

# Research as a form of Continuing Professional Development

Guiding Principles



Phillip Miller, New College Durham

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## Training Vs. Development

Existing models of staff development often involve a number of 'one-off' workshops being held across designated 'staff development days' spread throughout the academic year. There is, however, evidence to suggest that this style of provision does not yield significant changes at the classroom level (Savoie-Zajc & Descamps-Bednarz, 2007). In addition Zeichner (2003) stated that staff neither like these programmes nor use them to improve practice and that this sort of training model is unconnected to teachers' daily work and is disrespectful of their knowledge. What appears to exist is a conflict where continuing professional development in colleges takes the form of 'training' where skills or behaviours are being taught to staff, as opposed to 'development' where individuals are given the opportunity to create or produce, by deliberate effort over time.

## An Alternative Approach

The proposed approach to continuing professional development involves cohorts of staff being exempt from the institutionally provided programme of workshops that are available on staff development days. During these times the staff members will instead come together in small groups to undertake collaborative research projects looking at mutually agreed issues.

## Which colleges might benefit from this approach?

For colleges that currently have no protected time for staff to engage, or where few staff are identified as being engaged, in forms of research and scholarship this initiative creates the ideal gateway.

Alternatively for those colleges that are more advanced in their own scholarship journeys, this approach to staff development might be a way to support newer, less experienced members of staff to begin engaging in research and scholarship in a supportive and collaborative manner.

## College Staff Opinions

Focus groups carried out with teaching staff within colleges revealed three key themes regarding perceptions around staff development:

- Staff believe HE teaching is distinct from FE so specific HE development should be available.
- Staff believe that the opportunity to collaborate with others is crucial, both within and across disciplines.
- Experienced staff would value the opportunity to take ownership of and direct their own development.

## What sort of research could be undertaken?

Whilst this approach provides some protected time for groups to undertake research projects it would be unrealistic to suggest that all of the required work could be undertaken within the confines of institutional staff development days. It is therefore important that appropriate subjects are chosen for investigation. With this in mind topics should probably correlate closely with staff members' usual day to day work and be grounded firmly within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Boyer, 1990).

## Which staff should be involved?

QAA (2013) state that Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education and go on to state that at Levels 4 and 5 there is a need for staff to have understanding of scholarly developments in their discipline area and that at level 6 teaching will be informed, if not led by the research / scholarship of staff. It is therefore essential that colleges make some sort of provisions for their HE staff to engage in research and scholarship. However, where possible, it is suggested that involvement be open to all staff whether their primary focus be higher or further education.

## Example Projects:

Within the trialling and testing phase four groups of staff completed the following research projects:

'Institutional support for the maintenance of dual professional practice'

'Staff use of digital technology'

'A comparative analysis of internally progressing students and external applicants - what are their motivations for attending NCD?'

'Improving 'HE-ness' in the classroom/college'.

## Benefits to Staff

Park & Cable (1997) stated that allowing staff to undertake research on their own institution allows them to become 'architects of change', with Jaipal & Figg (2011) adding that this can be an effective way to promote inquiry, reflection, and problem solving in a way that would result in action .

Staff who participated in the trial and test of this approach to CPD also noted a number of additional benefits:

- *One experienced member of staff stated that an unexpected benefit was 'reinvigoration of teaching'.*
- *Development of work skills and transferrable skills that could be adapted and transmitted to students.*
- *Improvement in the delivery of Research Methods due to personal engagement.*

## Outputs and Timescales

The desired outputs for projects should be agreed at the beginning of their undertaken. Possibilities may include, but are not limited to, presentations to colleagues within the college, written report to senior management or external conference presentation.

It is recognised that one academic year may not be a sufficiently long timeframe to complete a research project. It is therefore suggested that research groups be able to set their own timeline for completion and dissemination.

### References:

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