This article focuses on early professional development (EPD) and continuing professional development (CPD).

EPD and CPD form two of the four stages in Northern Ireland’s integrated, competence-based approach to training and developing teachers. The other two stages are initial teacher education (ITE), which is covered in the article on ‘Initial Education’ [1], and induction, which is covered in the article on ‘Conditions of Service’ [2].

The continuum of career-long teacher education and professional development is underpinned by the following key documents.

- Teaching: the Reflective Profession [4] (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, 2011) sets out the requirements and competences expected of teachers during all phases of development.
- Learning Leaders: a Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning [5] (Department of Education, 2016) aims to aid the development of a structured teacher professional learning framework. The framework will be based on revised teaching and leadership competences and linked to improved outcomes for pupils. It will also look to promote collaboration and the sharing of best practice through professional learning communities and strengthening leadership capacity in schools.

The introduction of the strategy follows a review of the ITE infrastructure which took place between 2011 and 2014. Aspiring to Excellence [6], the final report of the review which was published in 2014, reiterated that there should be strong links between ITE and CPD. It also made a case for a substantial investment in CPD for teachers leading to master’s level [7] awards endorsed by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) [8].

EPD and CPD can involve a wide range of staff development activities, both formal and informal, designed to improve teachers’ practice. In-school activities include induction, mentoring, sharing good practice, lesson observation and feedback, and whole school development activities. External activities include courses of varying length provided by a range of providers (see below). Courses may be held during school hours, in ‘twilight’ sessions after school, or at weekends or during holidays. Conferences, industrial placement or work shadowing, and international study visits and exchanges are also considered to be CPD activities.

Organisational aspects
Legal framework

It is obligatory for beginning teachers to complete both induction and the early professional development (EPD) stage of development. Induction and EPD are documented with:

- a Career Entry Profile (CEP) [9] for completion at the commencement of induction
- an induction action plan, which is monitored by means of an interim review and a summative report
- the planning and evaluation of two Professional Development Activities (PDAs) during EPD.

Templates for these documents are included in the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook [3] (2010).

Statutory conditions of service require teachers to review their methods of teaching and programmes of work, and to participate in arrangements for their further training as teachers. There is no legal minimum requirement for the length of time to be spent on CPD. However, conditions of service require teachers to be available for work under the direction of the principal for five days when the school is not open to pupils. These days are often spent on whole-school in-service training activities and are known as in-service training days, or INSET days.

While CPD is not a legal requirement for promotion, keeping up-to-date with new developments would normally be considered necessary for teachers seeking new posts or moving to the upper pay scale.

Boards of governors [10] have a responsibility to promote the personal and collective professional development of school staff. They must develop and implement a training and development policy linked to the outcomes of the performance review scheme (see below), and produce a costed training and development plan appropriate to the needs of the school. The policy must provide clear guidance for staff in relation, for example, to secondments, attendance at courses during the school day, and any opportunity for teachers to undertake further professional qualifications during school time. Beyond the early professional development (EPD) programme, each school determines its own continuing professional development (CPD) needs, depending on the requirements of the school development plan, the professional needs of the teacher concerned, and the availability of resources in the school to meet them.

Performance management

Performance management is the system of annual performance review, which involves professional dialogue about aims and achievements between teachers and their team leaders, and headteachers and their governing body. Performance management sets a framework to agree and review priorities and objectives and to identify professional development needs in the context of schools’ development plans.

Common arrangements for reviewing the performance of teachers and school principals (headteachers) were phased into all schools between 1995 and 2000. The arrangements were last reviewed in February 2014, giving rise to the Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme (PRSD) [11]. One of the aims of PRSD is to ‘identify the professional needs and necessary resources to support teachers in their professional development and career progression’.

Teachers’ performance is reviewed on an annual basis. The reviewer is normally the teacher’s line manager. Before or at the start of the review cycle, the reviewer and reviewee meet to agree three personal/shared objectives which relate to the school development plan. These cover the three areas of professional practice, pupil and curriculum development, and the personal and professional
development of the teacher. Two classroom observations, of a maximum period of one hour, take place as a prelude to the review discussion. At the review discussion the reviewer and reviewee establish the reviewee’s performance and identify any personal and professional development needs in relation to the agreed objectives. They also agree an action plan and objectives for the coming year. Since September 2007, procedures for determining threshold progression, that is moving from the main pay scale to the upper pay scale, are on the basis of the principal’s professional judgement.

Providers

Providers of EPD and CPD are numerous and varied and include:

- senior staff within schools, who provide ongoing professional guidance and development for their colleagues, either as part of their day-to-day monitoring or as special, focused training
- the Education Authority (EA), which provides EPD support for beginning teachers, through a dedicated Early Professional Development website [12] providing information and support materials
- the Department of Education (DE) which, for example, funds the Literacy and Numeracy Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 CPD Project [13], a professional development programme for teachers of English and mathematics in these key stages
- higher education institutions
- further education colleges [14]
- independent providers.

Incentives, supporting measures and funding for participation in continuing professional development (CPD) activities

Schools decide for themselves how much of their budget to allocate to CPD. This is based on their specific areas for development as set out in their school development plan (SPD), although some specific initiatives receive government funding (see the subheading ‘Providers’ above).

Each individual teacher’s development is planned for in the context of the SDP and monitored by the performance management system. As a result, CPD is integrated into teacher performance management and school self-evaluation to form a coherent cycle of planning.

For teachers, effective professional development is beneficial because it enhances job satisfaction and career opportunities. There is no automatic link between participating in CPD and increased pay, nor is there any entitlement to training leave. However, in practice, learning through CPD will help teachers demonstrate in their performance review that their performance is satisfactory and deserving of pay progression and promotion.

For schools, an incentive to continually evaluate and improve the quality of their teachers is that this is one of the key aspects against which they will be judged during school inspection. This is in line with the Education and Training Inspectorate’s [15] Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) [16].

Some formal CPD activities may attract academic accreditation at master’s level (Level 7 [17] of The Frameworks for HE Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies [18], and lead to awards including the postgraduate certificate (PG Cert – 60 credits); the postgraduate diploma (PG Dip – 120 credits); a master’s [7] (MA – 180 credits); or doctorate [19] (PhD – 360 credits).
Although there is no automatic entitlement to payment for participation in CPD, there is discretion for schools to make a payment to any teacher who undertakes CPD over and above the contractual requirement to participate in in-service training days (see ‘Legal framework’ above). It is for individual schools to decide whether teachers are allowed to attend CPD activities in school time. If the training corresponds to needs identified as part of the review process and is in line with the SDP, attendance in school time would normally be allowed and the cost of the training activity would be covered by the school.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) [20] has previously provided bursaries to individual teachers who wish to carry out a professional development activity, and also to teachers who wish to work with colleagues on an inter-school basis. No such funding streams are operating currently. Case study reports [21] on how teachers used the bursaries are available from the GTCNI.

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