

The role of Middle Managers in the enhancement of staff professionalism for the Further Education system

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Abstract

The Statutory Instrument of September 2007 approved as part of the regulatory powers of the Education Act (DfES, 2002) established regulations for a minimum undertaking of 30 hours' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all teaching staff on a year-on-year basis. Seen as part of the professionalisation agenda for the Further Education (FE) sector, this regulation has placed additional responsibilities on the role of Middle Managers. Here we report on a small-scale research project based in one College of Further Education which set out to explore and better understand the role of Middle Managers in supporting the professionalisation agenda. The study determined to explore how Middle Managers, defined as those with operational rather than strategic roles, were supporting their colleagues whilst also trying to secure time for their own Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The impact of the IfL's approach to dual professionalism is also explored.

Key words

Professionalisation; Motivation; Effectiveness.

Context

The policy agenda for FE reform published by government in *Success For All: Reforming Further Education And Training* (DfES, 2002) identified a number of weaknesses in what Foster (DfES, 2005) critically defined as the 'middle child' sector. These weaknesses relate specifically to the lack of attention paid to teaching and learning in a sector staffed by an underdeveloped workforce suffering from 'significant recruitment and retention problems' (DfES, 2002 p. 20). To address these serious weaknesses a number of approaches have been adopted to professionalise the sector.

Ideas about teacher professionalism in this sector, as in others, are highly contested (Stornach et al, 2002). In recent years there have been major policy and structural interventions aimed at creating a professional workforce (DfES, 2002; DfES, 2006) to the extent that since September 2007, all teachers working in the FE system are required by statute to engage in elements of CPD on an annual basis.

As part of the reform agenda, the Institute for Learning (IfL) was established as the professional body for the sector, the equivalent organisation to the General Teaching Council (GTC) for school teachers, where exploration led Cook to conclude that *'Professionalism is an artificial construct, with ever changing and always contested definitions and traits'* (Cook, cited in Cunningham, 2008: p. 23).

Are things different in the Learning and Skills Sector?

The regulatory nature and monitoring of achievement of professional criteria for this sector present a formal, rigid and clear definition of professionalism not found in other education sectors. The IfL (as the professional body for the sector having gained full legislative status in 2007) played a pivotal role in supporting the reformation of Initial Teacher Training qualifications as outlined in the agenda *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (DfES, 2004). Once formally recognised, the IfL was charged with regulating and supporting the National Improvement Strategy for FE. These statute regulations were designed to help create a qualified, sustainable and professional teaching workforce. As a result, all practitioners are now required to register with the IfL, to establish professional qualifications and to create professional development schedules to enhance the recognition and status of teachers working in the FE sector (Keeley-Browne, 2007).

There are two key sets of regulations that inform CPD requirements for teachers and trainers working in the sector; the first regulation relates to teaching qualifications affecting all who teach, introducing the need to register for a licence to practise. The importance of remaining 'in good standing' forms the second regulation for those working in Further Education. In order to remain 'in good standing', all associates must attend, record and reflect on a minimum of 30 hours CPD annually. The requirement for non-teaching managers is that they complete five hours CPD a year. Managers with a teaching workload (those we define as Middle Managers) are required to complete the full 30 hours minimum requirements.

The philosophical approach to teacher professionalism adopted by the council and articulated in the IfL's Aims and Objectives (listed on their website) mirrors the work of Sachs (2003) who defines the activist professional as one who takes up responsibility for their own ongoing professional learning and development to create a community of practice which impacts on the social and cultural life of whole organisations (Cunningham, 2008: p. 202).

Defining the terminology

This article focuses on teachers and Middle Managers. By teachers we mean staff in the case study institution employed on a full-time basis operating as qualified teachers with a number of years' experience. By Middle Managers we refer to those designated with the title of Head of Curriculum (HoC), Programme Manager and/or Staff Development Manager, who have, as part of their role, responsibility for managing the CPD of other staff. These Middle Managers have teaching as well as managerial responsibilities and as such are expected to manage the CPD entitlement for their staff, as well as achieving their own 30 hours of CPD. Given that legislative changes require a greater focus on engagement with and accurate recording of CPD activity than has hitherto been part of the working practices, we set out to explore how far Middle Managers were engaging with their new responsibilities. The reforms impacting on the sector have, we suggest, placed additional requirements on such staff not only in the recording of their own CPD activities, but also in the requirement to ensure that the staff they line manage remain 'In Good Standing'.

The case study organisation

This case study offers 'a snapshot of a point in time' (Campbell et al, 2004: p. 60) of a medium-sized FE College in a Shire County. Within a traditional farming town, the college has supported the demands of rapid community expansion and caters to the learning needs of over 6000 full- and part-time learners. It accommodates what might be classified as both academic and vocational curriculum subject areas. Staff number 48 full-time lecturers, 31 part-time lecturers, 57 variable lecturers, and five part-time distance learning staff. Such staff support programmes are delivered at a distance working mainly online from a base outside the college. Middle Managers teach, and comprise seven Advanced Practitioners (APs) - Advanced Practitioners being staff identified and promoted as teaching and learning champions - and 13 HoC, all with teaching responsibilities. Teaching staff are line-managed within a three-tier management structure; Middle Managers are positioned firmly in the middle of the structure. The HoC, along with the Staff Development Officer responsible for CPD, are the focus of this research. It is they who are responsible for managing and monitoring the development of their staff through the internal appraisal system. Interestingly, an investigation by the IfL revealed that 27 percent of 980 respondents had not discussed their CPD achievement during appraisal [www.ifl.org.uk; accessed 21 March 2009].

Why case study?

Case study methods allow the researcher to concentrate on specific activities. Middle Managers were approached for their perceptions on CPD. In this case there were six out of seven available HoC who took part in the research, along with the CPD co-ordinator who also matches our definition as a Middle Manager. An informal interview was held with the CPD Co-ordinator whose role directly involves the management of all CPD throughout the college. The information was then triangulated against the data gathered from the HoC questionnaire.

The research tools were designed to accommodate mainly 'open' questions, with the overall aim 'to be exploratory and facilitate the giving of information or opinions' (Campbell, 2004: p. 99). However, this study, and its opinions and information obtained, can only be considered as reliable to the focus institution. What the researchers hoped to achieve was information of an indicative nature that could be explored against the experience of other practitioners in the sector.

Data collected from the interview with the CPD co-ordinator was used to inform the design of a semi-structured questionnaire which was distributed to the 13 HoC for completion. Campbell (in Cohen et al, 2002) considers triangulation of research to be 'a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity particularly in qualitative research'. Triangulation in this work has been achieved through explorative analysis of data generated principally from questionnaires and interviewing techniques.

It was deemed important to try and establish the related themes and factors that would help with analysis of the research findings. The themes are set out below and then used in the discussion of the research findings.

Research themes

- Motivation, support, methods and guidance of staff undertaking CPD
- measuring effectiveness and output of CPD, considering dual professionalism
- the effects of CPD engagement from the perspective of the Middle Managers
- responsibilities for CPD since September 2007.

Research findings

The first question to managers asked 'How do you motivate your staff to engage in CPD?' The results of question responses to motivation and support are indicated below with number of responses being indicated by ticks (please note some respondents ticked more than one box).

Motivation	
Team meetings	✓✓
Setting of targets	✓✓

Performance review	✓✓
Shared best practice	✓✓✓✓✓
Team training plan	✓✓✓
Staff own motivation	✓

Table 1: Motivation Tally

The table revealed that the sharing of best practice was thought to be the most effective motivator for staff to engage in CPD. Specifically the respondents commented:

“I explain the advantages of being up to date with changes in both education and my trade.”

“As a team we share experiences after each training activity attended.”

“It is requested by the awarding body that all assessors must maintain a consistent approach to CPD. As both areas are vocationally based the individual teaching staff utilise CPD to support their personal knowledge.”

Interestingly, the issues of staff developing their own motivation received the lowest scores where team approaches received the highest acclamation. In summary the majority of Middle Managers reported that they were supporting CPD through sharing best practice, giving greater focus to CPD. Relying on staff self-motivation received the least votes. This response may not be what IFL might want to read given they have focused their approach to professionalisation on self-regulation and the self-motivation of the practitioner.

The second question related to support: ‘How do you support your staff to engage in CPD?’

Support	
Approve external CPD	✓✓✓
Fund from central budget	✓✓
Mentoring	✓
Coaching	✓
Internal CPD	✓
Providing cover for teaching	✓
Toil & flexibility	✓
Subject specific events	✓

Table 2: Support Tally

In summary the highest scores were allocated to ‘approve external CPD’. When these responses were further interrogated the following information was revealed:

- Middle Managers reported that attendance at external CPD funded by vocational bodies was an annual expectation for most staff. The new regulations had not changed practice in any way
- external and free CPD provided by vocational bodies was perceived to be the most beneficial
- using subject-specific mentors was highlighted as useful in providing advice for young teachers
- one manager stated they provided an ‘open door policy’ and saw this as part of the CPD entitlement
- one manager stated they timetable teaching with flexibility to allow attendance at external events
- internal Peer Observation Systems, operated by Line Managers, were being viewed as meeting the CPD requirements.

The research revealed that Middle Managers were taking a normative approach to the new requirements by adapting current and existing practice to support their staff. Support for CPD seemed to follow the traditional patterns of practice with attendance at examination board training remaining as the route most adopted.

The provision of CPD

Research participants were asked ‘How do you currently provide subject specialist updating in terms of CPD to support dual professionalism?’ As a response, three HoC reported that they organise and plan for subject-specific training days and two stated that they organise awarding body training days. Two clearly showed that they did nothing to support their staff in this area. Dependence on staff belonging to industry bodies and associations through independent means and attending vocation-specific training as part of long-established practice was perceived as achieving CPD objectives. This response was considered less than ideal given the legislative changes.

To explore this further, the research participants were asked if there had been changes to their role to acknowledge increased accountability and responsibility for CPD since September 2007. The majority felt unable or were not willing to comment. One felt that they had a greater part to play in identifying CPD needs of their staff. One said that they were advised and aided by the Assistant Principal in this role, and one felt there were greater responsibilities placed on individuals and teams to participate and identify CPD requirements.

Five managers stated that they had little or no control over allocation of funding as a resource for CPD. Three used allocated funds from the central budget; three supported applications through a required statement of justification

or recommendation; and two expanded further by indicating that where the requested CPD was considered as important to provision or staff morale, they funded CPD from their curriculum budget.

In terms of the time required by Middle Managers to take on additional responsibilities to motivate and support CPD among their teams, all respondents reported no increase in time for this role and no re-definition of their job description leading to real difficulties in finding time to participate in any form of personal CPD.

The research revealed that the HoC were very aware of their responsibilities for managing and monitoring the development of their staff through the internal appraisal system. However, the research also revealed constraints namely lack of funding and time to investigate appropriate opportunities to up-skill, reflect and share best practice. Many of those involved in the research commented that often internal CPD opportunities when provided clashed with teaching or related duties. Managers felt this to be a particular difficulty for staff employed in a variable-hours capacity with the result that a large number of staff slip through the CPD net. Questions were put to the CPD coordinator to clarify how CPD was managed within this institution. The responses appear below:

How do you currently manage CPD? <i>"Staff can apply for CPD on an individual basis. This is then evaluated against the College Strategic Plan, Team Training Plans and Individual Appraisals. All staff development is recorded."</i>
How is your budget set and reviewed? <i>"The budget is set against the Strategic Plan and to keep in compliance with Health and Safety. Team Training plans and Individual CPD need is considered. The budget is set annually and reviewed every six months."</i>
What mentoring systems do you have to support teacher trainers and existing qualified staff? <i>"Every member of staff is allocated a mentor at the beginning of employment. They are invited to a new staff induction and complete an Individual Training Plan. This highlights any training needs which are then put in place with the staff development co-ordinator."</i>
How do you motivate staff to be accountable, manage and attend CPD activities? <i>"Every member of staff is accountable for the management of their own CPD. The Staff Development Co-ordinator keeps a record of all CPD undertaken, both in-house and external. Appraisals and team training plans identify any training needs and development is provided as necessary." "A Staff Development Plan is produced and delivered over the year taking into account staff development hours, days and the week in July."</i>
In what ways do you expect curriculum leaders to participate? <i>"I would expect them to identify any training needs of staff either individually or as a team and provide ideas for staff development. They should instigate staff development within the team, for example sharing good practice, shadowing, and highlighting visits to other colleges. I would also anticipate that they would be supportive of staff development by encouraging and helping staff to attend development. They should also consider the importance of adding value to the staff development by attending themselves."</i>
And do they attend? <i>"No, unfortunately my records show lack of involvement in CPD by Middle Managers themselves other than engagement with their vocational bodies for annual meetings. I suspect that this has always been their practice and the legislation has made no discernable difference to their practice."</i>
How many staff do you co-ordinate CPD for and have you established a CPD recording portfolio? <i>"I am responsible for all staff – 340 at present. Staff are requested to keep a record of their own CPD. We are developing an e-portfolio that staff can use to record CPD."</i>
What is your perception of changes in attitude, even anecdotally since the introduction of the 30 hours CPD for staff? <i>"I am not sure that all managers have accepted their responsibilities in this area. I have not seen any requests for staff development. Managers are focusing on areas where they have a personnel need in the support and motivation of new staff working in a probationary period; other staff seem to be left to their own devices."</i>
What levels and type of support do you expect managers to exhibit in the positive promotion of participation to CPD? <i>"I would expect managers to encourage and support all forms of CPD. They should investigate various methods of CPD and highlight what they think would be most effective for the team. Managers should facilitate some training themselves, complete team training plans and appraisals, be actively involved in development and be seen to attend development sessions to place importance on the activity."</i>
From your perspective, are there any barriers or constraints to CPD? If so, please qualify what they are and indicate if there is a management strategy to address them. <i>"The cost of training provides the largest barrier to CPD; external training is very expensive and is not always cost-effective as information is not always shared. Internal training by outside suppliers is again expensive although more staff can be trained it can be difficult to get everyone that requires the training in the same place at the same time. Staff can be reluctant to find other methods of training as time is always a constraint. Training and the development of staff is important but other priorities can supersede this. It can be difficult to motivate staff to attend CPD as they feel that some development is not relevant to them and it can be a challenge to provide training to cover the needs of all staff."</i>

Conclusions

This case study is a qualitative exploration into the role that Middle Managers have to play in CPD; the results represent their individual ideas, and when collectively analysed offer a real-life exposure to management involvement in supporting CPD in one institution. The research scope has been limited. Further research and analysis into CPD approaches in a range of institutions would be beneficial. A rigorous detailed research project is required to support the argument for a more considered whole organisational approach to the CPD entitlement of staff.

The research revealed that Middle Managers were adopting custom and practice approaches in the approval of CPD requirements, and were considering existing practices such as attendance at vocational meetings, as well as peer observation and mentoring systems, as part of the CPD process. There was little evidence of new initiatives or excitement around the CPD entitlement. In addition, Middle Managers made no mention of a CPD strategy, or adaptation in the Middle Manager role to facilitate greater motivation and support for the CPD requirements.

These elements must be addressed so that Middle Managers can work to ensure suitably qualified staff maintain their professional status and can be developed to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status, and therefore, maintain their dual professional standing within the FE environment. Middle Managers must become more aware and consider CPD as a crucial element to developing, motivating and maintaining their teaching staff as a major contribution factor for strategic planning and growth.

Time needs to be allocated for Middle Managers to manage the new entitlement. Additional organisation support should be in place so that Middle Managers can enthuse and encourage their staff to engage in meaningful CPD.

In terms of the 30-hour requirement placed on Middle Managers themselves, their engagement with CPD for their personal development appears to occur sporadically when activist managers take responsibility for professional learning, using their own initiative and special interests to maintain or develop their skills. The research revealed that the staff required to maintain their vocational professional standing with other professional bodies are using this training to maintain professional standing with both organisations. In addition, some Middle Managers were 'double counting' by recording activities with staff teams led by them (team meetings) as evidence not only of staff CPD but their own as well.

Recommendations

Greater clarity is needed around what constitutes CPD, and what meets the regulatory requirements if the current approach to professionalise the workforce is to receive any credibility and status with teachers and managers alike. Information is available on the IfL website as to what constitutes CPD but this needs greater refinement.

Middle Managers have a key role to play in driving forward the CPD agenda. They have the opportunity during conversations and mentoring and as part of a target setting interview in an appraisal for example, to make a difference. Middle Managers should be enabled to individually negotiate targets for clearly defined CPD determined by individual need followed by reviews and support meetings to ensure meaningful development occurs for each individual as appropriate and agreed. If appraisal systems are to be the driver for organisational CPD, then they need reviewing to ensure they are fit to operate in the current legislative climate.

Middle Managers should be encouraged to understand the importance of developing staff, in order to achieve strategic aims and objectives for organisational growth. Success at this level will inevitably lead to a more qualified and professional body of teaching professionals who are successful, productive and remain in the sector. This is a difficult task if no real encouragement or support is made available to staff.

Some questions to IfL and government

Is it time to review the strategy for CPD in the sector? Is there a contradiction in a system backed by statute that requires recorded achievement discussed within a philosophy of self-regulation? Surely the legality of statute makes the CPD dimension of the FE lecturers' professional life one that needs whole organisational support and systems in place to drive it? If so, real financial and resource backing needs to be in place to allow Staff Development Officers and Middle Managers to drive this reforming agenda. Or, we agree with Barker (in Cunningham, 2008: p. 23) that government (and the legislative councils that inform them) need to develop the concept of Informed Professionals, and in so doing, acknowledge that teachers have appropriate knowledge and skills and attitudes to be granted a greater degree of licensed autonomy to manage their own affairs. Such an approach would require the removal of the legislative requirement for 30 hours CPD, would couch CPD in the language of 'entitlement' rather than 'requirement', and give IfL a real opportunity to foster its empowering philosophy of self-regulation, self-development to create real change.

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