course more difficult to measure, but is central to assessing what difference CPD has made to practice. IfL’s approach since 2006 has been one of ‘output’ and ‘outcome’, as illustrated by IfL’s definition of CPD (page 4).

This is IfL’s third annual review of teachers’ and trainers’ CPD, and each year we have varied our approach, to gain deeper insights and evidence about CPD that really works, building on our three years’ evidence.

First review: 2008–09

The first review was for 2008–09: Making a difference for teachers, trainers and learners.

Members were asked to self-declare their CPD, either through the IfL website or through their online portfolio, REFLECT, to satisfy the 2007 regulatory requirements that teachers and trainers should undertake at least 30 hours CPD a year (pro rata for part-time teachers) and keep a record and share their CPD with both their employer and the professional body, IfL. The record is the self-declaration, and the sharing is carried out through IfL’s sampling process where the evidence of CPD is reviewed.

Key findings for 2008–09 included:

- Of the 75 per cent of teachers and trainers who declared their CPD to IfL, nearly all (98 per cent) exceeded their required number of hours of CPD, demonstrating their commitment to developing their own practice in the interests of their learners.
- The review demonstrated the value to teachers and trainers of taking a proactive approach to their CPD, planning ahead and sharing learning with colleagues.
- We noted an over-focus on formal CPD, such as courses, conferences and seminars, though this could be because these were more readily recognised as CPD than the informal personalised learning that members engaged in but did not necessarily record.
- There was an even split between the amount of time spent on teaching and learning and on subject and vocational updating, reflecting IfL’s model of dual professionalism (see page 22).

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4 Friedman, AL, 2011, p77.
5 PARN research, November 2011.

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Confidence in the use of technology was variable, with around a third of teachers and trainers saying that they felt under-confident.

Though learner impact is at the forefront of teachers’ and trainers’ minds, difficulty in evidencing it resulted in low levels of recording the impact of CPD.

There was relatively little sharing of CPD with colleagues and employers (less than 50 per cent) and only 4 per cent had received feedback about their CPD from colleagues.

The support role that leaders and managers must play to enable their staff to develop was variable, and in many cases a vision of a shared and strategic approach to CPD was not obvious.

Overall this review showed evidence of an individual and conventional approach to CPD. There were some excellent examples of individual reflection on practice, but also many lists of formal courses and workshops attended.

Second review: 2009–10

The second review was in 2009–10: Excellence in professional development – looking back, looking forward.

Building upon the findings of the first review, the second adopted a similar approach. By the end of the year, over 82 per cent of members had declared their CPD. This time, teachers and trainers in the selected sample were asked to send evidence by email or REfLECT, and a subset of those in the selected sample were followed up by telephone interview.

This review looked at CPD practice from the perspective of the three elements of the IfL model for CPD that had evolved over the previous five years, namely dual professionalism; professional values; and professional practice and research.

Key findings for 2009–10 included:

- Again, most teachers and trainers declared more CPD hours than the minimum requirement.

- A growing awareness of the professional commitment to CPD, with an increase in the percentage of IfL members (to 82 per cent) declaring their CPD.

- An increased interest in sharing CPD within and beyond the profession, with a considerable improvement in the number sharing their CPD, from under a half (44 per cent) of the sample in 2008–09 to approximately two-thirds in 2009–10.

- A growing recognition that conversations with colleagues and employers, including informal ones – ‘moments of enlightenment’ – often lead to change and are part of the CPD cycle, though many still did not recognise the extent and value of all they did to improve their teaching and training.

- An increased use by teachers and trainers of IfL's online personal learning space, REfLECT, for planning, recording and reviewing CPD.

- Research-based practice – which can include listening to learners, using technology to research practice or working collaboratively and reflecting with colleagues – being increasingly seen as the most effective CPD.

The use of questioning in the telephone interviews revealed the ‘flesh on the bones’ of the CPD evidence and the difference the development had made. Although this was of course reported from the individuals’ perspective, it was revelatory to them in many cases: while articulating their ‘story’ of professional learning, they realised what actually constituted CPD and the real impact it had made on themselves, others and their learners.

Third review: 2010–11

The 2010–11 review was intended to build on the findings of the previous two years and to refine IfL's conceptualisation of recording and sharing CPD.

New approaches to professional learning have meant moving beyond individual and largely solitary reflective practice, which in the 1990s would have been considered a reasonable output of CPD. David Boud, one of the best-known writers on reflective practice, and others in the same field of professional practice have begun to interrogate the notions of reflection and individual learning through reflective practice over the last 20 years. 7

In an article that attempts to relocate reflection in the context of professional practice, Boud says, “We need to move beyond older conceptions of reflective practice that are insufﬁciently rich to generate further work.” 8

In November 2011, academics, leaders of a range of professional bodies and members of IfL discussed challenges to the concept of professional learning at a seminar at the Institute of Education. 9

The challenges posed by globalisation mean that “the new professional is often a networked professional”. 10

Maintaining autonomy in the face of an audit culture means that there is often a dilemma for the professional between being accountable and being self-regulated. 11

A lack of space and the long-hours culture mean the importance of reﬂective practice seems devalued. 12

Indeed, “reﬂective practice in professional preparation and development can be superﬁcial and formulaic. 13

The current context for working as a professional in further education and skills suggests that we should build on the idea of the individual professional and their reﬂections on practice and their records of what they do to deepen learning from CPD.

CPD for the future will be able to recognise the need for a collective and critical approach to reﬂective practice that takes into account the changing context for professionalism and the emergence of the networked professional.

“The new professional is often a networked professional, having to co-operate and communicate with a wide range of colleagues within and outside their chosen profession … this reconstructs the space for reﬂection – it takes place in shared and networked situations.” 14

IfL’s 2010–11 review of CPD was intended to explore the link between the “networked professional” and professional “communities of practice” 15 in order to review our deﬁnition of professional learning and how it could be embedded within our practice of reviewing CPD. According to Etienne Wenger, learning in practice includes the following processes for the communities involved:

“Evolving forms of mutual engagement
Understanding and tuning a joint enterprise
Developing repertoires, styles and discourses

IfL’s methodology evolved therefore to facilitate these three elements. A number of face-to-face professional dialogues were organised in which members could exchange ideas about professional development and deepen the understanding of the networked professional within various communities of practice. The questions used in the meetings provide the structure for the sections that follow.

9 14 November 2011 at the Institute of Education.
Executive summary

CPD for the future: the networked professional

Review methodology for 2010–11

Aims of the review

The third review of CPD set out to:

- understand what kinds of CPD make a difference to teachers and trainers and their learners
- identify teachers’ and trainers’ preferences for the role that IfL should play in supporting them in their CPD
- encourage the practice of sharing CPD outcomes with others in order to develop communities of practice in CPD.

A number of mechanisms were used between 1 September and 31 October 2011 to gather data for this third review, which has adopted a collaborative, discursive strategy to facilitate discussions on the reviewing, sharing and impact of CPD.

Meetings were organised with a sample of members throughout the nine English regions. Each meeting was facilitated by an IfL staff member using a standard set of questions and notes; a recording was made of each, and a small number were filmed. The meetings were supplemented by individual web-based surveys to enable additional material to be collected. Online communities were established on the IfL website to encourage further discussion by attendees or those who had been invited but were unable to attend.

Regional focus group meetings

By 31 October 2011, 75 per cent of members had declared their CPD, either on the IfL website (80 per cent) or through their online portfolio, REfLECT (20 per cent).

The teachers and trainers who had declared their CPD for the year were sorted according to their sector and region. A sample from each region was selected randomly by automated means. The selected individuals were then invited to attend a half-day focus group meeting in their own or a neighbouring region, if more convenient.

Applications were accepted in order of receipt. If any places remained, the sample was widened to include other members in the region, following the same sampling framework.

The target membership for these focus groups was approximately eight, as their purpose was to enable reflection within a dynamic interchange of views.

A set of seven core questions (included in the Appendix) was used to focus the discussions and thereby seek opinions and recommendations from members. In total, 16 regional group meetings were held, in which 90 members participated.

Local focus groups

A further 17 local meetings were convened during October 2011 by some of the members of the hundred-strong team of CPD reviewers: practitioners who undertake work for IfL, reviewing CPD and professional formation portfolios for Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS).

Reviewers normally convened meetings within a single institution, often the one in which they worked, thereby extending the range of participants in the review while bringing in a new dimension – the opportunity to explore CPD arrangements and impact within a single institution. The same questions were used and detailed notes were taken by the reviewers.

Web-based surveys

Each member who attended a local focus group or one of the regional meetings received an invitation to complete an individual web-based survey. Survey questions mirrored group discussion questions, additionally amplifying some of them. This enabled members to provide additional information to supplement their focus group contribution. Those who had been unable to attend a group meeting were offered the opportunity to complete a questionnaire.
Other meetings

During the review period, a small number of additional opportunities were utilised where members of the further education and skills workforce or students were meeting for other purposes and their views about CPD could readily be sought. Notes from these meetings were drawn upon for this report.

Some 220 IfL members, representing all parts of the sector, were involved in the 33 regional and local focus groups. Over 48,000 teachers and trainers declared their CPD.

Key findings

- A continued commitment to professional development, with approximately 75 per cent of members declaring their CPD this year.

- A slight decrease in the average number of hours of CPD reported, from 49 to 48, still well in excess of the minimum number of hours required.

- Over half shared their CPD with a colleague or their employer (53 per cent), and 63 per cent shared with both a colleague and their employer.

- There was again a relatively even split between the average amount of time spent on teaching and learning (26 hours) and on subject and vocational updating (23 hours), illustrating how members’ CPD continues to reflect IfL’s model of dual professionalism (see page 22). The average time spent on professional development in the institutional context was less than 14 hours.

- Analysis of those who declared their CPD reflects the diversity of IfL’s membership and demonstrates the reach of sharing good practice across all parts of the sector, across age groups, genders, ethnic groups, job roles and length of time teaching in the sector.

Key recommendations

1. Sharing the outcomes of CPD is excellent CPD in itself, so create more opportunities for this.

   Collaborative learning and collective and critical reflective practice on what works and the impact on learners is key to improving teaching and learning. Organisations can create communities of CPD practice to model focus groups and outcomes.

2. More planning time and more time for effective personalised and collaborative CPD is essential.

   Directed and mandatory CPD is not necessarily effective, and yet employers seem to invest mostly in this; it is essential for motivated teachers to have more space for the ad hoc or planning and undertaking self-directed development opportunities.

3. CPD is vital to career development and readiness for new teaching and learning opportunities.

   Teachers and trainers need opportunities to undertake CPD targeted at keeping up to date or increasing the breadth of their experience in subject specialisms and related fields. Work-shadowing and subject specialist communities of practice are increasingly important; time to undertake professional formation and gain QTLS or ATLS also important.

4. The impact of CPD is insufficiently theorised or prioritised as this is ‘deep learning’ that affects a wide range of colleagues and learners.

   Action research and involving learners in development activities and supported experiments deepens the relationship between teacher and learner, changes the balance of ‘power’ and gets beyond surface evaluations to deep learning about teaching and 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.
Focus group findings

Effectiveness and impact

Q1. What was the most effective CPD that you undertook this year? What do you think the impact has been on your learners; your professional practice; your team, department or organisation; and how do you know?

The invitation to describe the most effective CPD experienced in the past year elicited an extremely wide range of responses, from which some common themes emerge. Much the strongest is the value of learning with and from colleagues – in snatched conversations, team meetings, CPD events, peer observations, work-shadowing, external network meetings or visits to other institutions.

The examples offered are a rich seam of evidence of the value of evolving this form of engagement with learning, referred to sometimes as a community of practice that impacts on both individuals and their organisations. Put simply, “the best moments are always with other people.”

Several focus groups took the opportunity to endorse the methodology of this CPD review as an example of this collaborative, reflective learning. The desire to be a better teacher or trainer for their learners’ benefit threads through almost all the examples offered and, therefore, direct relevance to teaching and learning featured strongly in responses. Many commented that effective CPD is something they do continuously, reflecting then acting to improve, even though this may remain unrecorded. But the examples they offered in response to this question were mostly of specific activities or events. The great majority of examples were of continuous processes, whether formal or informal CPD; few examples of one-off events were cited and many of those were of the acquisition of particular skills, such as IT: “The training budget is wasted when, after a training event, people go off and there is no follow-up”.

Team learning was described as particularly effective in several focus groups. Collaborative shared learning occurred informally in team meetings if they were structured to include sharing of practice and reflection: “Although these meetings had not been considered as CPD previously, it was agreed that some of the best reflection followed.”

One local focus group described its “Friday afternoon get-togethers” in which the team identifies a topic they wish to learn about and a team member with expertise. The latter offers a talk or demonstration. Numerous examples of impact on team, department or organisation described similar activities in which a team member shared what had been learned with colleagues and plans were made for the team to work together on areas of improvement. The opportunity to learn “in a safe environment where all participants learnt together without feeling awkward” enabled effective CPD for many members whatever the chosen topic.

Learning from colleagues in other organisations featured regularly in responses: it appears that the chance to learn from others like you who are doing something differently but better makes it seem achievable. One described a workshop session on using IT provided by staff in a neighbouring college as “an inspirational session”, delivered by ordinary colleagues currently using them to “an OK level, not BBC quality but what impressed me most was the ordinariness of it.” A team’s visit to another “outstanding” college led to a thorough review of their own practices and consequent changes that impacted strongly on learners.

One case study exemplifies a collegiate approach to CPD and its widespread impact. It illustrates many of the aspects of effective CPD highlighted above. A mock inspection highlighted inadequate approaches to equality and diversity both at organisational level and in embedding within teaching and learning.

An individual teacher had already made “a network connection” with an organisation that had an excellent equality and diversity profile, while attending a Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) learning fair. A visit was made and their experiences and activities explored. The result was a programme of workshops, peer support and training for staff, and formation of an equality and diversity steering committee – “a real snowball effect”.

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The impact has been seen in lesson observations (embedding) and in a wider strategic approach at organisational level. For CPD to be regarded as effective, it had to have direct relevance to and usually immediate impact on their teaching and training.

The opportunity to practice one’s own profession alongside teaching was important to counsellors, healthcare professionals, jewellery makers and builders, for example, because it maintained up-to-date knowledge and skills and gave them and their learners confidence in the authenticity of what they were teaching.

Peer observation of teaching and learning had a positive impact on many members: “Observing a colleague and learning about different methods of teaching made me think about what teaching skills I currently use and the ones I could adopt.”

In terms of impact, coaching and mentoring featured several times, too. The Subject Learning Coaches were referred to a number of times, both for the networks they ran and for their coaching approach to development of colleagues.

Mentoring was viewed as effective for the mentor at least as much as the mentee and one group recommended that because of this a wider range of staff should have the opportunity. Team mentoring was suggested by a group of trainee teachers, with many advantages including offering a range of perspectives and expertise (“some mentors can be restrictive or bureaucratic in their mentoring”) and overcoming problems such as inadequate mentor training. Like the mentors, several teacher trainers remarked that their role offered them permanent CPD through observing the practices of others – a powerful argument for peer observation.

Research was highlighted by several members as an effective form of CPD. Almost all of it was directly related to preparation for effective teaching and training, either subject-specific or teaching and learning strategies. The value of research undertaken as part of professional qualification (master’s degrees and doctorates, for example) was highlighted: “Academic research gives me confidence and a platform on which to reflect; the assignments act as a dialogue with myself and take me back to grass roots.”

As well as enhancing their own knowledge and skills, information could sometimes be passed on to learners.

As we can see in the many examples above, the impact of effective CPD on learners as well as teams and organisations is considerable. Other impacts on learners included improved results and better classroom behaviours (due to behaviour management techniques learned on specific courses but more often because of more stimulating teaching and learning).

One group described how two team members attended a behaviour management course and shared a few key elements with colleagues, out of which a more cohesive and standardised set of protocols for behaviour management were developed. One outcome was that staff in other teams noticed the changed behaviour of this group. This affected the pride these students and their tutors felt. The most commonly described impacts of CPD on professional practice were improved confidence that led to a much more innovative approach in the classroom and the ability to respond rapidly to changing curricula and contexts.

Some members took the opportunity to reflect on what good CPD means to them personally, describing how it energised, enthused and motivated them:

“The real excitement is in you having a part to play in moving thinking forward.”

“I want to continue to learn. I don’t want it to end.”

“Academic research brings intellectual stretch and has made me more open-minded. I should have done this 20 years ago.”

One teacher described how being a learner helped him empathise when he found out “what it is like being on page 3 and everyone else is on page 4”.

Dedicated time for CPD where day-to-day pressures can be put aside were highlighted by several participants as an important foundation for effective CPD, but as CPD budgets are being squeezed, in some cases quite considerably, personal motivation – always very important – will become even more significant.

The responses to this question demonstrate conclusively that the great majority of teachers and trainers seek CPD to benefit their learners.
Q2. Was there any CPD that you undertook that just didn’t work for you and can you say why?

All members were very clear about the type of CPD that does not work and the reasons why. Almost every group and/or individual began by describing organisation-led, generic, often mandatory training events. Nowhere else in this review has there been such unanimity of response.

It appears that in planning organisation-wide CPD, too often the principles of good teaching and learning are abandoned and what could be a valuable opportunity to learn away from day-to-day pressures is diminished. These were typically day (or longer) events designed with (sometimes acknowledged) good intentions by senior managers responding too often to external pressures and requirements.

At worst, staff were then “sheep-dipped” so that boxes could be ticked. “Box-ticking” was referred to frequently: “This generally means CPD not initiated by them but rather required by the organisation that appeared to be undertaken for the sole purpose of satisfying audit rather than improving or developing practice.”

Examples included: “Several staff who attended a compulsory session on using the [LSIS] Excellence Gateway found it was of little use because they were already using it and the training assumed no familiarity with it.” A group of ACL tutors attended training in the use of technology that was not available to them or their learners. There was frustration at the waste of their own time and scarce CPD resources in the many examples offered by members.

Poor delivery appears to compound the problems: day-long events with “six hours of screen presentation and almost nothing else”, for example. Health and safety training was used by several different groups to illustrate poor delivery, involving specialist companies deploying untrained staff who rely on presentation software and lecture:

“I’ve got a level 1 certificate but I can’t remember anything! Isn’t that awful?”

“In much mandatory training the question is rarely posed as to whether participants have understood or are able to transfer new knowledge to practice, even when assessment is part of the process … It is delivered in a way that generates surface learning and therefore recall of important detail can be difficult after time when it is needed.”

Sometimes the use of internal trained staff does not guarantee that training is well-designed and delivered if the individuals concerned are over-stretched in terms of their knowledge, skill or time.

Training that is not put to rapid use, even if well-delivered, is rapidly forgotten. This problem seems to be particularly prevalent after e-learning, when an online test simply affirms short-term memory but learning is not embedded. “The test was immediately after reading. I don’t think I could now get half the marks I achieved that day.”

Several other instances of ineffective, sometimes badly designed online programmes were offered. As the use of online CPD seems to be growing, this could become an increasing concern.
The lack of opportunity to reflect after training, alone or preferably with others, was identified as a barrier to effective CPD. One respondent noted that since longer-term evaluation of the impact of CPD is rarely systematically undertaken, it is hard to know what works and what does not.

Other problems were noted. External conferences seemed relatively unpopular, as they all too often did not meet expectations and the time and expense involved is increasingly difficult to find. Internal ‘marketing’ can be at fault too: there was recognition that mandatory events are not effectively explained, leading to resentment at what could be beneficial and even enjoyable training.

Another group recognised that organisation-wide events covering key topics can appear to offer value for money, but questioned whether they do when so much of it has little effect.

Two more groups noted that college-wide events can serve another underlying and valuable purpose, to build relationships across the organisation, but cautioned that this should be made explicit and should never override the relevance of the CPD on offer. One group summed up key requirements for CPD as “specific, timely, relevant and professionally delivered”.

Planning CPD

Q3. To what extent did you plan your CPD?

The seemingly simple question revealed a world of complexity. There were a number of differing interpretations of the word ‘plan’. One respondent asked, “Planning. Does that just mean thinking ahead?”

For some it meant activities planned by themselves, proactively, and where possible based on needs and interests they had identified. Others referred to planning by their organisation, even though they may have played little or no part in that planning or had limited freedom to select from a menu.

Some interpreted it as having an annual plan laid out, perhaps with very clear objectives, but did not usually indicate whether this was their own, their manager’s or their organisation’s plan, or a combination of these.

The question also revealed a range of definitions of CPD. Most participants focused upon events, courses and similar formal CPD when considering the question, despite the fact that earlier IFL reviews of CPD have highlighted the relative value of informal, usually personalised CPD. Several went on to point out that the informal, unplanned CPD that occurs as a result of reflection, even “happenstance” as some called it, was often the best CPD of all. Others noted that many teachers and trainers (and their managers) do not even classify as CPD the reflection and learning opportunities provided by peer review.

Focus group discussions presented a very mixed picture of planning that entails responding (in varying degrees of willingness) to an organisational set of priorities combined with a personalised approach based on either their own perceptions of what they need, their annual appraisals or, occasionally, a qualification they are pursuing.

Some focus groups noted the tension between individual and organisational needs, exacerbated by budget constraints, with organisational needs tending to come first, and four (of a total of 33 focus group meetings) complain of little freedom, the strongest expression of which was, “All participants felt their CPD was not planned but imposed”. Where the organisation’s ‘imposed’ CPD was seen as relevant – for example, based upon a thorough review of the organisation’s needs – or was learner-focused, there was less dissatisfaction.
In some focus groups, there was discussion of the role of informal, reflective and usually unplanned CPD. It was always described positively.

Examples were offered of thoughts in the middle of the night or snatched conversations with colleagues that led to action or to further enquiry, perhaps through reading and research or, increasingly, websites. Some brief reflective episodes were described as “sometimes more meaningful than a three-day course.”

This demonstrates that ‘unplanned’ in this sense is not a negative concept, though it often remains unrecorded.

The following quote from a local focus group leader seems to sum up the situation rather well: “This question has received a very mixed response. There is definitely some planning, which takes place at both an individual and organisational level. However, as in most instances, reality does not always match those plans. There are many variables that may influence this: funding, changes in priorities, not being able to access the appropriate or chosen training.”

Planning ahead of time is difficult but, despite that, teachers and trainers respond positively as needs emerge: “This sector is so fast-moving and responsive that many CPD needs emerge as the year progresses. What is significant is that the ad hoc and often self-directed can have the most impact on learning.”
Using technology to support CPD

Q4. To what extent did you use technology in your CPD?

This question produced a rich and, to a large extent, very encouraging set of responses. Though few directly answered the question ‘to what extent?”, reports gave the impression of extensive use and, where it was mentioned at all, increasing use. “We’ve all got so used to technology being part of the job,” reported one focus group and was endorsed by many more.

That does not guarantee, however, that all were pleased about this: “Some people would be happy to use online materials but others prefer working in collaborative groups and would resist using online options.” This statement represents a view expressed in several focus groups. The responses overall did not show a resistance to using technology, though there were examples; on balance, there were far more instances of positive, enthusiastic embracing of all that technology could offer.

Some discussion related to CPD undertaken to facilitate their use of technology in teaching and learning; some to its use in supporting CPD (online courses; Teachers TV; REfLECT, for example); some to its use in locating CPD opportunities and some referred to the use of technology in their own teaching, not in their CPD, using the interactive whiteboard, for example.

There were many instances of positive uses such as, “I use it to a surprising amount for a Luddite: online testing, case reviews, blog and actual work done online (from which I learned a huge amount), one podcast, which was a training session” plus several references to the use of REfLECT.

Of the many descriptions of training in the use of technology as a key element of their own CPD, the role of good Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS) and Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) programmes were singled out. An inspiring ‘blended learning module’ on this programme has evidently worked transformative wonders on many, including some experienced teachers unaccustomed to using technology:

“One member spoke of never having used interactive resources in class before the sessions. She went on to say it gave her the confidence to try new teaching methods and that technology had now become an ongoing part of her teaching. Others talked of having a new teaching toolkit to dip into and felt confident to embed activities using flip-cameras, interactive whiteboards, web-based document sharing and collaboration, a word-cloud generator and blogs. These members agreed that now they had used these first in a safe environment and had some success with them, they are encouraged to develop more and use to them with confidence in the classroom. They no longer see these as extra add-ons, but are starting to embed the use of technology.”

There were several other examples of often dramatic changes. One teacher discovered the rewards of using Twitter not just for herself but to inform learners of the latest developments in their subject, and now follows leading mathematicians to find the latest research and participate in discussion.

Numerous examples of creative uses of mobile devices in teaching and learning were recorded. These are powerful testimonies to the value of CPD and, in particular, the importance of peer support in developing technological skill and confidence.

Technology was used extensively in personal development and knowledge acquisition. Many used it in research: research for their teaching or research for qualifications they are undertaking, such as teaching qualifications, master’s degrees, doctorates and Open University distance learning programmes: “The internet is a godsend for research for CPD.”
Many read journals online to update their knowledge and used IT extensively in preparing teaching resources. Many teachers and trainers in the groups have learned how to use mobile digital devices (such as the Apple iPad® and iPhone®), video-sharing websites (such as YouTube) and other technology for educational purposes, and so have brought new interest into their classrooms.

But, as one focus group participant put it, “technology can be your friend or your enemy”.

Technology use in CPD is not without its problems and focus groups explored these too. The most frequently mentioned was poor-quality, badly designed online courses. Even when online courses were good, some teachers missed participating in discussion, and lack of equipment in some organisations, failure or unreliability, websites restricted or not allowed, inability to access equipment soon after training leading to loss of learning all created frustrations. So did lack of time to upload or to download resources, “I was given a free pen-drive of resources after one training session, but I’ve had no time to explore it.”

Frequent changes in technology, such as new interactive whiteboards, require time to adapt or even train again.

Many of the focus groups had mixed views of REfLECT. The core of the problem appeared to be insufficient training in its use, and although some participants did not find it easy to use, some extolled its virtues: “I think that the REfLECT tool makes you think about what knowledge you have got, what you have got from it, was it any good or not, what have you taken from it and it probably focuses me to think about what I have done.”

Despite some reference to problems, there is no doubt that the use of technology in CPD is becoming a day-to-day reality, just as it is in teaching and learning, for the great majority of teachers and trainers, who are increasingly using it and seem to be becoming comfortable with it.

One focus group’s summary is not untypical: “When compared to previous years’ CPD, all participants recognised an increase, either through acquiring IT skills themselves, use within teaching and learning, accessing CPD and reflecting on it ... Examples cited include: using voice recorder inserts on assignment drafts; creating virtual learning environments (VLEs) in collaboration with learners; using the VLE to gain learner feedback; using online modules and REfLECT. Doing lots of up-skilling, really loads ... it’s in most things we do now.”
Preferred strategies

Q5. What preferred strategies have you employed in your CPD?

In IfL’s 2010 report, Brilliant teaching and training in FE and skills: A guide to effective CPD for teachers, trainers and leaders, over 5,000 teachers and trainers identified the strategies that would most likely lead to effective CPD and impact on teaching and learning (see figure 1 opposite). The answers to the focus group question reflect the same broad preferences.

Reflective practice

All groups reported use of reflective practice as a preferred activity, but most were referring to reflecting upon their teaching and training, which may in turn lead to CPD, rather than upon their CPD experiences themselves.

One summary from a local focus group leader illustrates the response of the majority: “Few of the group said they felt they reflected after a formal CPD event, other than perhaps in a very informal and personal way, in their heads, briefly. However, all said they regularly reflect on their practice in the classroom, using a variety of methods from personally in their own minds to writing reflections on the evaluation section of their lesson plan.”

Reflection overall is a well-embedded practice, according to the IfL members: “I am constantly reflecting on practice with the support of colleagues as it’s a fundamental part of what we do in our profession.”

It was noted that it is particularly strong among those working towards professional qualifications (CTLLS, DTLLS and professional formation were all mentioned) and those who have recently completed such activities. This was supported by some who felt that REfLECT had supported them in the practice of reflecting upon CPD by providing both an expectation and a format for it.

However, more than one group noted that “There needs to be some interrogation of what reflection means”, indicating a sense of the need to be more critical in reflective practice.

Personalising teaching materials and online resources

In the research project, this activity was identified as the second approach with the most impact. The focus groups qualified this somewhat: “If that means taking resources from elsewhere and adapting them, then most of us do it.”

Personalising and professionalising their materials was a high priority for many members, although not always seen as a development activity. At least one group expressed some confusion about what the term means in relation to CPD, recognising that all resource preparation cannot readily be classified as CPD. One member gave an explicitly CPD-related example: “Some line managers produced ‘quick-help’ sheets to help staff accomplish tasks so that learners had personalised materials and session plans requiring individual target-setting.”

Collaborative learning

The third most important activity was also endorsed as vital for effective CPD in the focus groups. Collaborative learning with in-house teams was frequently used and, by some groups, endorsed as one of the most beneficial models of CPD. Though a few respondents were referring to collaborative working with colleagues, most offered examples of CPD, for example: peer observation and feedback, teaching and learning sets; team and group CPD activities in organisation-led CPD days, as well as “talking things through with colleagues in the staff room”. Of these, peer-observation was picked out a number of times as particularly beneficial.

Action learning, action research and involving learners in CPD

These three activities tended to be grouped together by participants as experimentation in practice and seen as important, but with varying degrees of use.

Respondents interpreted action learning in different ways, usually very loosely as “trying something new in the classroom”; “working together to resolve real challenges” or working in action-learning sets, but overall the focus groups were rather unsure of its application.
Action research had been used very effectively by many participants. In one organisation, all the in-service tutors were completing their DTLLS qualification and engaging in action research projects. The research findings were shared with the whole service through a conference event, with qualified tutors invited to share research findings, creating a CPD event in itself.

But others referred to action research undertaken as part of a formal qualification programme or personal research undertaken. Again, though, the term was widely interpreted. Most appeared to define it as, “trying something new, looking at what someone else has done and adapting it to your own learners.” There were some who spoke of a “fear-factor” in carrying out action-research, in case it might show something the organisation did not want.

However, almost every group reported on the prevalence and value of obtaining learner feedback and using it to improve teaching and learning and a vital part of CPD. The practice is evidently firmly established by most members in this survey, so much so that it appears to be routine. “How else would we learn to teach better if we didn’t ask the learners?”

In one organisation, a Teachers Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) encourages teachers to use new strategies with their learners and evaluate whether this improves understanding and learning. Student feedback played a part in the evaluation. In another example, a member noted the benefits of drawing on students to help him acquire new IT skills, since “students often know far more than we do.”

One teacher arranged joint CPD with his group to acquire new knowledge and skills that both they and he required. Another, unable to use whiteboards, received training but, still unconfident in using them with her learners, asked them to help her and give feedback. She believed that as well as improving her skill, this led to improvements in behaviour and learning.

What emerged from the focus groups was a growing understanding that CPD needs to be theorised in more detail as ‘professional learning’, since the benefits from using these different strategies provided deep learning and a real impact on learners and learning.

In one organisation, a Teachers Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) encourages teachers to use new strategies with their learners and evaluate whether this improves understanding and learning. Student feedback played a part in the evaluation. In another example, a member noted the benefits of drawing on students to help him acquire new IT skills, since “students often know far more than we do.”
CPD priorities for 2012

Q6. What are the three most important issues for you as you consider your CPD for 2012?

Members interpreted this question in two different ways. Many members, especially those completing the online individual questionnaire, used the opportunity to state those things they would personally like to do in the coming year, improving IT skills being referred to most frequently.

Others, mainly those in local or regional focus groups but also some individuals, identified issues that were important either to them or their sector, such as keeping up to date with curriculum change, or barriers to undertaking CPD, of which time was the most frequently identified.

The largest cluster of replies to this question centres on career development and employability. These respondents were fairly evenly divided between those in focus groups and individual questionnaire respondents. Many spoke of “uncertain times” and the need to prepare themselves for change, not least unemployment and the search for further work: “The more we do, the more we know; the more qualifications we have, the better.”

Others recognised the likelihood of being required to undertake new roles or teach new courses within their current employment for which they needed to prepare themselves. Some were currently unemployed: “... to regain employment in this sector will involve reviewing my current skills, developing new skills and gaining new experiences”; and “learning how to market an oldie!”

A group of respondents referred to imminent retirement and the need for either honing new skills in readiness for independent consultancy or simply making the transition to retirement.

Two questionnaire respondents were currently independent consultants and their descriptions of the ways they need to use CPD to prepare themselves for a highly flexible and rapidly changing work market offer insights into the breadth of retraining that perhaps some of those in stable employment may increasingly need to embrace. “Need to keep skills up to date and keep abreast of current issues by attending regional events, focus groups, etc ... Important to keep up to date with new technologies and further develop e-learning skills.”

Many members referred to the need to keep up to date, specifying a number of areas, of which information technology attracted much the greatest number of mentions – just over one third of individual questionnaire respondents included this in their replies.

Most members referred to improving their own skills, sometimes particular ones, such as “interactive whiteboards”; others wanted to help their learners use new technologies in their own learning.

Not surprisingly, keeping up to date with their subject knowledge or vocational updating – “retaining technical competence when removed from industry”, for example – was alluded to often, though reference to keeping up to date with wider curriculum changes was noted more frequently. Examples of this included changes in initial teacher training; the qualifications and credit framework (QCF), 14–19; Ofsted practices; and, more generally, the “new regulations and requirements” in the sector.

A significant number of references were made to the aspiration to become a better teacher and the actions planned to achieve this.

Though this was referred to in many focus groups, it was the individual respondents who specified their plans more precisely. Many wanted to develop strategies to “foster independent learning in their students”; “involve my learners more actively”; and “improve learner retention”, for example.

One summed it up thus: “I want to become an outstanding teacher”, and asked IfL to put up the criteria for being outstanding on the website and help members achieve it.

In one of the focus groups where being better teachers was reported as a goal of CPD, members of the college described the importance of challenge: “We’ve got new curricula and sets of data to be working with, so let’s explore new ways, be honest about it, let’s be a bit freer. I think it’s time to, maybe as a team, be even more open and challenge each other more.”
There were numerous other specific themes mentioned: gaining QTLS (several times); teaching on apprenticeships; foundation learning; first aid, to name but a few. Few used this opportunity to identify more personal goals, though two referred to their own studies for MA and PhD qualifications and one referred to undertaking educational research.

Though some focus group reports attempted to list the individual plans of group members, most did not and were more inclined to discuss and report wider issues.

Time was most frequently reported as the burning issue for teachers and trainers in the sector. Reference was made to it many times: “If we are looking at issues rather than topics ... it’s time ... it’s a huge issue ... finding time to do it, finding time to read, time management, finding time to reflect, doing something about your reflections ... having support.”

Linked to this were budget constraints and the impact on CPD opportunities: “How much you access CPD depends on organisational support and budgets”. Budgets for cover to leave classes and for conference and course fees appear to be diminishing and even disappearing, though this is not possible to quantify from the data. But teachers recognise that not all kinds of CPD should be given funded time, distinguishing between activities that lead to career enhancement, such as QTLS, and those required by the organisation, such as safeguarding.

In each regional focus group there was a proportion of members who had just been made redundant or who were about to be. The question of employability and keeping up to date was very much in the forefront of their minds.
Support from IfL

Q7. What would you like IfL to do to support your in your CPD for the coming year?

Members want two distinct types of support from IfL:

- first, practical, sometimes specific, actions
- second, what might be termed partnership working and support working with national bodies to lay optimal foundations for continued CPD.

The suggestions have been incorporated into, or were already reflected in, our plan for CPD support in 2012–13, opposite.

**Partnership work (Priority 1)**

A number of proposals were put for ways in which IfL could work with other national agencies and with employer bodies in particular to create an infrastructure to support CPD. Most of these focused on:

- raising the status of CPD
- demonstrating its key role
- providing funded time for it.

Some members suggested that as well as supporting CPD, IfL has a role to play in “future-gazing”, to help members prepare for change, and in wider policy development within the sector.

**Individual career support (Priority 2)**

Career support was most frequently requested, including information, advice and guidance for career planning, career coaching, and help to facilitate transition to other educational sectors. This reflected the uncertainty being experienced by many in the sector.

**Creation of directories and calendars of CPD opportunities (Priority 3)**

Support to facilitate the selection of external CPD ranked high: participants mentioned directories, calendars and similar listings of CPD and, possibly, some form or rating or accrediting programmes.

**Development and use of new media (Priority 4)**

Development of further education and skills focused media to support the development of resources and skills, such as a Teachers TV, Twitter for FE and similar, was a popular idea among some members.

Suggestions for the development of IfL’s website and REFLECT were also made.

**Themed and subject specific support requests (Priority 5)**

Further development of IfL’s regional support services was referred to frequently: participants mentioned opportunities for regional network meetings, particularly subject-specific ones, as well as capacity to offer support within individual institutions.

A variety of suggestions were offered for themed and subject-specific support that members would find useful.
IfL’s CPD priorities 2012–13

Priority 1: increase the impact of professional development activities

- Disseminate research findings on the kinds of CPD that are most effective and cost-effective.
- Support teachers and trainers to reflect on their practice with greater criticality and precision.
- Support the way in which the outcomes of teachers’ and trainers’ professional development activities are routinely shared, disseminated and reviewed.
- Develop models that can be used by teachers and trainers to measure the impact of activities on learners.
- Develop activities, resources and collaborative spaces that promote an understanding of professional learning and the benefits of learning networks.

Priority 2: increase the numbers of teachers and trainers with professional status and expertise in development

- Develop a module on CPD and the professional journey to enable teachers and trainers in initial teacher training to plan for gaining QTLS or ATLS.
- Provide regional and local support for increasing numbers of teachers and trainers undertaking professional formation.
- Provide a career framework and accompanying resources for teachers and trainers, from the new teacher to the seasoned professional.
- Provide opportunities and recognition of teacher educators through their work as peer reviewers of professional formation and CPD.

Priority 3: develop a recognised professional learning culture in the sector

- Provide regional, local and online resources and recognition for mentoring and collaborative practice among teachers and trainers.
- Provide resources and bursaries for sharing the results of action research on teaching and learning.
- Provide relevant and current research evidence that teachers can use to improve their own practice.
- Produce regular case studies from teachers in all parts of the sector as examples of effective practice.

Priority 4: promote emerging technologies through CPD

- Promote the effective use of REfLECT and mobile technology for planning, recording, reviewing and sharing CPD.
- Provide online communities for teachers and trainers in special interest groups.
- Promote the use of social media engagement for developing and sharing effective practice.
- Provide organisations with REfLECT Connect as a means to integrate individual learning spaces with institutional virtual learning environments (VLEs).

Priority 5: promote effective professional development in subject areas

- Provide access to resources and support in subject or vocational areas.
- Develop an evidence base in effective teaching and learning approaches in identified priority areas, such as science, technology, engineering and maths.
- Link teachers and trainers to professional bodies and associations relevant to their subject or vocational area.
- Signpost or provide opportunities for teachers and trainers to engage in peer review, work-shadowing and industrial placements.
Last words

The last words on CPD for 2010–11 remain with our members and summarise much of the discussion that has taken place over the last three months about the impact of CPD on teaching and learning:

The best moments [of CPD] are always with other people; it is significant that the ad hoc and often self-directed can have the most impact on learning.

It may sound as though much of what IfL members have said in terms of their own professional learning is just common sense and yet it is not surprising at all how close these ‘private theories’ of the teaching and learning strategies teachers and trainers prefer to experience themselves actually mirror the findings of research into effective education for adults and young learners. One of the most influential public theories has been the subject of 15 years’ extensive research by John Hattie into what actually makes for ‘visible’ and effective learning. His latest work expands on an evidence-based approach to learning and achievement, and he stresses the need for professional learning communities: “What is needed is more space for teachers to interpret the evidence about their effect on each student … this may require some major rethinking about teachers’ work.” 17

As the professional body for teachers and trainers in further education and skills, IfL has long advocated evidence-based practice and the explicit recognition of this through support for effective CPD. We suggest therefore that the conclusions of this review are clear for individuals and organisations alike:

- If the best moments are always found with others, then for maximum impact every teacher and trainer needs to discuss, critically reflect and co-construct their professional learning with colleagues.

- If the ad hoc and the self-directed gives rise to the most meaningful results, then the organisation needs to create a more expansive and less restrictive working environment so that learning at work itself is CPD. 18

- IfL as the professional body must continue its strategies to support communities of teachers and trainers to begin “evolving forms of mutual engagement”; “understanding and tuning a joint enterprise”; and “developing repertoires, styles and discourses”. 19

For the future, all of this suggests a need for professional networks that support communities of practice. It has been claimed by many researchers who see deliberate practice as the route to the acquisition of expert performance that over 10,000 hours of practice are needed to be able to do anything really well and that “nobody gets good without the work”. 20

It is also true that nobody stays at the level of expert teacher or trainer without continuing appropriate and focused professional development throughout their working lives.

I hope this review gives you some insights into the evolving nature of professional development and that it stimulates your own thinking, debate and work with your colleagues.

Dr Jean Kelly
Head of Professional Development

Appendix

References


Cordingley, P, 2010. Sauce for the Goose: learning entitlements that work for teachers as well as for their pupils. Coventry: CUREE.


Focus group questions

1. What was the most effective CPD that you undertook this year? What do you think the impact has been on your learners; your professional practice; your team, department or organisation; and how do you know?

2. Was there any CPD that you undertook that just didn’t work for you and can you say why?

3. To what extent did you plan your CPD this year?

4. To what extent did technology play a part in your CPD?

5. What preferred strategies have you employed in your CPD?:
   - Reflective practice
   - Collaborative learning
   - Personalising teaching materials
   - Involving learners
   - Action learning
   - Action research

6. What are the three most important issues for you as you consider your CPD for 2012?

7. What would you like IfL to do to support you in your CPD for the coming year?

Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>28/09/2011</td>
<td>Workshops focusing on CPD within a seminar to explore implications of the Wolf report, attended by approximately 60 members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25/10/2011</td>
<td>Focus groups with 22 students at the National Union of Students (NUS) conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14/11/2011</td>
<td>Seminar to discuss CPD with 20 students on the DTLLs programme, held at the Institute of Education (IoE).</td>
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Regional group meetings

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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>20/10/2011</td>
<td>North West and Yorkshire and Humberside region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

IfL would like to thank the 220 or so teachers and trainers who gave up their time to take part in our professional learning discussions, and the organisations they represent:

- Accrington and Rossendale College
- Artiepharrie Charity Ltd
- Babcock Training
- Barnet Borough Council
- Barnet College
- Barton Perveril College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Blackpool and The Fylde College
- Bournemouth Adult Learning
- City and Islington College
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Community Education Lewisham
- Coventry City Council
- Croydon College
- Devon Adult and Community Learning
- ESG Group, Orient Training
- Essex County Council
- Excel College London
- Farnborough College of Technology
- First Rung Limited
- Forest Gate Learning Centre
- HMP Dovegate
- HMS Raleigh
- Huntingdonshire Regional College
- JGA Group
- Jigsaw Training
- Kingston Maurward College
- Lambeth College
- Learning First
- Learning Works
- Lowestoft College
- Morley College
- Myrrh Education and Training
- National Construction College Main
- National Retired Teachers Association
- Newcastle College
- Newham Borough Council
- Newham College
- Newham Community Employment Project Limited
- North Tyneside Council
- Northumberland Community Development
- Protocol National
- Redbridge College
- Richmond Adult Community College
- Richmond upon Thames College
- Skills Funding Agency
- South Leicestershire College
- South Staffordshire College
- South Thames College
- South Tyneside College
- Southgate College
- Southwark Council
- Stephenson College
- SW Durham Training Ltd
- Talent Training UK LLP
- Taunton and Somerset NHS
- The College of West Anglia
- The Manchester College
- The Skills and Development Agency
- The TEE Technical Training Group
- University College London
- University of Greenwich
- Walford and North Shropshire College
- Walsall Adult and Community College
- West Lancashire College
- West Midlands Fire and Rescue
- Wigan Community Learning
- Wiltshire and Somerset Colleges’ Partnership Ltd
- Winstanley College
- Wolverhampton College
- Writtle College

Focus group video

A short film was made of the focus group meeting held at the British Library.

If you are viewing the interactive PDF of this document, you can click on the video button opposite to view Putting professionalism in your hands. It is also available at http://youtu.be/h4IQ2p158q4
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