

ATL ADVICE



Taking Ownership of Your CPD in FE

This factsheet sets out the ways members can argue for, and develop, adequate CPD for teaching and educational professionals.

ATL believes professionals working in the field of education need to have time and space to facilitate their professional practice, to share ideas and develop a community of practice. Whether regulated or not, FE lecturers and support staff have not had enough high-quality CPD provided for them. It is time for you to take control of your CPD.

There are no quick and easy ways to establish effective CPD, particularly in light of the constraints around time and cost. It would appear to be even harder to develop sustainable communities of practice around CPD, but there are steps that can be taken that will help members embed communities of professional interest and cultivate good practice.

Putting it into practice

In developing a community of practice that is based on FE lecturer practice and challenges, a good starting point is to develop a shared sense of professional practice that goes beyond individual, team, and college agendas.

Such practices may already be evident, of course, in local research groups or team meetings. If so, they facilitate deeper and more insightful inquiry that belongs to the character of professional practice as professionals discuss and explore new solutions to their current challenges or ambitions. One thing constraining this type of expansive exploration and 'ownership' of professional development narratives is the emphasis on 'efficiency' and its impact on workload (more work and less time to do it).

What is more, all too often the only serious discussions and solutions around teaching and learning are dealt with through coercive college procedures. For example, current pedagogic problems are treated as individual 'performance' issues and recourse is often made to

industrial procedures that contain definitions of 'capability' and 'competency'. What may be a pedagogic problem ends up as a disciplinary problem.

By engaging in wider forms of teaching and learning inquiry (such as pedagogy and curriculum design or assessment methods) a community of professionals can begin developing a shared understanding of issues. They could then present the teaching and learning perspective more coherently and visibly than what is now currently done at individual performance level. Or, indeed, at local negotiating level when classes and whole programmes are being cut.

By focusing on teaching and learning issues, such a community of practice can provide a professional voice within an educational environment. It is very odd that a specialist sector, such as education and training, does not have its own local experts on traditions, cultures and pedagogy who give voice to ongoing inquiry in each workplace.

Other positive outcomes of developing a community include the development of a 'professional practitioner' voice and the accumulation of shared understanding, which can provide an authoritative viewpoint when there are proposed changes to the curriculum, new roles and restructuring, or to supporting students. In this light, a separate 'teacher and learner interest group' could foster such a community of practice.

ATL believes there is mutual benefit in drawing on best professional practice and experience. While trade unions are the best stakeholders to support staff interests in negotiations, it is also for the staff themselves, via professional practice, to posit evidence-based solutions to local challenges or to pedagogic concerns.

Establishing a community of practice

Once a teacher interest group becomes established and is articulating the concerns of professionals, its goal should be to develop a community of practice to help staff take control of their CPD, potentially working alongside the trade union union learning rep (ULR) where appropriate. ULRs specialise in advising and supporting members with their continuing personal and professional development. They work closely with college members, wider staff and management to identify ways to improve access to and quality of current CPD, as well as sourcing new opportunities for members.

Below are a few things ATL believes will help you and your colleagues to realise this goal.

Is your college's model of learning expansive or restrictive?

A model of workplace learning and practice has been developed by Professors Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller that describes a continuum of practices that is evident in any workplace. At one end of this continuum are 'expansive' practices and, at the other 'restrictive' practices. It is a continuum because you are most likely to find a workplace containing a number of 'expansive' and 'restrictive' indicators in different areas or policies.

Expansive practices are those that facilitate and support individual and professional development. For example, access to learning and training opportunities; the quality of CPD; legitimate and fair access to CPD; and a voice in the development of opportunities. Such practices and processes will be visible and obvious to those in the workplace.

Restrictive practices are those that relate specifically to the job at hand or to mandatory regulations and guidelines. In short, they are necessary, immediate and are not aligned to personal or professional development as such. They are practices needed by the organisation for internal or external policy requirements. Hence they are directed by the employer and often have short-term objectives.

| Elements of organisation's learning environment | Examples of practices | Expansive indicators | Restrictive indicators |
|---|--|--|--|
| Goals and relationships for learning | FE ITT; CPD; mentoring; coaching | Learning agreement; ULR; transparent and accessible CPD model | Ad hoc informal arrangements; mandatory CPD |
| Knowledge and practice transfer | Appraisal; research; CPD events; college SAR and TLOS | Strongly framed by all staff; co-ownership of teaching and learning issues | Weakly framed by staff, shaped by contractual duties |
| Collective goals | SMT; team meetings; teacher interest groups; staffroom | Visible community of practice: in places, roles and resources | Mainly invisible or subordinate to industrial relations and HR assumptions |

Legitimacy and voice = agency

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has produced professional standards that advocate reflective practice, collaboration with colleagues, and, consequently, developing pedagogic practice.

There are also projects, again by the ETF, on practitioner research. So the space for professional dialogue and practice is there, the issue is to fill this space with a voice by professionals for professionals so FE professionals can regain their sense of 'agency'.

A teacher interest group in practice

A teacher interest group could begin to focus its activities by first meeting informally and beginning to piece together local inquiry into teaching and learning. This could initially be with the support of teacher training from the college (or from a local university).

Once there are regular meetings and there is an understanding of goals, the group can then map sources of college and wider support; this could be through personnel who have expertise or influence,

collaborative opportunities with other institutions or access to funding/project work.

Initially, the group could aim for influence on teaching and learning matters by developing opinion pieces (possibly a group newsletter would be appropriate); inquiry around national or local consultations; and participation in CPD events (ATL supports learning and development events at branch and college levels).

The group could then support the ULR to secure a learning agreement with the college and thereby formalise emerging good practice (see www.atl.org.uk/ulr for more details on the role of a ULR and a model learning agreement), perhaps by establishing a forum (see below).

A forum for discussing staff CPD with the college

The group could, over time, also feed into supporting and developing teaching and learning observation models (see ATL factsheet *Lesson Observations in FE Colleges* at www.atl.org.uk/factsheets) and help with evaluation of learner experiences and needs. Finally, you could liaise with external groups and networks (professional bodies, employers, universities, and charities) to further the community of practice and network resources.

While such activities would be voluntary (and, perhaps, some would always remain so) the group's growing impact could further develop professional expertise and practice in the workplace by fostering a collegiate and professional ethos that epitomises the most successful educational and training workplaces.

In conclusion, taking ownership of your CPD as outlined above can bring practitioners more opportunities, a voice and esteem, while raising the professional ethos in the workplace so staff feel better about their work and professional agency. The employer benefits because staff who feel better about their work do better, more innovative work.

Contact

If you would like help setting up such a group or would like ATL to visit the college to talk to members or management about this way of working, contact Norman Crowther, the national official for post-16 education, at ncrowther@atl.org.uk.



Need advice?

Your first point of contact is the ATL rep in your school/college. Your local ATL branch/district is also available to help, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on 020 7930 6441, email info@atl.org.uk. Don't forget there's lots more advice on ATL's website at www.atl.org.uk.

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