

BRIEFING

NAHT roundtable on continuous professional development

The Department for Education (DfE) has for some time been considering a consultation on the continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers, including ideas about significant policy changes in this area. As this is such an important topic for school leaders, NAHT decided to host a roundtable debate with a panel of CPD experts to discuss the issues.

The event, on 12 September 2014, was attended by:

David Weston of the Teacher Development Trust
Heath Monk of Future Leaders
Nansi Ellis of ATL
Paul Crisp of CUREE
Professor John Howson
Stephen Exley of TES
Toby Greany of the Institute of Education (IoE)
Gail Larkin, NAHT president
Russell Hobby, NAHT General Secretary
Kathryn James, NAHT Director of Education
Louis Coiffait, NAHT Edge Chief Executive Officer
Siôn Humphreys, NAHT Policy Advisor
Valentine Mulholland, NAHT Policy Advisor
Steven George, NAHT Head of Press and Media

The report below outlines the key areas of debate and contains a summary of points on which a consensus was reached.

Key areas of debate

1. International comparisons

The topic of international comparisons was introduced by Nansi Ellis. Comparisons show that while teachers in England report having more time for CPD than most other countries, it is far less structured and less likely to lead to a formal qualification.

The panel discussed the question of how to balance formal structured learning with the value of ongoing peer learning. While the importance of teachers actively undertaking their own learning was recognised, it was considered important to understand how formal qualifications, from QTS to leadership qualifications, align with this learning.

Louis Coiffait of NAHT Edge pointed out that this is particularly important for workforce mobility, allowing teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders to learn from, and move beyond, more than one school.

It was agreed that to establish an effective balance between these different forms of learning a shared definition of CPD, and of what constitutes 'quality' CPD and the outcomes it can produce, is needed. This led to the following discussion on the definition of quality CPD.

2. Defining quality CPD

David Weston began the debate by suggesting that CPD has two main outcomes: to benefit students and to ensure that teachers are developing their practice within the profession.

The panel agreed these points and additionally identified that to address teacher retention and support the 'pipeline' of recruitment, quality CPD must also meet the needs of both their institution and of the wider system.

Professor John Howson stressed the importance of allowing teachers to go on to other professions and return to the classroom. It was agreed that this connected with allowing teachers to thrive and that it is vital to have a system which accommodates those returning to the profession or entering it from a different career.

3. Characteristics of effective CPD

Having identified the overarching aims of effective CPD, the panel proceeded to discuss its more precise characteristics. The following list was developed by CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education). Presented by Paul Crisp of CUREE, the panel widely agreed the specifications for effective CPD:

- It prioritises valued outcomes for learners above all else
- It is a collaborative process
- It allows participants to exercise a degree of choice in its formulation
- It draws down the appropriate amount of specialist expertise
- It is sustained over a long period of time (usually deemed to be at least 10 weeks and/or 30 hours over a year)
- It includes opportunities to both practice and apply learning
- It draws on evidence of changes in practice.

In addition to the above, discussion returned to the importance of embedding ongoing self-led development within more formal structures. A recent NAHT member survey showed an enthusiasm for self-directed learning, however the panel agreed that for this to be effective, teachers must be supported to develop the necessary skills, such as how to use evidence-based research in their own practice.

4. The role of school leaders

Toby Greany of the Institute of Education (IoE) introduced the question of how school leaders engage with the large number of training providers and identify the pathways needed in their own schools. This task is central to ensuring that CPD meets the needs of individual institutions.

It was agreed that school leaders have a crucial role to play in understanding what constitutes good professional development and how to support and encourage their staff in undertaking it, as well as undertaking it themselves.

There was wide concern that if provision is to be coordinated at school level, many school leaders may not have the experience to identify training needs or to know what outstanding teacher development looks like. Much of what is called CPD in schools is in fact just communicating information to comply with the latest regulatory framework or about school policies and approaches, which is necessary but does not really represent CPD. The recent volume, variety and velocity of government-driven change is skewing the balance and in order to redress this, it is important to establish an understanding of the role and nature of effective teacher CPD among school leaders. This is in itself also an important part of a school leader's CPD.

5. Making time for CPD

There was consensus that often what is described as CPD in schools, particularly during inset days, is in fact compliance training or information sharing. Heath Monk of Future Leaders posed the question of how schools can create time over and above these activities for real CPD despite limited time and money and within the barriers of the structure of the school day.

The usefulness of the current inset structure was discussed. There was consensus that the inset concept and even twilight sessions can work against true professional development. However it was agreed that it would not be useful to remove this entitlement but rather to change school practice around these days to accommodate an understanding of the need to separate time used for longer-term professional development and time used for more immediate, institutional purposes.

6. Entitlement for CPD

In response to a clear need for more dedicated development time, Russell Hobby of NAHT introduced the topic of entitlement for CPD and how this can be secured. Different models of entitlement were discussed, such as those used by Further or Higher Education institutions, which give individuals more freedom to determine how their development time is used.

It was recognised that for the entitlement to meet the needs of both the individual and the wider system, complete autonomy would not be successful. Additionally, teachers should be supported to identify the development they need. There was further

concern that the accountability system may be preventing innovative practice in some cases, which would not be improved by enforcing a formal entitlement.

Due to the concerns outlined above, there was reluctance to create a formal entitlement. There was also reluctance to create an obligation that would require CPD to support teacher accreditation; an optional certification process was considered more likely to be successful.

The emphasis returned to the role of the school leader in guaranteeing that all staff have access to quality CPD. David Weston suggested that while we should aspire for a CPD entitlement in five years' time, the first priority is to establish quality CPD by making current practice more visible and helping those schools who are doing too little.

7. Core body of knowledge

The majority of professional knowledge was seen to be subject and/or phase dependent. Paul Crisp stated that the core body of knowledge can be described as a series of overlapping domains; a small set will be generic and apply to all circumstances, with separate overlaps applying to certain phases and subjects.

There was agreement that there is no clarity over the body of knowledge that CPD is working to address in teaching. Subject and phase-specific knowledge is central and must be continually updated.

Conclusions

Quality CPD can be defined as: professional learning that has a positive impact on student outcomes and allows teachers to thrive, while at the same time supporting the needs of their institution and the wider system.

The key characteristics of **effective CPD** are:

- It prioritises valued outcomes for learners above all else
- It is a collaborative process
- It allows participants to exercise a degree of choice in its formulation
- It draws down the appropriate amount of specialist expertise
- It is sustained over a long period of time (usually deemed to be at least 10 weeks and/or 30 hours over a year)
- It includes opportunities to practise, and apply learning
- It draws on evidence of changes in practice
- Structured learning assists and connects with on-going self-development.

School leaders have a critical part to play in both ensuring their staff can access quality professional development and influencing the culture of the school to support and encourage on-going learning. The CPD of school leaders themselves must help them improve how they perform this vital function.

School practice around **inset days** needs to embed an understanding of the separation between development time and time used for management purposes; both are necessary for schools but it must be made clear that sharing information alone does not constitute quality CPD.

While a **formal entitlement to CPD** is aspirational, it is necessary to first establish widespread quality CPD. Current practice should be made more visible and assistance given to schools doing too little.

There is no **core body of knowledge** that CPD is working to address in teaching. Subject and phase-specific knowledge is central and must be continually updated.

Outcomes

Dissemination of findings

This report will be shared with the roundtable participants and members of both NAHT and NAHT Edge. The debate will inform NAHT's response to the consultation proposed by DfE and will be shared directly with the department.

Stephen Exley has written an article on the debate which can be found at: <http://news.tes.co.uk/b/news/2014/09/15/inset-days-39-universally-reviled-39-by-teachers-experts-warn.aspx>.

Further action

The Teacher Development Trust, IoE, CUREE and Durham University are carrying out a meta-analysis of what good CPD looks like and what currently does and does not work. NAHT and NAHT Edge will be engaging with this project.