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Access to Continuous Professional Development by teachers in England

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This paper sets out to investigate issues of access to continuous professional development faced by teachers in England. Specifically, the paper attempts to understand the types of CPD activities that are offered to teachers, the types of activities in which teachers participated and whether a disconnect occurs between activities offered and those needed by teachers. Further, the paper also explores the barriers to access to high quality CPD that exist for teachers at both the individual and school levels. Data for the analyses presented were collected as part of the nationally representative, *Schools and Continuing Professional Development in England – State of the Nation* research study which was funded by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

Keywords: teacher professional development; access to learning; organisational support for learning

Introduction

Teacher access to CPD is rarely mentioned in research literature. Perhaps because teachers are so often required to attend certain types of professional development and it is so ubiquitous in the literature on improvement, many assume access to CPD is not of concern. In the TDA-commissioned ‘State of the Nation’ (SoN) study on teacher CPD in England, access was one of three primary foci. It was given this prominence in the study because while all teachers may participate in some form of CPD, questions have arisen about the quality of CPD to which teachers have access and whether gaps exist between provision and teachers’ needs for CPD. Implied in these questions about access is also the degree to which context – school and individual – is supportive of access to quality CPD activities. In this article we report on evidence from the SoN study concerning access to CPD by teachers in England. In doing so, we will begin with a discussion, drawing on research literature, about the types of CPD to which teachers have been shown to have access, and

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how these types differ from forms generally associated with teacher professional learning. We also draw on the literature to discuss supports at the school and individual levels that make access to high quality CPD more or less possible. This summary of available literature serves, then, as context for a description of the study and the findings specific to access concerns that follow.

Teacher participation in effective CPD and access concerns

Teachers' perceptions of what constitutes effective professional development have been well documented. For example, teachers report that sustained and intensive professional development has a greater effect on instructional change than shorter professional development (Garet et al. 2001). Professional development is more likely to be effective in improving teachers' knowledge and skills if it forms a coherent programme of teacher learning (Garet et al. 2001). Teachers also report that professional development that focuses on academic subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for 'hands-on' work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence) is more likely to enhance their knowledge and skills (Garet et al. 2001).

When these characteristics are not present, teachers report the professional development activities to be less effective. Cohen and Hill (1997), in a survey of 1000 elementary school teachers in California, found that professional development was perceived by teachers as least effective at changing teacher practice and improving student learning when it focused on generic teaching behaviours and did not provide opportunities to analyse curriculum and student responses to it.

In addition to this evidence on teachers' perceptions of effective professional development, research provides guidance about the characteristics of professional development that lead to improved teaching practices and improved pupil learning. For example, Hiebert (1999) calls attention to the importance of high standards, content focus and in-depth learning opportunities for teachers:

Research on teacher learning shows that fruitful opportunities to learn new teaching methods share several core features: (a) ongoing (measured in years) collaboration of teachers for purposes of planning with (b) the explicit goal of improving students' achievement of clear learning goals, (c) anchored by attention to students' thinking, the curriculum, and pedagogy, with (d) access to alternative ideas and methods and opportunities to observe these in action and to reflect on the reasons for their effectiveness. (Hiebert 1999, 15)

In the literature review for the SoN study, which considered empirical literature since 2004, a number of effective forms and features of CPD

were identified that are entirely consistent with this earlier literature. For our purposes, features are understood to be general characteristics of CPD activities that could apply to almost any form. Effective features most often identified in the literature include that the activity:

- is applicable to school and classroom settings (Warwick et al. 2004; Cordingley et al. 2005b; Makopoulou and Armour 2006; McNicholl and Noone 2007; CUREE 2008);
- has clearly shared aims and objectives (McNicholl and Noone 2007; CUREE 2008);
- is provided by people with expertise (Cordingley et al. 2005b; Makopoulou and Armour 2006; Miller and Glover 2007);
- takes account of prior knowledge and experience (Makopoulou and Armour 2006);
- models effective teaching and learning strategies (Duncombe et al. 2004; Bolam and Weindling 2006; Makopoulou and Armour 2006); and
- promotes enquiry and problem-solving (Cordingley et al. 2005b; Pollard et al. 2005; Bolam and Wendling 2006).

Those forms most associated with the impact of CPD include:

- enquiry (Arthur et al. 2006; MacBeath et al. 2007);
- collaboration (Warwick et al. 2004; Cordingley et al. 2005a, 2005b; Arthur et al. 2006; Makopoulou and Armour 2006; McNicholl and Noone 2007);
- coaching and mentoring (Harrison et al. 2005; Hobson et al. 2007; CUREE 2008);
- observation (Boyle et al. 2004; Cordingley et al. 2005b; Pedder et al. 2005; Dymoke and Harrison 2006; Hodgkinson 2006); and
- networks (Hakkarainen et al. 2004; Veugelers and O'Hair 2005; McGregor et al. 2006; McCormick et al. 2007; CUREE 2008).

There is a small but emerging literature that indicates that these forms and features relate to positive outcomes for both teachers and students. This evidence suggests that professional development experiences that share all or most of the characteristics can have a positive influence on teachers' classroom practices and pupil learning (Wilson and Ball 1991; Fennema et al. 1996; Cohen and Hill 1998; Kennedy 1998; Shields et al. 1998; Birman et al. 2000; Garet et al. 2001; Desimone et al. 2002).

Despite its possible importance to schools and pupils, professional development is largely considered an individual teacher's decision. Teachers often select the professional development in which they will participate from a number of options available from a highly disparate

set of providers (Sykes 1996). Given that the research-defined characteristics of high quality professional development are entirely consistent with teachers' perceptions of what constitutes effective professional development activities, we would expect that teachers would be participating in CPD with these effective characteristics. Unfortunately, however, most professional development in which teachers engage remains: traditional in form; less than a week in duration; increasingly focused on content but with little opportunity for active learning; and increasingly coherent with curriculum standards but rarely cohering with other systemic aspects (e.g. teacher evaluation and building on other professional development) (Birman et al. 2000; Garet et al. 2001, Desimone et al. 2002; Opfer et al. 2008a). If teachers are the primary choosers of CPD activity they also understand what is most effective for their own learning, and yet if they are participating in activities that do not meet these needs, then questions arise about the types of activities that are being offered to them. That is, access to high quality CPD may be the problem.

School and individual supports for participation in effective CPD

Extant research literature suggests that both school and individual supports are necessary for access to high quality CPD to occur. While teachers both choose their own CPD and have an understanding of their own learning needs, Day and Gu (2007) argue that fundamental to the effectiveness of CPD is teachers' sense of commitment, which influences their capacities for and attitudes to professional learning. This echoes the research into work-based learning, where Billett (2006) sees the employee's agency as being important to taking up the affordances for learning of the workplace (afforded by the employer and any mentors or co-workers). In a more specific way Taber (2005), in the context of chemistry teaching, identified a number of attitudes and a lack of awareness of teachers (e.g. that they looked for definitive answers to science activities) that affected their responses to the CPD provision, some of which appear to reflect their views of learning. Interestingly, although this issue of teachers' views of learning is often referred to (Marshall and Drummond 2006), we have little empirical work that helps us to be definitive about how these views on pupil learning and their own learning affect their engagement with, and the impact on them of, CPD.

It is more established that the norms of the school, its structures and practices, both enable and constrain teachers' learning (Rutter et al. 1979; Galloway et al. 1982; Pollard 1985; Mortimore et al. 1988; Woods et al. 1997). For example, Hollingsworth's (1999) longitudinal study of primary mathematics teachers' professional development demonstrated that teachers encountered difficulties in implementing new practices in their

classrooms because of unsupportive conditions in their schools: a lack of coordination and leadership; little collegial activity; and no obvious commitment to professional development in mathematics. Thus, 'features of the social setting constrain or afford particular practices associated with learning and thereby constrain or afford the learning itself' (Greeno et al. 1996, 37).

Pedder (2006) explicitly investigated the school-level factors that supported teachers' learning as part of the 'Learning How to Learn' (LTHL) study and found a statistically significant relationship between the school-level factors – communicating a clear vision, support for professional learning, auditing expertise and supporting networking – and teachers' levels of enquiry and learning. Key supports for individual and organisational learning identified in the literature review for the SoN study include a balance between individual and organisational learning needs and strategic planning of CPD provision to meet these needs (see Pedder and Opfer 2010, in this issue).

Overall, the evidence suggests that there is a lack of strategic planning and identification of learning needs and this results in ineffective CPD for both the school and the individual. Research associated with those early in their teaching career shows that large proportions are not having their needs met (Hodkinson 2006; ICM 2006), nor are they being prepared for tasks that require specific skills needed for new responsibilities (ICM 2006); 40% said they did not get an individualised induction programme (ICM 2006) and a tool developed for this (the 'Career Entry and Development Profile') did not appear to help in arranging induction or link ITT and induction (Hobson et al. 2007).

Thus the overall impression here is that while strategic and systematic planning of CPD is needed to achieve its potential effectiveness for teacher learning, little of this planning, in practical terms, is yet emerging in the literature sources identified and examined. Given that so many of the studies of CPD effectiveness reveal partial and flawed enterprises, erratically arranged across schools, it cannot be surprising that teachers may be accessing CPD that is less effective than it could be.

Given the literature on teacher participation in high quality CPD and the types of supports necessary for this participation to occur, the SoN study set out to investigate issues of access. Specifically, we were interested in understanding the types of CPD activities that are offered to teachers, the types of activities in which teachers participated, and whether a disconnect occurs between the activities offered and those needed by teachers. Further, we set out also to explore the barriers to access to high quality CPD that exist for teachers at both the individual and school levels. In the following sections we describe how we collected the data to address these research interests and then present our findings related to access to CPD for teachers in England.

Methods

The 'State of the Nation' study brought together the results of a mixed-method study with insights from a literature review of reports of empirical research in CPD since 2004 (see McCormick et al. 2008 for the full report), qualitative 'snapshots' in nine primary and three secondary schools (see Storey et al. 2008 for the full report), and a survey of a national random sample of primary and secondary teachers in England (see Opfer et al. 2008 for the full report). Findings related to access to CPD in England relied primarily on findings from the survey methods, with findings from the school snapshots elaborating on the survey results.

Further discussion of our research design, including consideration of our sampling strategy, response rate, and methods and processes of data collection and analysis, is included in the introductory article of this collection (Pedder et al. 2010, in this issue).

Findings

In analysing the results from our data sources, we were primarily interested in identifying issues or themes rather than focusing on the analysis of types of data or specific questions. We hoped that this thematic analysis of the data would aid us in identifying cross-cutting issues related to the three study foci. These cross-cutting issues could then provide direction for future policy and programme development related to CPD. The thematic analysis of the data resulted in the identification of two issues specific to access to CPD in England:

- (1) Teachers are offered a narrow range of CPD opportunities which vary significantly by experience, career stage and leadership responsibility.
- (2) Both school-level conditions and teacher perceptions serve as barriers to CPD participation.

The data supporting the emergence of each of these issues are presented in the following sections.

Issue 1: Teachers are offered a narrow range of CPD opportunities which vary significantly by experience, career stage and leadership responsibility

The primary barrier to participation in effective CPD is the lack of varied opportunities for CPD provided to teachers. Teachers in England are not offered the full range of types of CPD. Opportunities to take part in CPD activities and teachers' participation in CPD activities closely track one another. When offered opportunities to participate in CPD, the vast majority of teachers take part in the activities offered.

However, what is clear is that many teachers are not offered the range of available CPD types. For example, less than half of all teachers responding to the survey were offered opportunities to participate in non-university accredited courses (26%), university courses (19%), conferences (43%), curriculum committees (31%), teacher study groups (19%) and independent study (29%) (see Table 1).

The survey results were confirmed by teachers in the snapshot schools, who said they attended when opportunities were provided:

If offered a course I would certainly go so as to take time out of school to reflect. (Teacher, Droley Comprehensive)

Teachers in the snapshot schools also reported that the opportunities provided to them were 'familiar' and 'functional' CPD options. Teachers often referred to these opportunities as 'training', and these types of opportunities appeared to have the first call on CPD funds available to the schools.

We would expect that teachers at different career stages have different development needs and that these differences would be evident in the opportunities provided to them. However, the significant variation that exists in the opportunities provided to teachers with differing years of teaching experience, career stages and school leadership responsibilities, does not appear to be related to levels of development. Differences in opportunities for teachers are discussed below. Teachers in the survey and teachers in the snapshot schools did not perceive gender to be an issue in opportunities for CPD.

Differences in CPD opportunities by years of teaching experience

Generally, teachers with only one to two years of experience are offered fewer types of CPD than teachers with more

Table 1. CPD opportunities offered to teachers and levels of teacher participation.

	Percentage of teachers who were offered opportunity to take part	Percentage of teachers who took part
In-school workshops	88%	85%
Non-university accredited	26%	16%
University courses	19%	11%
Out-of-school workshops	70%	64%
Teacher networks	56%	51%
Conferences	43%	34%
Mentoring	61%	57%
Committees	31%	26%
Teacher study groups	19%	16%
Independent study	29%	26%

experience (see Table 2). These teachers are offered fewer CPD opportunities for:

- Non-university accredited courses ($p = .003$);
- Teacher networks and collaboratives ($p = .003$);
- Conferences ($p = .000$);
- Curriculum committees or task forces ($p = .000$); and
- Teacher study groups ($p = .020$).

Reversing this general trend, as years of experience increase, teachers are offered less opportunity to take part in independent study ($p = .012$). Moreover, teachers with 20 or more years of teaching are also offered fewer opportunities to take part in teacher study groups ($p = .020$).

Differences in CPD opportunities by career stage

As teachers rise up through the career stages, they are offered more opportunities to take part in the following types of CPD (see Table 3):

- Non-university accredited courses ($p = .002$);
- Teacher networks and collaboratives ($p = .000$);
- Conferences ($p = .000$).

Table 2. CPD opportunities offered to teachers by years of experience.

CPD opportunity	Percentage of teachers by years of teaching experience offered CPD opportunities			
	1–2 years (out of 141)	3–10 years (out of 437)	11–20 years (out of 215)	20+ years (out of 264)
In-school workshops	89%	88%	90%	90%
Non-university accredited courses*	15%	28%	32%	25%
University courses	16%	19%	22%	17%
Out-of-school workshops	77%	68%	72%	67%
Teacher networks or collaboratives*	44%	56%	64%	57%
Conferences*	33%	40%	53%	48%
Mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing peers	65%	64%	62%	56%
Curriculum committees or task forces*	16%	31%	40%	35%
Teacher study groups*	14%	22%	23%	14%
Independent study *	37%	32%	27%	23%

*Opportunities indicate those where significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between opportunities offered to teachers by years of experience.

Table 3. CPD opportunities offered to teachers by career stage.

CPD opportunity	Percentage of teachers by career stage offered CPD opportunities				
	Newly qualified teachers (out of 97)	Mainscale teachers (out of 417)	Post-threshold teachers (out of 537)	AST/excellent teachers (out of 11)	Qualified head teachers (out of 13)
In-school workshops	90%	85%	90%	91%	100%
Non-university accredited courses*	13%	25%	29%	36%	54%
University courses	18%	18%	20%	36%	42%
Out-of-school workshops	77%	67%	70%	73%	85%
Teacher networks or collaboratives*	37%	54%	61%	73%	77%
Conferences*	34%	37%	49%	73%	77%
Mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing peers*	74%	58%	63%	82%	62%
Curriculum committees or task forces*	14%	28%	37%	64%	54%
Teacher study groups	19%	20%	19%	36%	7%
Independent study	35%	31%	27%	18%	39%

*Opportunities indicate those where significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between opportunities offered to teachers by career stage.

Teachers are also given the opportunity to take part more in curriculum committees and task forces as they rise in career stage ($p = .000$), although qualified head teachers are slightly less likely to be offered this opportunity than advanced skills teachers (ASTs) and excellent teachers. Finally, ASTs, excellent teachers and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are all offered more opportunities to take part in mentoring, coaching, lead teaching and observing peers than teachers at other career stages ($p = .025$).

Differences in CPD opportunities by leadership responsibility

There are many differences between teachers with different leadership responsibilities in terms of the CPD activities offered to them (see Table 4). In most instances, as leadership responsibilities increase, teachers are offered more CPD opportunities. This trend is statistically significant for eight types of CPD, as shown in Table 4 below. Additionally, teachers with senior leadership responsibilities are statistically more likely to be offered opportunities to undertake independent study than teachers with all other levels of responsibility ($p = .006$).

Overall, then, it appears that teachers with fewer years of experience, teachers at earlier career stages and teachers with less leadership responsibility have a narrower range of CPD opportunities available to them. This finding contradicts assertions by snapshot schools where it was largely perceived that staff had equal access to CPD opportunities.

There are two likely explanations for the limited CPD opportunities available to teachers. First, Wilde (2005) has suggested that the gap in provision of CPD provided by local authorities (LAs) and the needs of schools are linked to the new role of LAs as brokers rather than providers of development activities. Similarly, the gap between teacher needs and the opportunities offered to them could be explained by schools also serving as brokers rather than sites of professional development.

The information gathered in the snapshot schools would support this explanation. Teachers reported that there did not seem to be a clear link between what was offered and the demand from individuals. Further, teachers felt that professional development was largely left to individuals and their own wish to develop. As one NQT reported: 'Everyone in the maths department can do what they want.' Thus, schools appear primarily to broker CPD for individuals, or groups of individuals, rather than seeing their role as professional developers of the entire staff.

The second likely explanation for the narrow range of CPD opportunities available to teachers may be due to school-level conditions

Table 4. CPD opportunities offered to teachers by leadership responsibility.

CPD opportunity	Percentage of teachers by leadership responsibility offered CPD opportunities			
	Little to no responsibility (out of 408)	Middle leader (out of 599)	Senior leader (out of 57)	Head teacher (out of 11)
In-school workshops*	85%	91%	90%	100%
Non-university accredited courses*	20%	29%	35%	55%
University courses	17%	19%	23%	46%
Out-of-school workshops*	61%	75%	77%	82%
Teacher networks or collaboratives*	40%	66%	72%	82%
Conferences*	32%	48%	61%	91%
Mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing peers*	55%	65%	79%	73%
Curriculum committees or task forces*	23%	36%	44%	55%
Teacher study groups	17%	20%	30%	9%
Independent study*	30%	27%	49%	27%

*Opportunities indicate those where significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between opportunities offered to teachers by leadership responsibility.

and individual perceptions of CPD that serve as barriers to provision. For example, teachers in snapshot schools reported familiar reasons such as time and budget constraints as barriers to CPD provision in their schools. Others reported older colleagues who were less interested in professional development. Both of these types of barrier will be explored further in our second access issue (below).

Issue 2: Both school-level conditions and teacher perceptions serve as barriers to CPD participation

Two types of barrier to CPD opportunities for teachers in England emerged in the ‘State of the Nation’ study. Teachers reported both on the survey and during the school snapshots that some school-level conditions were associated with fewer opportunities for CPD. Teachers also reported that individual perceptions of CPD can decrease demand for CPD, and this results in fewer opportunities being offered to teachers in their school. Each of these types of barriers to access is discussed in this section.

School-level barriers

Teachers in certain school contexts have fewer CPD opportunities than teachers in other school contexts, and these school-level conditions could be seen as barriers to professional development access. These school-level conditions include the school sector, the achievement band of the school and insufficient school CPD budgets.

Differences in CPD opportunities by school sector

There were many statistically significant differences in the CPD opportunities offered to primary and secondary school teachers (see Table 5). Primary school teachers are offered opportunities to take part in in-school workshops ($p = .004$), out-of-school workshops ($p = .000$) and teacher networks ($p = .000$) more often than secondary school teachers. Secondary school teachers are offered opportunities to take part in university courses ($p = .031$), mentoring ($p = .054$), curriculum committees ($p = .000$), teacher study groups ($p = .001$) and independent study ($p = .000$) more often than primary teachers. The overall pattern that emerges is that secondary teachers have more varied opportunities for CPD than primary teachers.

Differences in CPD opportunities by achievement band of the school

There are also some statistically significant differences in the CPD offered to teachers in schools in different achievement bands (see Table 6).

Table 5. CPD opportunities offered to primary and secondary teachers.

CPD opportunity	Percentage of primary teachers offered the opportunity (out of 656)	Percentage of secondary teachers offered the opportunity (out of 467)
In-school workshops*	90%	84%
Non-university accredited courses	26%	25%
University courses*	17%	22%
Out-of-school workshops*	75%	62%
Teacher networks or collaboratives*	60%	49%
Conferences	43%	44%
Mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing peers*	59%	65%
Curriculum committees or task forces*	26%	39%
Teacher study groups*	16%	23%
Independent study	24%	36%

*Opportunities indicate those where significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between opportunities offered to primary and secondary teachers.

Table 6. CPD opportunities offered to teachers by school achievement band.

CPD opportunity	Percentage of teachers by school achievement band offered CPD opportunities				
	Lowest band	2nd lowest band	Middle band	2nd highest band	Highest band
In-school workshops*	95%	91%	85%	84%	88%
Non-university accredited courses	21%	23%	27%	23%	28%
University courses	20%	18%	23%	13%	18%
Out-of-school workshops	71%	71%	69%	65%	76%
Teacher networks or collaboratives	54%	62%	53%	52%	58%
Conferences*	38%	40%	48%	38%	52%
Mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing peers*	50%	62%	62%	69%	62%
Curriculum committees or task forces	24%	29%	27%	33%	36%
Teacher study groups	13%	22%	19%	17%	19%
Independent study	26%	27%	32%	30%	30%

*Opportunities indicate those where significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between opportunities offered to teachers by school achievement band.

Teachers in the two lowest achievement bands are offered in-school workshops ($p = .005$) more often than teachers in schools in other achievement bands. Teachers in the highest achievement band schools are offered the opportunity to attend conferences ($p = .018$) more often than teachers in other achievement bands. And teachers in the lowest

achievement band are offered the opportunity to take part in mentoring, coaching, lead teaching or observing activities ($p = .016$) far less often than teachers in other achievement bands.

These differences in CPD opportunities provided to teachers in schools in different achievement bands were echoed in the school snapshot data. Teachers in schools under special measures reported that they had little choice over their CPD. As a result, these teachers expressed very little ownership of their CPD and felt this was a barrier to effective take-up. Similarly, these teachers reported that ‘non-priority’ areas – ones that were not literacy, numeracy or science – were wholly excluded from CPD provision. Thus, teachers in low performing schools reported more constrained CPD opportunities than teachers in higher performing schools.

While data on school budgets were not part of the survey analysis for this study, teachers reported in the school snapshots that CPD budgets were sometimes insufficient to meet the need for professional development in their schools. Budget constraints were frequently cited by teachers as reasons for a lack of take-up. These budget constraints affected the amount of money available for teachers to attend courses, the amount of available supply cover for classes, and the time that teachers could contribute to development activities that occurred outside the normal working day.

Further, because of budget constraints, teachers reported that school development needs were, rightly, given priority over individual development needs. Teachers in the SoN study often circumscribed requests for professional development because of restricted school finances to support activities with.

Perceptual barriers

Three types of individual teacher perceptions were identified as barriers to CPD in the SoN study. Older teachers were reported to be less interested in professional development, but often given preference in CPD opportunities. Teachers constrained their demand for CPD in response to perceived school conditions. Additionally, teachers reported that the quality of the CPD offered to them could put them off taking part. Each of these perceptions is discussed below.

Older, more experienced teachers have less demand for CPD, but also have the greatest access to it. As the survey data indicate, as teachers gain more experience, they have more CPD offered to them. Related to this, as experience rises, so too does participation in most instances. However, teachers with 20 or more years of experience are less likely than teachers with less experience to take part in non-university accredited courses, teacher mentoring, coaching and independent study.

The survey results were confirmed by teachers in snapshot schools who reported older teachers being disinterested in development opportunities and also holding negative views about the benefits of CPD. Unfortunately, snapshot teachers also reported that these older teachers had significant influence over the opportunities provided in schools because they had the ‘ear’ of senior leadership.

As a further barrier, teachers may not demand CPD if they feel there are budget constraints in the school. Staff reported that they would do more but ‘you don’t because the budget doesn’t allow it’. In this context, teachers felt that asking for CPD was a moral as much as a professional decision, and that requests should be for activities with ‘strict relevance’, which guaranteed a high impact. Relatedly, teachers constrained their demand for CPD if they believed there were not enough good quality supply teachers available to cover their classes. Thus teachers see financial resources, professional responsibilities and time away from their students as significant barriers to participation. Therefore, teacher demand for CPD represents teachers’ perceptions of constraints on availability and not necessarily their need for development.

Finally, teachers reported that the quality of CPD offered to them put them off taking part. Teachers in the snapshot schools reported significant variability in some of the offerings. They also described a ‘PowerPoint problem’ where presenters read from slides. Some teachers also referred to a ‘spin-out problem’ where content that should have merited a couple of hours filled an entire day. A ‘bandwagon’ approach to CPD was also cited as a barrier to take-up, where the offerings reflected the latest fad rather than actual development needs.

Conclusions and recommendations: CPD access

Findings from the ‘State of the Nation’ study demonstrated that a possible reason for ineffective CPD in England is access. Teachers often have limited access to the kinds of CPD most associated with improved learning. Further, access to effective CPD varies significantly by individual and school contexts – although not in ways that suggest a purposeful plan for meeting differential needs. Both schools and individuals serve as barriers to accessing effective CPD. Schools in different contexts provide different opportunities to teachers. Teachers in schools with low pupil achievement appear to have particularly limited opportunities and access. Teachers with seniority often set the tone and direction for CPD opportunities provided to all teachers in a school. Unfortunately, because their interests and perceptions of learning may differ from those of colleagues at different career stages, their domination of the CPD agenda may be limiting opportunities for others.

Based on the identification of these issues in the SoN study of CPD in England, we make the following policy and programme recommendations. First, schools and teachers should be encouraged to take part in a range of CPD types and activities, especially those that are classroom-based, research-informed and collaborative activities. Schools need to be sensitised to providing equal opportunities for CPD regardless of career stage, leadership opportunities or teaching experience. This would enable CPD activities to be planned to coincide with career stage development. However, this may necessitate cooperation between networks of schools to meet the needs of career stages where few teachers at that stage may be present in one school – for example, newly qualified teachers. The need for CPD from schools and teachers may vary by context, but we need to make sure there is equal access to CPD across school conditions and across teachers so that provision varies due to a better match with need than with opportunity.

What becomes clear in the SoN study is that schools need help in identifying better quality CPD activities for staff. They also need help in understanding the elements and conditions of effective CPD. Relatedly, better ways of identifying teacher needs and demand for CPD that do not rely on informal perceptions of need must be developed to help schools in planning more strategically the provision of, and access to, CPD for teachers. Schools, in addition to teachers, need support if we are to have CPD achieve its potential effectiveness for teacher and pupil learning.

Notes on contributors

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