Why is CPD important?

ATL wants to help its members develop professionally and personally throughout the course of their careers. We believe that good-quality continuing professional development (CPD) is a key part of this. Indeed, the union feels so strongly about the importance of CPD, we want it to form part of your contractual rights at work.

What is CPD?

CPD refers to any activity, formal or informal, that helps you develop your skills and knowledge, and enhances your professional practice. There are many ways CPD can be accessed and delivered, including:

- training courses and workshops
- studying for a qualification or accreditation
- online courses/webinars/podcasts
- observation (as either observer or person being observed)
- shadowing a colleague
- mentoring
- peer group exchange, eg via TeachMeets/Twitter groups/Google groups/professional exchange
- visiting other schools/colleges
- attending exhibitions and conferences
- international visits and exchanges
- self-reflection, personal reading or research.

Features of effective CPD

Whichever form your CPD takes, evidence shows that the most effective CPD is that which is:

- Personalised – ie built on your identified needs and requirements rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.
- Relevant – relates to your teaching theory and/or subject specialism and the needs of your learners.
- Sustained – New skills and ideas need time to take hold; experimentation and refinement is the best way to embed new ideas into your classroom practice.
- Supported – by coaching or mentoring from experienced colleagues, either from within or from outside your school.
- Collaborative – while teaching could be seen as a solitary profession, collaboration with your fellow teachers and colleagues has been identified as one of the most relevant features required for teacher learning.

Why is CPD important?

Well-crafted and well-delivered CPD is important because it delivers successive benefits at every level within the education system.

The education professional

Whether you are a teacher in a local primary school, a lecturer in an FE college, the headteacher of a large secondary school or a part-time learning support assistant, regularly updating your knowledge and skills can help you remain
competent, effective and innovative in your role. The opportunity to access structured training and learning based on your needs and the needs of your learners can also:

- enhance your confidence and motivation
- contribute to your career development as you become more effective in your workplace
- allow you to consolidate and demonstrate your professionalism, both to yourself and others; indeed, ongoing CPD can be seen as the hallmark of the professional.

Learners
The quality of teaching is recognised as one of the most important factors in determining learner outcomes. In other words, a good teacher will achieve better results from their learners than a poor one and vice versa.

CPD is central to helping you secure high standards of teaching. It also helps you keep your professional practice fresh, up-to-date and stimulating.

When your practice has these qualities, you are more likely to feel inspired, inspire others and teach effectively, thus enabling your learners to achieve their best.

Good workplace CPD, which is built on the factors outlined, also enables you to reflect on what you are doing, try new approaches and, in doing so, improve learning outcomes for your students.

Your workplace
If access to effective CPD encourages you to be more confident, motivated and inspired, giving you the reward of greater professional satisfaction, then it follows that the more of your colleagues who feel this way, the greater the positive impact will be on the ethos in your school or college.

The use of CPD can encourage and promote a learning culture with staff helping to exemplify to students that learning is a valuable, enjoyable, lifelong activity.

A more fulfilled workforce can also have a positive impact on staff commitment and retention as people feel valued and invested in.

The education sector and others
CPD can give parents, the wider public, the teaching community and the education sector confidence that teachers, lecturers, trainers, tutors and assessors are continuously improving their skills, knowledge and expertise.

ATL also believes that giving education staff an entitlement to high-quality training appropriate to their current career stage and professional aspirations is the best way to achieve a self-sustaining education system, which will provide the most effective education for children and young people.

CPD and workload
ATL knows there are barriers to education staff trying to access regular, high-quality CPD. Failure to properly identify teachers’ needs is one, while lack of funding is another.

Punitive performance management systems can also inhibit staff from requesting CPD in case it is seen as a failing. We also know that if you are part-time, a supply teacher or a member of support staff then you can find it difficult to access training, as can those who teach certain subjects, such as religious education.

Perhaps the biggest barrier, though, is workload. ATL members feel they are too busy to attend a course, find time to reflect on their practice or trial a new teaching method. The irony is that accessing CPD can play a key role in enabling you to adapt positively to changes in your work or the education sector’s requirements.

CPD can also help you manage your time better (see ATL’s factsheet on time management at www.atl.org.uk/abouttime) and work more efficiently.

Most importantly, the confidence and motivation gained from accessing regular, high-quality CPD can help you engage in informed discussions about what you are expected to do (and not do), enabling you to focus your work on what really matters for students, and reducing unnecessary workload for yourself and your colleagues.

ATL’s CPD programme
ATL believes that education staff should have access to CPD at every stage of their professional career from their initial teacher education, early professional development and beyond. Our CPD programme offers courses at both national and regional level designed to meet our members’
needs and help them develop their practice and cope with the demands of their job.

We also believe that professional development is most effective when senior teachers and managers lead by example in promoting and engaging in professional development, which is why we run courses specifically for our leadership members.

Information on all of our courses can be found in our Learning Zone at www.atl.org.uk/learningzone.

What are your rights to CPD?

All workplaces should have a policy on learning, development and training that sets out:

• what learning means within that specific workplace
• what support for learning is available for staff
• clear procedures for requesting support for learning.

While support staff and teachers in England and Wales do not currently have any requirement to undertake CPD or learning within their workplace, members in the maintained sector in England are able to use the appraisal system within their schools to discuss and press for support to learn. See ATL’s advice on appraisal and CPD at www.atl.org.uk/appraisal.

In the post-compulsory sector, there is an aspiration that lecturers engage in industrial updating and in programmes of CPD.

The Education and Training Foundation sets out ambitions for CPD in the workplace contained in the teacher standards for the FE and skills sector.

The Foundation also accepted the findings of the Commission on Adult and Vocational Learning, which supported CPD in the workplace.

For further information see the ‘Taking Ownership of Your CPD in FE’ factsheet on the ATL website: www.atl.org.uk/factsheets.

In Northern Ireland, the performance review and staff development scheme (PRSD) applies to all qualified teachers other than teachers participating in induction and early professional development, and opportunities for professional development are made available to all teaching staff.

In Wales, the Education Workforce Council (EWC) administers funding for new teachers starting induction. It also provides early professional development grants.

Arrangements for funding vary, however, depending on whether induction began before September 2012 or after. Further information can be found on the EWC website: www.ewc.wales.

The right to request time off

Regardless of the lack of entitlement to CPD in the workplace, in Great Britain, all education workers have the right to request time off to train if their workplace has more than 250 staff. More information about this is available for members in England, Scotland and Wales at www.gov.uk.

Members in Northern Ireland can find out more at www.nidirect.gov.uk.

How do I apply to undertake learning?

Ideally any application for learning should be made during a yearly appraisal or performance-management meeting. However, as this is not always achievable, you should ensure that an application is made as soon as possible. Staff should always refer to any workplace policies on learning and development, and follow the procedures in the document. It is advisable to put your request in writing. If you need advice on how to do this, contact ATL’s learning and development team at learning@atl.org.uk.

When making your initial request, consider including the points listed below. This is to give your manager, CPD coordinator or other relevant member of staff a clear idea of what it is you want to study, and why and how it will impact your current working. Any application should contain:

• what you would like to learn
• where the learning will take place
• the provider
• any related costs and time off
• the potential qualifications the learning could lead to (eg ATL courses are accredited at postgraduate level)
• how the learning could relate to current or future roles
• how the learning could improve the performance of both you and your students.
If no timescale for reply is stated in your policy, ask for one within reason, such as 10 to 15 working days.

You should expect a written response from the person who can authorise your learning, and you should ask for one if this is not covered under your workplace policy.

Can I appeal if my application is refused?

If you have a workplace learning policy, there should be a provision in place to appeal against a decision you think is unfavourable. You should use this in the first instance. However, if there is neither provision for appeal nor a learning policy, you would be able to appeal by taking out a grievance - see the ‘help and advice’ section of ATL's website: www.atl.org.uk. Also, speak to your local union learning rep, workplace rep or branch secretary, who can help negotiations for a policy in your workplace or in the case of an appeal.

Claiming expenses

If you are requesting time off, you should also ask for funds from your employer to cover your expenses for travel and any accommodation costs. ATL courses have a nominal charge for members, which should be paid by your employer. These are low and the cost to your employer is greatly reduced. As the training undertaken is of benefit not only to yourself but also your employer, this is a reasonable expectation.

Further information

FE members in England should visit the Education and Training Foundation website at www.et-foundation.co.uk for more on ongoing work on CPD in the FE and skills sector.

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