

Developing a flexible approach to Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development for the Adult and Community Learning sector: a case for collaboration

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Abstract

The diversity of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision and the particular nature of its workforce are important elements in any deliberation around the planning, access to and take-up of professional development of ACL teaching staff. One of the key goals of the LONCETT (London Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training) ACL project has been to present evidence-based ways forward in relation to the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs of tutors. The LONCETT research has been conceived as an opportunity to record the perspectives of key players in the professional development of ACL tutors. This paper identifies the key barriers to professionalising staff in this part of the Learning and Skills Sector (LSS). It explores the potential of collaborative approaches between teacher training providers and learning providers to ensure appropriate and accessible professional development for the sector's workforce.

Key words

Adult and Community Learning; Initial Teacher Training; Continuing Professional Development; Collaboration.

Introduction

LONCETT's objectives are to expand access and improve recruitment and induction to ITT, to increase emphasis upon specialist pedagogies in ITT and CPD, to improve specialist mentoring and workplace support and to foster and sustain teacher education communities across London. The LONCETT ACL strand focuses on these issues as they impact on ACL. The strand is led by City Lit, in partnership with ACL providers from local authorities, colleges and specialist adult colleges in the LONCETT area, and is supported by the Institute of Education, London. The research and projects reported here took place over two years between September 2007 and June 2009.

In year one, the ACL project focused on the ITT and CPD needs of teachers in the ACL sector and identified barriers to training in the sector. From this base, an investigation into the potential for collaboration in the planning and delivery of ITT and CPD across ACL providers in London was carried out over the second year. This paper summarises the findings of the research carried out and presents a case for 'collaboration' as a fitting response to the current regulatory reforms in the Lifelong LSS.

Context for the research

The area of provision that can be defined as Adult and Community Learning is generally contested (Hunter, 2005) and ACL in London is no exception. Unlike other parts of the education and training system in England, ACL cannot solely be defined in terms of its management, organisation and/or provision.

Briefly, the organisation and management of ACL may be formal and structured with a defined and set curriculum or, conversely, provision may be described as negotiated non-formal or informal learning (Hunter, 2005). The location of learning reflects the diversity of funding and provision, with settings as diverse as Adult and Community Education colleges, Further Education and/or Higher Education providers, local education authorities, and smaller community settings. Irrespective of funding source or location, ACL provision has an acknowledged history of attempting to respond flexibly to disparate local learning needs – perhaps not so adequately served by other Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded provision (Hulin and Lahiff, 2009).

Given the difficulty faced in summarising the ACL sector, it is perhaps not surprising that presenting any comprehensive data on the ACL workforce is equally challenging. For instance, a recent LLUK pilot study collecting data in relation to ACL (Jones, 2007) found response rates from ACL to be so low that no reliable conclusions could be made. Significantly, only 14.5 percent of the sample responses could provide *any data* on qualifications held by staff in the sector.

Despite the paucity of workforce data held nationally, it can be asserted that the ACL workforce in London, like elsewhere, relies heavily on part-time, particularly hourly-paid, staff. In their review of the part-time workforce in the LSS, Hillier and Jameson (2004) confirm that many ACL providers employ very few full-time staff at all, in contrast to a very high proportion of hourly-paid staff. Other characteristics of the workforce identified by Hillier and Jameson worth highlighting here include the fact that ACL staff are much more likely than other LSS staff to work for more than one institution.

The advantages of a flexible part-time workforce for ACL are generally acknowledged but an overwhelmingly part-time workforce does present specific challenges - both in terms of staff workloads and, particularly, when planning for staff development and training. It is this latter concern i.e. planning for workforce-appropriate staff development and training in a changing policy context, which has provided the backdrop to the project reported here.

To summarise, ACL in London, as elsewhere, can be characterised by its complexity: the range of providers; its organisational structure; the shape, form and management of curricula and the diversity of provision. It is not therefore unrealistic to anticipate that the needs of the workforce will be diverse and meeting those needs challenging for all concerned.

Responding to requirements

A key theme of the LONCETT ACL strand has been to consider ways in which the recent reforms to ITT and CPD requirements are impacting on the ACL sector, and, following on from this, how ITT and CPD opportunities can be made more accessible and appropriate for this predominantly part-time workforce. The purpose of year one of the research has therefore been:

- to identify the key access issues for tutors and employers for ITT and CPD
- to identify the distinctive nature of ITT provision for ACL.

The second year of the LONCETT ACL strand set out to explore practical outcomes based on recommendations from the initial 2007/08 research. Its two main themes have therefore been:

- to research and develop a series of illustrative case studies or guidelines for effective staff development planning for ITT and CPD
- to investigate and develop collaborative approaches for ITT and CPD.

Three research questions framed the project's development:

- What have ACL organisations been doing to respond to the new regulatory requirements and to meet staff needs?
- How can ACL providers work collaboratively to plan and deliver ITT and CPD?
- What factors are critical to successful collaboration?

The research has been conceived as an opportunity to record the perspectives of key players in the initial and professional development of ACL tutors, as well as ensuring that the 'voice of the ACL tutor' is heard (Hulin and Lahiff, 2009). The research has provided an opportunity to generate primary data from the sector and to understand the lived experiences of practitioners in ACL. As such a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, research design was developed.

Three main sample groups were identified to provide primary data in year one. Their respective perspectives were seen as central to developing an understanding of barriers to accessing current training provision and in identifying future training needs. The identification of the sample groups ensured that opportunities to triangulate the findings generated from the sample were embedded into the research design. The three sample groups were:

- nine ACL providers: the providers were selected to reflect the range of ACL providers in the LONCETT area and can be seen to present '*A Strategic View*'
- 13 teacher trainers: those currently involved in the training of ACL staff, presenting '*A Training View*'
- 41 ACL (trainee) tutors presenting '*A Personal View*' (Hulin and Lahiff, 2009: p. 11)

A combination of semi-structured, one-to-one interviews and focus groups was chosen to gather perceptions from the sample groups identified above. These approaches were chosen as they were seen to provide the most appropriate tool to 'delve deeper' into the experiences and knowledge of the sample groups.

Findings from the first phase of the research are detailed in Hulin and Lahiff (2009). The major barriers to accessing training identified by the trainee tutors were time, finance, employer support, and access to information and advice on training. Time to commit to gaining full Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status was identified as a particularly important variable. This is a significant finding for the ACL sector, given its heavy reliance on part-time tutors who are 'industry specialists' - many of whom have their main career outside teaching.

The findings endorsed conclusions reached more than ten years earlier by others, including Harvey (1995). Harvey's conclusions highlighted a strong relationship between 'progression' (towards a full teaching qualification) and professional identity. Where teaching was seen as 'peripheral to life' there was less likelihood of progression beyond a minimum level of training. Whilst time and opportunity, rather than a lack of 'commitment' to the subject or to learners, were key variables in the LONCETT research, findings confirmed that an individual teacher's perception of him/herself as *another professional*, rather than as *a teacher*, affects the aspiration to gain 'full' QTLS or 'Associate' Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS) status.

Apart from the significance of professional identity, other principal barriers to accessing training have changed little from those identified by Graham et al (1982) and confirmed in smaller-scale studies in the period up to 2001 (Corder, 1993; Harvey, 1995). In strategic terms, the centrality and complexity of the part-time workforce in ACL influences how organisations plan the development of their staff and, equally, how the workforce access professional development. The flexibility and diversity of provision in the ACL sector demands a flexible and diverse workforce. The workforce, in turn, demands a flexible response from professional development providers that meets individual needs, as well as the needs of organisations.

With respect to the providers, findings indicated that the ability to both plan and resource staff development were central concerns. The reforms were seen as complex and lacking in clarity and effective information and advice for both teachers and their employers was seen to be fundamental to effective planning. The research confirmed that, confronted with the new

policy agenda and associated regulatory requirements, organisations face new challenges in developing strategies to plan, finance and resource staff development appropriately.

In keeping with this finding, and in response to feedback from partners, the LONCETT ACL project moved onto collect examples of organisational practice in relation to planning for initial training and professional development. With the intention of providing illustrative case studies, interviews were held with managers from eight of the ACL sample providers in year two of the project. Data from the interviews demonstrates that providers who had developed successful workforce development strategies adopted a differentiated approach in setting qualification expectations for different teaching roles. For example, in one case study organisation, there was an expectation that sessional tutors teaching non-accredited classes would work towards the ATLS status whilst those with a fuller curriculum responsibility and/or working on accredited or Skills for Life classes would work towards the full QTLS. To achieve this, the organisation held comprehensive data on staff qualifications and individual teacher roles and arrived at a clear statement of qualification expectations. They also made explicit the support and training they would provide for the individual teacher (Hulin, 2009b).

In contrast, there were other ACL organisations that were still unclear about how the reforms affected staff. For instance, there was confusion around the appropriateness of each of the relevant qualifications - Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) or Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS). Given the nature of its workforce, the application of the distinction between the roles (as described by LLUK) became a real challenge for these ACL organisations.

Most organisations felt that ATLS and CTLLS were the most appropriate for those sessional staff teaching non-accredited classes, but were cautious in applying their interpretation. If it transpired that all sessional staff were actually required to gain the full DTLLS, organisations were very concerned that these staff would, reluctantly, give up their teaching rather than qualify to diploma level. Indeed, the reaction of current staff to the possibility of a commitment to diploma level qualification, led management to believe that it would be extremely difficult to recruit and retain sessional teachers at all. Managers were equally concerned that such a requirement would have a significant impact on staff turnover and, as a consequence, learning provision would shrink considerably. It was anticipated that 'an unintended consequence' of an attempt to 'professionalise' the workforce would be a potential shortfall in the number and range of current practitioners who are 'practising professionals'. This was seen as particularly crucial to learning and teaching quality - given that the findings from various inspections had typically identified the currency of practitioner-teachers as one of the key strengths of such organisations (Hulin and Lahiff, 2009).

The research therefore signalled the need for flexible training routes that were clear and related to the tutor's starting point. The role that employers have in professionalising the workforce was also confirmed. However, employers need support if they are to respond appropriately to the needs of their staff, and some managers were also anxious about their capacity to respond to the regulations for the large number of part-time staff. As one interviewee remarked, *"it costs just as much to develop part-time staff as it does a full-timer and we have 800 part-timers!"*

Notwithstanding these concerns and the substantial issues to be overcome, many of the trainee teachers and employers involved in the 2007/08 research were confident that if a more 'flexible' delivery was planned - to include differentiated entry points and blended learning modules for example - then the route to initial training and professional development would offer more accessibility. For instance, some of the larger employers interviewed had indeed devised substantial CPD programmes over the years to cover essential aspects of the professional role. However these programmes were often menu driven and set apart from ITT and frequently these CPD programmes were simply not accessible to staff from smaller organisations, given constraints of timetables, travel times to other institutions and so on.

Research from year one demonstrated that, given the policy context, the opportunity to reshape provision around a more flexible offer and based on an improved partnership between ACL and teacher training providers should be taken. The willingness to develop and engage in such a collaborative opportunity was also evidenced.

Potential for collaboration in planning and delivery of ITT and CPD

The research on access to training (Hulin and Lahiff, 2009) and the broader picture gleaned from the research with providers for the illustrative case studies (Hulin, 2009b), established that a flexible approach to ITT and CPD is essential to meet the needs of a diverse and disparate workforce. Year two project aims were therefore confirmed as:

- to identify factors that contribute to or inhibit successful collaboration for ITT and CPD
- to confirm the feasibility of developing a structured CPD framework for the four Specially Designated Institutions (SDIs)¹
- to consider a framework through which a collaborative approach to CPD for the four SDIs could be delivered
- to identify credit possibilities for CPD modules in the framework

¹These institutions, amongst others, were given protected status as SDIs (Specially Designated Institutions) following the break-up of the Inner London Education Authority in 1990, and the Introduction of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992. The Government, was 'abjured' from doing anything that would 'damage the distinctness of their offerings' (Times Higher Education, 24 Aug 07). SDIs are unique in receiving LSC funding on the same basis as Further Education colleges.

- to identify barriers to future collaboration in the delivery of CPD among the four SDIs.

To help frame the generation of primary data, a literature review was conducted. The review identified that Cox (2005) had conducted one of the most significant and far-reaching investigations into good practice transfer in the LSS for the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA). Building on earlier research by Fielding et al (2005) in the school sector, Cox, using case study examples taken from across the LSS, draws on different models of good practice sharing and identifies the main critical success factors for the transfer of good practice in the post-16 sector. These factors are:

- confidence in the source of the practice
- reciprocity and parity of status between the participants
- sharing as an active learning process
- leadership and management of change
- conducting an impact assessment
- recognising barriers to development (Hulin, 2009a: p. 6).

In identifying these factors, Cox also drew upon an interesting analytic distinction between the practices and processes he had recorded. For Cox, *collaborative sharing* arrangements were described as those where the relationships developed because providers chose to participate in good practice sharing for mutual or competitive advantage and are typified by a *shared commitment to achieving the agreed outcomes*. Alternatively, where providers choose voluntarily to participate in good practice sharing as *an expression of shared professional values* and as a contribution to a common good, rather than necessarily an agreed set of outcomes, this is described as *collegiate sharing*. Insights from the work of Cox (2005) and Fielding (2005) were helpful in both the research design and in analysing data generated.

To address the first two aims of the second year research, a case study approach was adopted. Each of the four case study institutions is a SDI with a high proportion of non-formal education. These four providers represented 40,000 learners, 77,000 enrolments and over 1,500 teachers. Adopting a qualitative research approach, interviews were conducted with key personnel involved in the ITT and CPD of staff at four SDIs.

The findings from the interviews evidenced that strong collaborative practices have not only been established across the four SDIs, but also that there was a clear commitment to continue working together. The factors critical to successful collaboration identified by Cox (2005), above, were evidenced across the four SDIs. There was, in particular, the recognition that strong senior management support lay at the heart of successful collaboration (Hulin, 2009a).

In analysing the interview data, it was interesting to note that the analytic distinction between *collaborative sharing* arrangements and *collegiate sharing arrangements* that Cox (2005) employed had some currency. For instance:

*“The impact on ongoing practice has been substantial we are able to say: this is how we ensure RARPA is rigorous. We are not just making it up. We are working **collaboratively** and using peer reviews to contribute – this has been very useful. An important aim this academic year for the SDIs Vice Principals has been to try and sort this out.”*

(Vice Principal, College A; emphasis added)

Collaboration was also seen as offering the potential for a more cost-efficient way for the employers to ensure that the professional development of staff is linked closely to the organisation’s quality improvement programmes. At the same time, it offered potential to meet the individual needs of staff.

It is anticipated that further analysis of the data will provide an additional opportunity to consider Cox’s interesting conceptual distinction. At the current stage of analysis, the term ‘collaboration’ is used as a generic descriptor.

In addition to the findings with respect to collaborative practice, the research also established that ITT and CPD should not be thought of as two separate activities, but need to be formally linked so that the latter builds explicitly on the former. That is, the development needs of teachers should be prioritised - whether framed as ITT or CPD. Additionally, to maximise the impact of development activities, there needs to be a more synchronous approach to planning these activities. As one college manager outlined:

“I am keen to see the link between ITT and our staff development programme made stronger. We have concentrated on getting our heads around the new legislation but now we are clearer we see an urgent need to get them working together more.”

(Vice Principal, College A)

The research project recommendations suggest that a collaborative approach to providing non-accredited in-house CPD should incorporate common quality assurance procedures with centrally developed guidelines and documentation. This would enable partners to fulfil their roles in the quality assurance of provision and maximise potential for enhancing CPD as part of an APEL and/or academic credit system. It would also strengthen ITT and CPD links.

Turning attention to the consideration of a framework in which to place ITT and CPD, there was not only potential but also considerable interest in developing a collaborative approach to the planning and provision of an integrated programme of ITT and CPD. It was felt that a high quality flexible programme of professional development would certainly offer increased access opportunities to the larger numbers of part-time teachers, many of whom work for more than one employer in the sector. However there were practical issues to be faced:

"We often bear the brunt of the costs where a part-timer works across a number of institutions because other organisations do not have the resources to develop their staff. There are many teachers who work across the four organisations and a proportionate responsibility needs to be developed."

(Staff Development Officer, College A)

In response to both the findings from the first year and to respond to the needs of staff teaching in the four SDIs and other ACL contexts, two pilot optional modules - Equality and Diversity and Assessment (RARPA)² - were developed in 2008/09. Both modules were offered as part of the current ITT certificate programme and have therefore provided both accredited ITT and non-accredited CPD. Evaluation of these pilots is ongoing. Results will inform the planning of future optional accredited ITT modules and non-accredited CPD.

The main recommendation from the second year of the project, building on the already successful approach to collaboration across the organisations, is to establish a framework for collaboration across ITT and CPD. The aim is to enhance collaborative working and embed flexibility into the offer for all staff. Whilst the development of the framework is ongoing, it will include such things as an agreed definition of roles for associate and full teaching role across all SDIs, and coordinated training programme for ITT including the development and piloting blended learning modules. As a starting point for development, the potential for a central professional development unit for the four SDIs will be explored. This is likely to include a central planning group to agree priorities for collaborative CPD programme, with membership to include staff development managers (or those with responsibility for staff development planning) and teacher trainers.

Conclusion

In the context of the 2007 reform of qualifications and continuing professional development requirements for staff working in the LSS, ACL tutors, their employers and teacher educators have faced new challenges in planning, delivering, financing and resourcing appropriate ITT and CPD. The nature of the diverse and predominantly part-time teaching workforce, many of whom do not have teaching as their primary professional identity, demands a flexible and accessible model of delivery of ITT and CPD. However, the size and nature of many ACL organisations means that they are stretched in responding to the professional development needs of their staff. Collaboration between these organisations – led by managers, teacher educators and/or subject-based groupings - provides an opportunity for teachers working across the sector to meet the regulatory requirements whilst, at the same time experience a richer learning environment. This learning environment is envisaged as one where ITT and CPD are closely linked, ensuring that CPD can build on ITT in a seamless and meaningful way.

The LONCETT ACL research projects have established that the sector demands a flexible and integrated response to the planning and delivery of ITT and CPD. The complexity of the provision, its workforce and the community of learners it serves require that strong links be forged between teacher educators, staff development managers and senior managers. Similarly the links between teaching and learning improvement strategies and professional development planning need to be made apparent. The research undertaken indicates that the potential for collaborative development in this part of the sector is not only possible but also desired by all.

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² Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non Accredited Learning