

In spite of, not because of: What stops vocational teachers from maintaining and developing subject and occupational expertise?

A submission to the *Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning* by

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1. Introduction

This note draws on current research into how vocational teachers in further education (FE) maintain and develop their subject and occupational expertise.¹ The particular focus of this research was informed by an earlier study that identified that the maintenance and development of subject and occupational expertise was, for FE teachers, the most important of three drivers for continued professional development (CPD) (Broad, 2012). The other two were: the development of teaching skills; and finding out about how to meet students' needs. If the purpose of CPD activities was linked to these drivers, then it was seen as beneficial by the teachers. However, this current research suggests that vocational teachers face significant barriers when attempting to access types of CPD that enable them to maintain and develop their subject and occupational expertise and that these barriers are in the main caused by the lack of appropriate and sufficient funding. This has subsequent

¹ The research includes a survey of 54 teachers in FE colleges in England, ten in sixth form colleges, nine in Adult and Community Learning, two in work-based learning and two teaching for private providers, interviews with seven vocational teachers, four further hairdressing teachers and representatives of key organisations that included awarding bodies, a sector skills body and two professional associations. The full report of the research will be published in the autumn of 2013.

causal effects on the extent to which teachers are able to free up time to engage with CPD activities for these purposes.

2. Summary of key findings

- Teachers engage with a wide variety of activities to maintain and develop their subject and occupational expertise. These include attending external courses and workshops, attending exhibitions, reading specialist journals and working with colleagues in industry and other teaching organisation. For some teachers, the main catalyst for this is through professional organisations aligned to their original occupation. There are also some vocational professional associations specifically for teachers in certain subject areas such as the Association of Painting Craft Teachers (APCT) and the Association of Hairdressers and Therapists (AHT)
- The greatest barrier to the development of subject and occupational development was funding. Explored in more detail at interview and through participant observations, all teachers reported that they were personally funding some, if not all, of their subject and occupational development
- Respondents said that lack of time was also a barrier for them. Teachers said that much of it was carried out in their own time. However, as workloads have increased for teachers, this becomes more problematic. For part-time hourly paid teachers, this can often mean that they actually lose financially as the stand-in teacher is paid rather than the teacher being released
- One concern here is that as so much of the activity appears to be self-funded and carried out in teachers' own time, they have begun to see this as a natural way of doing things so that, on occasion, lack of funding is no longer identified as a barrier. This is revealed in the discussions with teachers who were able to identify activities that they would like to engage with, but were not able to due to lack of financial support. This has two potential impacts: first that financial barriers are hidden; and second that it may be that teachers are only able to engage with an impoverished

form of CPD as they are not able to access events external to their employing organisation

- CPD for subject and occupational development does not seem to be an organisational priority for general FE colleges and this is probably due to the complexity of what they offer. The internal CPD they provide for their teachers is normally generic. Teachers report that with the recent wider financial contractions, funding for CPD for subject and occupational purposes has gone from very little to non-existent
- There appears to be a lack of equity in accessing subject and occupational CPD in a number of ways. First, those teachers on more flexible and insecure contracts are less likely to have their CPD for subject and occupational purposes funded by their employing organisation.
- A second potential cause of unequal access to CPD for subject and occupational purposes is that as much of the activity is self-funded, it is largely determined by the individual teacher's personal circumstances as to whether they can afford to do this
- A third potential cause of unequal access to CPD is the context in which the teacher is employed. The small specialist arts college included in this study appeared to take a more collegiate and beneficial approach to teachers' professional development. This was mainly due to line managers who had a greater understanding of the need for subject and occupational development than their counterparts in FE who often have little vocational experience of some of the subject and occupational areas they manage
- Even when line managers are vocationally experienced in the subject or occupational area and are supportive of their staff developing their occupational expertise, they are often stymied by wider organisational constraints of lack of funding
- Teachers are creative in the ways in which they access subject and occupational CPD activities. These include offsetting the cost of activities against consultancy work as a non-taxable expense
- Some teachers are able to access free events provided from within the industry such as product updating courses provided by manufacturers. However, where these are

free to attend, they tend to be impoverished and rely on theoretical, rather than practical input

- Many teachers 'horse trade' and swap classes with their colleagues so that they can attend events and activities. This will however become more problematic if workloads increase for teachers and as mentioned above, can have negative financial implications for part-time teachers
- For many teachers, the development of their subject and occupational expertise is intrinsically linked to their students' development. An example of this is hairdressing competitions run to aid students in skills development. At these events, teachers also take the opportunity to develop their own skills through networking with other teachers and experts. Funding for these student focused events seems to be lessening due to current financial constraints

3. Recommendations

1. To ensure that the development of teachers' subject and occupational expertise is not neglected, funding would need to be ring-fenced and targeted towards specific CPD activities. Teachers should have greater control over the funding of the types of CPD that they engage with as they are the ones best placed to identify professional development needs
2. For some teachers, professional organisations offer a clear vehicle for CPD activities that help to maintain and develop subject and occupational expertise. Mechanisms for nurturing these should be explored through further research.
3. Rather than one overarching professional association for the Learning and Skills Sector, smaller, more focused and specialised associations as detailed in point two above, may be better placed to support the development of both vocational teachers and their students. Further research into the possible benefits of this approach would be helpful in determining the forms that these should take and the nature of the relationships they would need to build with teachers, colleges and wider industry

4. It appears that part-time teachers are disadvantaged through current arrangements and this needs to be addressed to ensure equity of access to CPD that enables all teachers to develop their subject and occupational expertise
5. Vocational subjects and occupational areas are currently lost in the milieu of large complex FE organisations. Further research is needed into the feasibility of more specialised vocational colleges and providers
6. As many teachers appear to be funding their own professional development activities, perhaps more favourable taxation arrangements could be explored. The example given by a part-time teacher, also working as a consultant, claiming CPD activities as a non-taxable expense may be a useful avenue to explore

4. Funding CPD activities for vocational teachers

Many teachers reported that funding for subject and occupational CPD was non-existent. A construction teacher explained that organising all CPD activities for the purposes of maintaining and developing his knowledge of carpentry and joinery is, 'completely up to me' and that anything that he is interested in, such as exhibitions or courses, is self-funded. An applied sciences teacher explained that none of the activities carried out that linked to his subject and occupation were funded by his employing organisation. Unsurprisingly, teachers not on full-time contracts found it more problematic to secure funding from their employer. This presents a challenge for ensuring equal and equitable access to CPD as 61.7 percent of teachers in the FE sector are employed on a part-time basis (LLUK, 2011). An example of the position of part-time teachers was explained by an early years teacher who said, 'I've never got anything, I pay everything'. However, the fact that she is an hourly paid, part-time teacher actually offers her an advantage over her colleagues on more secure and substantial contracts. Whilst her organisation does not fund this form of CPD for her, in the time when she is not employed, she works as a consultant. The advantage that she has is that through this she can claim expenses and fees for CPD activities as a non-taxable expense. Perhaps there is a wider lesson to be learnt here. If teachers have to fund their own CPD, it may be that it should attract more favourable taxation arrangements.

5. Is self-funding of professional updating becoming the norm for teachers?

One concern here is that as so much of the activity appears to be self-funded and carried out in teachers' own time, they begin to see this as a natural way of doing things and therefore it is no longer identified as a barrier. This is revealed in the experiences of a business studies teacher who explained that there were no issues for him with identifying CPD activities. However, he then went on to describe the types of activity that he would like to do, but the issue was that those he would most like to attend were prohibitively expensive. Many of these were provided by his professional organisation, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which he is required to be a member of if the college offers their accredited courses. This professional organisation provides conferences both within England and also internationally, but funding for these would have to be made by the teacher and personal circumstances of having a growing family made this impossible for him. He gave an example of one of these conferences that he could not secure funding for. It was held in Harrogate and the cost for attendance and accommodation was around £2,500.

6. Some possible organisational explanations for why teachers fund their own occupational development activities

The reason why some teachers are not able to securing funding from their employing organisation is that CPD for subject and occupational purposes is not seen as an organisational priority. A college human resource (HR) manager explained typical organisational approaches to CPD at interview and said:

I don't think the first thing is let's make sure people are working on their subject specialism.

If a teacher was not performing to the organisational requirements of improving student retention and achievement, the more likely response is, according to the HR manager 'where do we need to performance manage people out.' In addition he maintained:

...but I don't see improving someone's subject knowledge is the first thought that comes into your head if you have got concerns about success rates and retention.

In other words, the organisational priorities appear to be different from that of teachers. This is perhaps driven by the complexity of the modern FE college, which is providing courses not only in vocational and occupational areas. They teach students from fourteen to beyond retirement, from pre entry to professional and degree level. Meeting teachers' individual training needs within this context is highly problematic. The CPD offer from within organisations therefore tends to be generic.

What is deeply problematic going forward is that even where teachers have been able to access funding, the current financial crisis has somewhat diminished this. Of deep concern here is that described by a hairdressing teacher. She explained that she used to consider herself lucky in that the college she works for did have a reasonable budget she could access for her self-identified CPD activities. This she maintains has now stopped and there is no funding available for self identified activities. She said:

They won't pay for anything so obviously before, we could do, where we felt there was a need, you know, you could get training in that way, now you need to find ways of getting that training without having to pay for it.

Professional organisations are similarly affected by budget changes and the impact of this was explained by a business studies teacher who runs courses accredited by the professional body for the occupational area. He stated that the professional body is cutting off support for its educational provision as it moves its focus onto overseas expansion. He said: 'It's certainly nowhere near as good as it used to be and their communication problems are appalling.'

7. Lack of appropriate funding leads to impoverished CPD and unequal access

The most common impact of not being able to secure funding is that this inhibits teachers from accessing courses and other events outside of the organisation. An example of the impact of lack of funding was given by a special needs teacher who explained how he submitted a request for support to enable him to engage with an Open University course on inclusion and diversity. He stated that this request had not been passed to the appropriate department by his departmental manager. He explained that this was due to the severe restrictions on funding for CPD. Similarly, as described above, the hairdressing teacher also explained that currently there is no funding available for her to attend outside events.

A further way that teachers develop subject and occupational expertise is by reading trade magazines and specialist journals. This enables them to relatively quickly and easily access new knowledge and industrial processes. These were identified as the most commonly used type of CPD for subject and occupational development. They also require funding and teachers often subscribe to professional and trade magazines personally. However, these can be relatively expensive and the applied science teacher explained how one weekly magazine he reads costs £4.30 per week. It could be argued that buying these is just a part of a teacher's professionalism. However, this will become costly over a year and this is only one way in which teachers develop their expertise. It also raises issues of equity in that this particular teacher may well be in a personal financial situation where he can afford this, whereas other teachers may not be. One negating factor however, is that for this particular teacher, three professional associations that he is involved with provide magazines as part of the subscription costs. The frequency of these varies from once a fortnight, to once a month, to quarterly. It may be however that some teachers do not belong to a professional association, or that if they do the association does not provide journals and magazines. In some instances, teachers can access specialist publications in other ways. The construction teacher explained how he visited the college library to access specialist publications. However, these in all probability are provided as a resource for the students and the teachers are therefore also able to access them. The problem here is the lack of a common planned approach to enabling teachers to access up-to-date subject and occupational knowledge in such a relatively inexpensive and potentially accessible way.

8. The role of professional and other external associations and how insufficient funding negates their effectiveness in supporting teachers' occupational development

One of the most powerful ways of maintaining and developing expertise for some teachers is through membership of an occupationally aligned professional body. The fees for membership are normally paid by the individual teacher rather than the employing organisation. These fees vary according to the organisation and the number of organisations that the teacher subscribes to. For example, the cost of belonging to the AHT for the hairdressing teacher is relatively cheap at £40, whereas the applied sciences teacher is a member of more than one association and the personal cost to him is in the region of £500. Again this raises issues of equity and equal access. If these organisations are, as I suggest, so powerful in helping teachers to develop and maintain subject expertise, then it is far too important to rely on whether the individual teacher is personally positioned to be willing and able to self-fund. On occasion colleges do recognise the importance of supporting teachers in accessing professional associations. Where the teacher is required to belong to the professional association, fees can be paid by the employing organisation. For example, the business studies teacher is required by the CIPD to be a member if the college is providing their accredited courses. He describes himself as 'lucky' in that his manager ensures that his fees are met by the college. He recognises that this is not the case for teachers in every college. However, it is not necessarily the development of subject and occupational expertise that is driving this decision to allocate funding, rather it is that for the college to offer the courses, this requirement of membership must be met.

This demonstrates that bodies outside teaching organisations have the power to help teachers build bridges from teaching to industry and we can identify here that the business studies teacher's professional association, because of its requirements, has power. Not only is it the professional association, it is also the awarding and standards body. Some Sector Skills Councils and other sector regulatory bodies have similar requirements. In the case of hairdressing teachers, they are required to carry out 30 hours of occupationally related CPD per year by the Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority (HABIA), their Sector Skills Body. Similarly, the applied science teacher is subject to a similar requirement, but in his case, by his professional association. Their experiences are different from those of the business

studies teacher as these requirements do not seem to have traversed into the organisational CPD network for them. It should be especially strong for the hairdressing teachers as their requiring organisation is the one that sets the standards for the qualifications they teach. It should therefore have power. The CIPD has managed to exert some pressure on colleges to support membership is partly because it is uniquely situated in that it has requirements for those offering its qualifications and it is also the professional body. For the applied sciences teacher, his professional body has no requirements that impact on the organisation. Whether he engages with CPD or not, it will not impact on whether his organisation can offer the course. For the hairdressing teachers, HABIA has a requirement, but is not the professional association.

Interestingly these organisations recognise that if they are to require teachers to engage in CPD, they should also provide mechanisms to enable them to engage with CPD. The applied sciences teacher can access CPD through his professional association both at conference and through the journal provided by the association. HABIA has recently established a Skills Academy in order to provide CPD events for teachers. Some of this is funded by one of the awarding bodies, the Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT). However, even though these organisations are providing some forms of CPD activity, significant funding obligations still fall on the individual teachers.

9. Strategies that teachers employ for negating some of the issues caused by insufficient funding

Some teachers work very creatively in order to access activities and negate the barrier of lack of funding. A hairdressing teacher described how, because the college salons stock products from particular manufacturers, she was able to access some of the courses they provided. There was a choice of courses provided by the manufacturer that the hairdressing teachers in the department could elect to attend. However, they had to choose from the cheapest half day options that only provided demonstrations and theoretical instructions. If they wished to attend a course which was practical and 'hands on', they would need to fund these themselves. The same teacher also described how manufacturers of products and

equipment agree to provide training for students on their products and equipment. This is clearly a marketing initiative as the manufacturers are hoping that the students will then become future customers. When these events are happening, the teachers inform each other and if they are free, they also attend, so enabling them to access free product updating events.

If individual circumstances allow, perhaps the easiest way to negate the problems of lack of funding is to self-fund CPD activities. As shown by the example of the applied sciences teacher earlier, teachers often fund their own CPD. The construction teacher also explained how he recently attended a one week course on chair making. This course was paid for by the teacher and he attended it by taking his annual leave. He also paid for his own accommodation and travel expenses. He recognised that he is in a fortunate position in that he was able to do this but recognised that his colleagues may have different personal circumstances which would negate this option for them. I would argue that this is not a satisfactory situation as it means that appropriate and beneficial CPD is largely determined by the personal circumstances of individual teachers and leads to extremely variable levels of engagement.

10. The impact of lack of funds on securing time for CPD

Not only does funding impact on teachers being able to pay for activities, it also impacts on teachers' ability to secure the time to attend activities. Members of the AHT, a professional association for hairdressing and beauty therapy teachers, stated that attendance at meetings is done in their own time and one said:

We all do it in our own time, we all give up our own time to go to these meetings, like this week I'm going up to Blackpool, I come from the furthest, you know, it's like a five hour drive in my own time, but I do it to support the AHT and the southern area.

To a large extent, this works as the AHT meetings are organised on weekends and evenings, when teachers are not being contracted to teach. This becomes an issue when attendance at events and courses are scheduled for when teachers are contractually obliged to be in classrooms with students and can become a barrier to active membership of professional associations. This was highlighted by the Chair of the Association of Painting Craft Teachers (APCT) who explained that current trends towards workload within colleges impacts negatively on teachers. He said:

The colleges make such demands on staff today that they don't have that time and colleges don't release staff as they did years ago.

One way in which teachers use funding is to 'buy' time for CPD so that another teacher would be paid to cover classes whilst the original teacher attends an event. A graphics teacher linked time to funding in this way and stated that one of the reasons why there was so little time and space for CPD was that funding could not be accessed to release him to attend events. The lack of ability for teachers to 'buy time' is even more detrimental when teachers are not employed on full-time contracts. Whilst being employed part-time may offer them more space to pursue CPD activities, when there is a clash, it can cause greater issues for these teachers. A hairdressing teacher explained how she has suffered financial loss in taking students to hairdressing competitions as part of their course. Because for part of the teaching week she is hourly paid, when she has taken students to the competitions, she has had to arrange for a colleague to cover her classes. This colleague then gets paid instead. In addition, she is not paid for the time she spends taking the students to the competitions, so this then happens in her own, unpaid time. She is therefore experiencing a 'double whammy' of losing pay and not been paid for the additional time it takes to attend the competitions. The same hairdressing teacher also explained that for the last two years, she has no longer been able to take students to the AHT competitions as the college will no longer provide the money for student travel, accommodation and subsistence whilst they are away competing in the competition.

This has an impact on this teacher's ability to develop her subject expertise as she used the opportunities presented by the competitions to network with hairdressing teachers from other colleges and this no longer happens for her. Not only does lack of funding for subject

and occupational development have an impact on teachers, it also impoverishes the students' learning experiences. One of the strengths of professional associations is that they can enable and facilitate high levels of collaborative learning that cross boundaries between teachers and students so that both groups are learning together, albeit in different ways.

What the teachers sometimes do when time cannot be bought is to 'horse trade' and swap classes to free up time. This is because in order to engage in any activity, the teacher is required to make up the time that is being 'lost' to the organisation. The applied science teacher explained how, when he requested time to attend professional association meetings, he was told by his line manager that he could attend, but that 'you've got to arrange cover for all your classes while you are away'. The way he dealt with this was to call in favours from colleagues and swap classes with them. This brings its own work as some of these swaps will be in areas that are unfamiliar to the teacher necessitating extra time being spent on lesson preparation.

Horse trading hours by swapping classes is becoming more difficult for teachers as they face increased and intensified workloads. Much work has been done on the ways in which teachers' workloads have been intensified. For example, Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran (2006) suggest characteristics of intensification found in the schools sector includes, less 'down time' in the working day, resulting in less time to keep up with developments in subject areas and less time to reflect on and refine teaching; a chronic and persistent sense of work overload which in turn fosters dependency on externally produced materials; negative effects on quality as corners are cut to save time; diversification of expertise creating doubts about own competence. Supporting these observations with accounts from FE, Edward et al (2007) report that teachers and managers in FE described coping with endless change coming at them from all directions and struggling to balance the needs of their learners with the demands from their managers, inspectors and funding sources. Against this backdrop, it is problematic to envisage how these teachers will be able to find space to engage with CPD in meaningful ways. Indeed, a graphics teacher stated that the greatest barrier to engaging with CPD was time and pressure from other jobs that were required such as tracking students and administering assessment processes. He said it 'just

consumes it all' and described educational administration as 'the biggest block to doing anything else'.

11. Enabling or disabling line management approaches to CPD

Managers in FE have some power to either enable or disable teachers as they attempt to engage with CPD activities for subject or occupational purposes. They are positioned to enable this because of the elasticity of the role of the manager in FE that affords extensive agency and autonomy (Page, 2011). For example, teachers described themselves as 'lucky' if their manager found ways to support their requests for time or funding for CPD and were so enabled in their activities. Alternatively, a special needs teacher described how he sent requests 'up the line' only to have them ignored, thus he was disabled in his CPD activities.

Probably the most enabling line management structure is one that enables collaborative working. A graphic design teacher used the collective language of 'we' when talking about how CPD was organised within his organisation. He explained that 'we' take the view of trying to accommodate each other in attending external lectures and that this will be supported by the line manager if it is a valid activity. However, this teacher does not work in mainstream FE, but in a specialist college, and the organisational structures and approach may well be different to that in general FE colleges. This suggests that for this teacher, the organisation is managed along collegiate lines within the traditional professional paradigm. Within more mainstream FE colleges, there are pockets where managers are supportive of their staff in their subject and occupational development and who still operate their departments as much as they can along these collegiate lines. The business studies teacher explained that he felt himself to be 'lucky' in that his manager is supportive and will try and identify funding to enable him to engage in identified activities. This is because he says, 'my manager pretty much understands...she knows quite a lot about HR...[his main subject area]' For this teacher, the level of support extended to having a masters course fees being met. It did not however extend to finding time to release the teacher.

For some teachers in FE, their managers are themselves under pressure, running fairly large departments that cross multiple sites. This has an impact on the relationship he or she can build with their team, which in turn may impact on how magnanimous they can be in terms of the decisions they make for CPD. The special needs teacher explained this very thing and that his line manager covered three sites and probably only spent one and a half days on the site where the special needs team is located. The impact of this was that they were very much left to their own devices and were offered little support over issues, concerns and problems. Coupled to this, the line manager was not a special needs expert and so, as explained by the special needs teacher, did not understand the issues and concerns. Resulting from this is that this teacher felt that the organisation had no concerns for his professional development in his subject area. This lack of subject or occupational knowledge as being part of the disabling process appears to be a common theme. The applied sciences teacher explained that his particular manager did not like him attending meetings of his professional association. When asked to explain why this might be, he stated that his line manager is not an expert in the field. At work here is that in both these examples, the managers themselves did not have strong connections to the subject or occupational areas.

When managers are closer to the subject or occupational area and therefore have more and stronger network connections to the subject and occupational area, they tend to be more accommodating of the need for subject and occupational development. This can be seen in the example given by a construction teacher. However, his responses also show that even when the immediate line manager is supportive, they in turn may be stymied by the organisational culture. He explained how his manager is 'a top guy' and that 'you think I'm passionate about my job, this guy is even more so, he's really into it'. But this construction teacher still described the organisational approach to CPD as 'It ticks a box.' When I asked him whether the CPD provided to him was effective, his response was 'No, but managers don't care.' These managers are having to attempt to accommodate teachers' professional development whilst at the same time dealing with their own complex and pressured workloads. It demonstrates the complex and contradictory position held by many managers within FE in that even when they are working to funnel as best as they can, the funding and

time needed by teachers in their pursuit of subject and occupational development, they are seen to be inhibited by the very same teachers.

12. Conclusion

Organisational provision and support for professional development activities for subject and occupational reasons is scant to the point of not existing for many teachers and this is compounded where teachers are employed on part-time contracts. Nevertheless, vocational teachers engage with a wide variety of activities in order to maintain and develop their subject and occupational expertise. This includes reading specialist materials, attending exhibitions, courses and meetings, and for some, being actively involved in the work of professional associations linked to their original occupation. Of deep concern is that because there is so little support offered by their employing organisations, teachers fund these activities and also attend largely in their own time. Arguably therefore, they engage with these activities in spite of, not because of, organisational approaches to the planning and provision of CPD. It appears that this approach to supporting CPD, or not as the case may be, for these purposes has become so ingrained that the financial barriers that teachers face have become hidden. This then for many teachers may lead to impoverished forms of CPD. It also impacts more greatly on those teachers who because of their personal circumstances, are not personally positioned to be able to fund their own CPD, thus leading to inequity. Against this rather disappointing backdrop, teachers are creative in identifying ways of developing subject and occupational expertise in ways that are not so dependent on funding such as through manufacturers. Where they do have to pay, there are some teachers who, because of their work away from FE colleges, can offset the costs of activities as a non-taxable expense. They also work collaboratively with colleagues so that they can be released from teaching to attend events. For some teachers, their development in these areas is intrinsically linked to their students' development and they use opportunities afforded to students. What is problematic about these creative approaches is that teachers say that the impact of the recent and continuing financial crises is impacting negatively on these opportunities. The situation for those teachers employed in specialist provision

colleges appears, however, to be more positive. Those teachers whose line managers are more conversant with the subject or occupational area tend to report that they face fewer difficulties in securing support. The challenge, therefore, is to work towards ensuring that the provision of CPD for subject and occupational development is more equitable. The evidence here suggests that to do this, a planned approach, rather than a laissez-faire approach is required.

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