

THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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At this time of year in the educational calendar, teachers across the country are beginning to plan for the start of the next academic year. Most will prioritise planning for their future students, perhaps reviewing the curriculum and exploring what elements need further development. Alongside this focus on their classes, many may also be reflecting on how they have achieved against their own personal aspirations and professional developmental targets, set in the autumn of 2018.

How training needs are addressed is likely to vary within the vast array of schools and academies across the nation. Whatever the approach, few, if any, will be facing what was once commonplace – a smorgasbord of short, unrelated, in-house sessions on a whole school INSET day, or if you were lucky, the occasional curriculum focused development day at some point in the year.

Yet today, whilst there is a more varied choice of training opportunities, the landscape of provision is fragmented and access to professional development very much depends on a school's culture towards developing staff. Some Multi Academy Trusts offer well structured, high quality in-house training pathways, whilst others have partnered with proven external providers. In some parts of the country, Local Authorities continue to play a positive key role in the provision of ongoing teacher training. Alongside this, access to teacher training is available through a vast array of independent providers, large and small, offering either face to face, online training or a combination of both.

Within this fragmented picture it can be a challenge to determine what actually is high quality, value for money training. What's more, how can schools measure if that training will have significant impact on individual professional practice, alongside improving outcomes for students?

What training should I undertake?

Before choosing a provider, for those who are unclear on how to determine the right training pathway, a helpful first step is to become familiar with the developing range of Department for Education (DFE) guidance documents focused on what a teacher should be expected to know at different stages of their career. At one end of the spectrum, for those who are relatively new to the profession, is the recently introduced Early Career Framework (2019).

Although it has received mixed reviews, for some offering a useful reference but also facing criticism that it is unambitious (Schools Week, 2019), and that it could patronise new teachers (TES, 2019). The framework outlines its intent for early career teachers, defining a funded curriculum of what they should know and do in the years following initial teacher training.

For those teachers who have moved past the very early stages of their career and aspire to leadership, guidance can be found in the DFE National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Content and Assessment Framework (2017).

Having established what training is required, finding and accessing the right provider may not always prove to be straightforward.

Who shall I choose to provide my training?

Whilst a perfect recipe for effective professional development remains elusive, those wishing to delve a little deeper into the theory behind what leads to effective professional development have a range of opportunities for further reading. Ranging from research on educational topics considered of international importance (Timperley, 2008) to practical handbooks that offer to take the guesswork out of professional learning (Weston and Clay, 2018).

In addition, from the business world, the Centre for Creative Leadership offers the 70-20-10 rule – a research-based guideline for developing managers that argues you need to have 3 types

of learning experience: 70% of what you learn from job-related activities, 20% from interactions with others such as a peer to peer, mentor or coach, and 10% from formal training. To help clarify your choice of training provider, another recent DFE guide, Standards for Teachers' Professional development (2016), sets out clear expectations for any individual or organisation delivering professional development that can be used as a checklist.

Unhelpfully but perhaps understandably, many training providers operating on the open market are rarely willing to share beyond high level summaries of their programmes.

Drawing on my own experience of school leadership and of designing curriculum content for national leadership programmes, the following list can provide a useful, although not exclusive, reference to use against your own specific learning requirements:

- ▶ Is the training delivered within a programme of learning events, with clear learning objectives for each individual element?
- ▶ What evidence is provided demonstrating a planned sequential curriculum, linked to specific professional knowledge, competencies and skills?
- ▶ Is it clear how each participant can measure their own knowledge, competencies and skills against those defined within the programme?
- ▶ Are the elements of the programme delivered at the right time of the school year?
- ▶ Is the whole programme layout easily navigated and does it allow for a bespoke individualised approach?
- ▶ Does the curriculum offer a range of academic theory and models that also reflects current research?
- ▶ Is there opportunity to connect with peers on the programme?
- ▶ Does the programme draw on examples of best practice from a range of different educational settings?
- ▶ Is an online platform offered with a mix of access to content, e.g. face to face training, online tools, articles etc?
- ▶ What are the expectations for practical application of learnt content in own school with measured feedback?
- ▶ Is there any partnership of delivery with potential accreditation from recognised credible providers?
- ▶ How challenging will the content be with time built in for reflection?
- ▶ What range of support, coaching or mentoring is offered?

Final thoughts

Having achieved clarity on what you need to learn and where you will be able to access your training, here are a few final thoughts that are worth bearing in mind.

Firstly, if selecting one day stand-alone courses, be clear on how the content relates to your learning needs and how transferable the learning will be in your own context.

Secondly, explore any evidence of bias towards any one model, approach or theory that does not encourage intellectual curiosity for alternative thinking.

Thirdly, whilst branding and promotion of programmes is a necessity in today's crowded marketplace, it should not be seen that slick adverts equates to quality. Looking to the future, further conversations leading to the promised 'Quality Mark' for CPD providers will be welcomed.

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