Accredited Continuing Professional Development: the motivational and inhibiting factors affecting the completion of courses by teachers.

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**A. Literature Review**

**Introduction**

Over the years continuing professional development (CPD) in teaching has been conceptualised in several different ways. In *Teaching and Learning: A strategy for professional development* (2001, p.1) the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment gave this view:

I believe that professional development is above all about developing extraordinary talent and inspiration, and especially the classroom practice of teachers, by making sure that they have the finest and most up-to -date tools to do their job

Blunkett's view appears to expect to bring about changes in practice whilst leaving the individual teacher largely untouched and unchanged by the professional development that has taken place. There is a clear contradiction between this and the view of professional development supported by Dadds (2000, p.55):

The journey of professional growth into new and better practices is often unpredictable; often non-linear; often emotional as well as cerebral. It demands the capacity and strength to ask questions; to analyse and interpret feedback; to describe the emotions generated by self-study; to change established practices in the light of new understanding; to remain interested and emotionally curious.

Soulsby and Swain's (2003) Report on the Award-bearing INSET Scheme was fulsome in its support of longer-term more rigorous study as a means of bringing about teacher development, whilst acknowledging that finding a direct link between accredited study and pupil development was more difficult.

The literature on factors affecting the completion or otherwise of accredited CPD was minimal and broader themes had to be considered to enlighten our investigation. More has been published on factors that inhibit involvement in accredited CPD activity rather than on completion.

Looking at the draft bidding specification for the 2004 bidding round for what will be called Postgraduate Professional Development funding, it appears that the findings of Soulsby and Swain's report (2003) have largely been accepted by Government advisors. Only programmes at masters' level or above will be eligible for TTA funding, a clear indication that the Government is committed to teachers undertaking higher qualifications as a means of facilitating school improvement.

Given such high level encouragement it is perhaps surprising that more teachers are not keen to undertake accredited professional development, but a range of factors appear to discourage this.

**Time**

It is generally accepted that teachers have a comparatively high workload (Timperley & Robinson, 2000; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001) but the extent to which lack of time results in lack of engagement with accredited CPD does vary between schools. While discussing the reasons why more teachers do not undertake research, one important form that CPD may take, Hancock (2000, p. 121) states:

Teachers' working conditions militate against any activity that is not contributing to the 'hands on' work with pupils.

Later, Hancock continues this argument by focusing on the new skills teachers need to acquire if they are going to become successful researchers and suggests that the need to bring new skills, 'creative energy' and 'commitment' to this new task proves too much for many teachers.

**National Culture**

Perhaps it is not just workload pressure and perceived lack of time that discourage activities that do not contribute directly to the 'hands on' work with pupils. Haggerty (2004) has contributed an important thematic review into the debate. Reviewing the works of Goodson (2003), Hargreaves (2003) and Sachs (2003), she detects consistent reference to a growing dichotomy between, on the one hand, teachers who want to reflect and develop their professional expertise within a understanding of a wider view of education and, on the other, technicians who will deliver pre-designed and carefully scripted packages, (Goodson, 2003.) Hargreaves (2003) differentiates between sophisticated professional learning communities and performance training sects and sees the latter in danger of developing a culture of prescription and dependency. Bottery and Wright (2000) show that the intellectual demands on teachers are not for any deep and extended overview of education, but for devising and implementing practical strategies for delivering policy. Where does this leave professional development? Hargreaves believes “research in best classroom practice is being imposed on teachers rather than being used as a source of professional reflection and adaptation to teachers’ own classroom circumstances” (Hargreaves, 2003, quoted in Haggerty, 2004, p.593).

**Local culture and Teacher Confidence**

Schools do exist where consistently more teachers find time to undertake accredited CPD. A key factor may be the commitment of the head / CPD co-ordinator to a culture of CPD, especially where that commitment is underpinned by resources. Soulsby and Swain (2003, p.12) report that the impact of CPD is greatest where “the head teacher takes a personal interest”. Wood found a high take up of CPD opportunities in a case study where senior management seek to avoid simple ‘off the shelf’ CPD solutions in favour of constantly evaluating individual and organisational needs and matching these with an appropriately targeted range of CPD which suits both local and national contexts, (Wood, 2003.)

Levels of confidence among teachers and a belief in their own ability to engage with a subject and produce work at masters' level and / or above may be an even more significant constraint on teacher involvement in accredited CPD than lack of time:

To a very considerable extent teachers have been usurped as creative and thinking professionals - it is now possible that they believe in themselves less than they ever did.

(Hancock, 2000, p. 121)

The self-confidence factor is particularly frustrating when it prevents large numbers of teachers engaging with accredited CPD, and yet one of the outcomes of accredited CPD is the increase in teacher confidence that results from successful completion of an award.

**Bringing the academic and professional together**.

All teachers are required to engage in continuing professional development; to identify, document, record and evaluate it as they cross through the barriers of induction standards, grapple with targets for performance management, submit threshold applications or bid for research scholarships, international exchanges, professional bursaries or sabbaticals.

(Cambell, 2002, p. 1)

This level of bureaucracy may well prevent teachers from taking on additional accredited CPD activity, but many HEIs led by organisations such as UCET are seeking to develop flexible assessment patterns that incorporate work being undertaken in school e.g. for performance management.

Accreditation of prior learning also offers possible ways of acknowledging work undertaken for professional programmes such as NPQH within a masters' programme.

**Personal / Professional Balance**

There is some evidence that there is an imbalance between emphasis placed upon the importance of teachers working towards professional goals as opposed to personal ones. So long as significant funding for some CPD courses is provided by the TTA, it seems unlikely that the link to professional goals established by negotiation between the teacher and their performance manager will lessen. Yet the possibility of teachers being more willing to engage in CPD courses if the programme allowed them to develop interests that are more strongly personal or subject orientated should not be ignored. Wood’s case study drew attention to an art teacher who derived renewed allegiance to her subject and fresh impetus in her work from a short course in art at a national museum, (Wood, 2003.)

**Summary**

The philosophy individuals hold about the way in which professionals learn has a fundamental effect on the way in which they feel professional development should be transacted. Arguments for the importance of teachers engaging with accredited masters' level development activities are predicated on the view that professional learning demands internal change and growth as well as changes in practice.

There was little literature available on the specific area of our research: factors affecting the completion or otherwise of accredited CPD. This appears to make our investigation yet more relevant.

# **B. Research approach**

The research was undertaken by four lecturers based in three higher education institutions: Oxford Brookes University, the University of Gloucestershire and Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln. Our involvement in this project lasted 16 months during which time we met three times, and communicated by telephone and email. An initial review of the literature was developed throughout this period.

A paper questionnaire was initially sent to a cohort of 90 teacher participants who had studied award-bearing courses, 30 from each institution. These participants were selected from courses reflecting a broad spectrum of the CPD courses offered at the three institutions, and included equal numbers of those who had completed the assessed workers and those who had not.

25 returns were received from this first round, and it was decided to send out a further 90 questionnaires, 30 to participants from each institution. As our preliminary analysis of the original returns indicated an under representation of both male teachers and secondary teachers, the second cohort was targeted to adjust for this. In total 46 completed questionnaires were received from the 180 teacher participants invited to take part in the research, (25%) which is a relatively low rate of return. Of these, 90% were returned by participants who had completed the assessed element of their course. Only 10% of the respondents were non-completers of the courses.

The questionnaire (appendix 1) sought to determine: -

* what factors motivate participants towards completion and what factors support completion;
* what factors inhibit completion.

A mixture of open and closed questions was used. The closed questions were en-coded to facilitate quantitative analysis. The answers to the open questions were en-coded to convert the answers in the raw data into “a limited number of categories that enable simple description of the data and allow for statistical analysis” (Robson, 2002, p257). The returned questionnaires were anonymous.

Following an analysis of responses to the initial questionnaire a smaller sample of 12 participants was identified. This was structured to include four participants from each institution, reflecting, in equal proportions, both those who had completed and those who had not, Permission was sought from these people regarding their willingness to take part in a follow up semi-structured interview by telephone. Interviews were carried out by researchers not involved in the teaching or assessment of the participant. The semi-structured interview questions (appendix 2) sought to investigate more fully the factors involved. Those who had not completed the written assessment of their course were generally less willing to be interviewed. However, there were institutional differences here. One institution found no problem in finding 2 non-completers to interview; whilst another could not recruit any. As a result only seven interviews were conducted.

The en-coded questionnaire returns provided quantitative data for analysis whilst both the questionnaire returns and semi-structured interviews provided rich data which helped us build up a valuable profile of motivation and inhibition amongst these teacher participants in accredited CPD.

## C Questionnaire data analysis

When developing our questionnaire, we were interested in gaining a more detailed picture of the type of teachers engaging in award-bearing courses, as well as a better understanding of why some participants managed to complete their assessed work, while others did not. Are teachers more likely to undertake CPD at a certain age, career stage, after moving to a new school? Do HEIs underestimate the diffidence of experienced and professional teachers when it comes to further enquiry? What kind of challenges to teachers face when undertaking CPD? What are their sources of support? What are the lessons for HEIs?

These questions formed the starting point for our enquiry. Unfortunately the number of questionnaires returned was low, so the conclusions drawn from our analysis must be regarded as tentative. One of our findings was just how hard it is to elicit a response from the primary target group i.e. those who did not complete.

## Participant profile

Forty six replies were received in total, from respondents who had undertaken a variety of m-level award-bearing courses, including:

* Postgraduate Certificate courses in primary subject leadership, early years education, primary science, early professional development, mentoring ITE, child development
* Postgraduate Diploma courses in practitioner research
* Individual m-level modules in mentoring ITE, leadership skills, inclusive education and early professional development.

Despite our attempts to try to ensure a balanced response, the majority of the questionnaires were returned by women primary school teachers, (see tables 1 & 2 below.) This, in part, reflects the CPD courses offered by our institutions which attract more primary than secondary teachers and, to a lesser extent, the national picture. The figures for school phase and gender are as follows:

# Table 1 : School phase

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Primary | Secondary |
| Respondents to questionnaire 2003/4 | 65% | 35% |
| Total CPD students enrolled at Bishop Grosseteste College 2003/4 | 70% | 20% |
| Total CPD students enrolled at Oxford Brookes University 2003/4 | Not  available | Not  available |
| Total CPD students enrolled at University of Gloucestershire 2003/4 | 62% | 27% |
| Proportion of teachers nationally 2002[[1]](#footnote-1) | 50% | 50% |

# Table 2 : Gender

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Women | Men |
| Respondents to questionnaire 2003/4 | 83% | 17% |
| Total CPD students enrolled at Bishop Grosseteste College 2003/4 | 82% | 18% |
| Total CPD students enrolled at Oxford Brookes University 2003/4 | 84% | 16% |
| Total CPD students enrolled at University of Gloucestershire 2003/4 | 84% | 16% |
| Proportion of teachers nationally 2002 | 71% | 29% |

The larger proportion of students who worked in the primary sector might explain the preponderance of women on the courses (since 84% of primary teachers are female[[2]](#footnote-2)).

In terms of school size, the majority of respondents (82%) came from small to medium sized schools[[3]](#footnote-3). We had wondered whether larger schools were more likely to encourage teachers to participate in award-bearing CPD courses. This did not appear to be the case.

*Age*  
At one institution, the age profile of students has changed to being mainly 21-30 and 50+ (which they describe as eager youngsters and older reflectors). The age profile of the questionnaire respondents was as follows:

* 1. 24%
  2. 10%
  3. 16%

51-60 9%

Although there was a large proportion of “eager youngsters” (24%), the percentage of students over 50 tails off. 26% of respondents were aged from 30 to 50, which is a time when teachers may have additional professional responsibilities as their careers progress. Teachers in this age group may also have family responsibilities which make it harder for them to undertake further study.

*Number of years experience*  
The age of participants does not necessarily indicate how experienced they are as teachers, since some are late entrants to the profession. We were interested in whether teachers tended to opt for CPD if they had more or fewer years of teaching experience. The figures were as follows:

1-4 years 30%

4-10 years 44%

10+ years 26%

*Length of time in current school*   
Although only 30% of respondents had been teaching for 0-4 years, 65% had been at their present school for four or fewer years. It seems possible that moving to a new school is a prompt to undertake CPD.

*School location*  
The majority of our respondents came from rural schools (48%), compared to schools located in urban areas (24%) or suburbs (28%). This probably reflects the main constituency of the three institutions – in Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire. We had thought that the difficulties of finding supply cover for rural schools might adversely affect some teachers’ opportunities to attend CPD, but this did not seem to be the case for our respondents.

*Rationale for taking the course*  
The majority of respondents had chosen to take the course for professional development (45%) compared to those taking a course for personal interest (38%) or because they had a responsibility to do so (17%). Interestingly, the majority of those studying for personal interest have been teaching more than four years, and of the participants aged 50+ (4), three were studying for personal interest.

We asked respondents to indicate how important it was for them to be studying an award-bearing course. The majority indicated that it was either important (52%) or very important (28%). Even those studying for personal interest considered it important to be on an award-bearing course.

All the courses that respondents were studying could lead to masters qualifications if they undertook further study. Two thirds of the respondents were definitely planning to continue with their studies and a further 7% indicated that it was possible they might continue.

## Factors assisting learning and development

The table below indicates which factors most assisted respondents in learning and development. They were asked to give each factor a mark out of 10 (with 1 being low and 10 high). The results have been averaged, sorted into order of importance and compared against three other factors: number of years teaching, school phase and school location.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average across all respondents | Years teaching | | School phase | | | School location | | |
| 1-4 | 4+ | n/p | P | s | u | s | r |
| Reflecting on practice | 8.13 | 8.36 | 8.29 | 8.25 | 8.24 | 8.07 | 7.73 | 8.23 | 8.27 |
| Discussion with other participants | 7.83 | 7.93 | 7.78 | 7.5 | 7.96 | 7.93 | 7.73 | 7.54 | 8.05 |
| School-focused applications | 7.76 | 7.79 | 7.74 | 9.25 | 7.36 | 8 | 7.7 | 7 | 8.23 |
| Sharing ideas with colleagues | 7.62 | 8.21 | 7.35 | 7.75 | 7.64 | 7.79 | 7.5 | 7.54 | 7.73 |
| Tutor responsiveness | 7.59 | 8 | 7.41 | 7.5 | 7.76 | 7.73 | 7.18 | 7.77 | 7.68 |
| Taught sessions | 7.58 | 8.14 | 7.32 | 7 | 8.08 | 7.33 | 7.36 | 8.17 | 7.36 |
| Engaging with theory | 7.33 | 7.36 | 7.32 | 5.5 | 7.36 | 7.67 | 6.73 | 6.85 | 7.95 |
| Personal reading | 7.24 | 6.71 | 7.47 | 8 | 7.12 | 7.46 | 6.73 | 6 | 8.23 |
| Writing assignments | 7.02 | 7.25 | 6.94 | 8 | 6.78 | 7.36 | 6.3 | 6.91 | 7.41 |
| Writing journals/diaries/course tasks | 5.72 | 5.46 | 6.08 | 5.25 | 5.74 | 4.85 | 4.5 | 5.82 | 6.29 |

Although the differences are small between the various factors which assisted learning and development, the solitary tasks seemed to be less popular than group tasks. Personal reading and writing assignments scored higher for nursery and secondary teachers than primary. Engaging with theory scored much lower for nursery teachers than for primary and secondary: nursery teachers much preferred school-focused applications.

Those who had been teaching for fewer than 4 years valued reflecting on practice, sharing ideas with colleagues, the taught sessions and tutor responsiveness. Those who had been teaching for more than 4 years also liked reflecting on practice, but their next highest preferences were for discussion with other participants and school-focused applications.

## Assessment approach

A number of different assessment approaches were used at the three institutions, including written assignments, portfolios, presentations and examinations (or a combination of these approaches). 76% of questionnaire respondents had been required to write assignments, with the others indicating different combinations of assessment methods as follows:

Written assignment 76 % (35)

Portfolio 2 % (1)

Written assignment; presentation 11 % (5)

Written assignment; portfolio 7 % (3)

Written assignment; presentation; portfolio 2 % (1)

Written assignment; presentation; portfolio; examination 2 % (1)

**What helped completion of assessed tasks?**

Questionnaire respondents were asked to identify ways in which the assessment approach had been helpful in ensuring completion. The responses were varied. A number of respondents (eleven) mentioned appropriately timed deadlines as being helpful to completion. Deadlines needed to be clear, built in to the structure of the course from the start, and fitted around the school year. “I could pace myself with the work to fit in with the school.” Strict deadlines were welcomed by some: “We were given a completion date and expected to meet it.” Others liked some flexibility to ensure that they were able to work on the assignments when their schedules permitted.

The relevance of the mode of assessment was also considered important by seven of the respondents:

* [Assessment] was based on reflective practice in the classroom.
* The presentation helped me to focus on what was important.
* It was varied interesting, well outlined and relevant to practice.
* Short tasks reflected work in taught sessions and were school based.
* I prefer assignments to sitting an exam.
* I enjoy reading and writing so it was an assessment that appealed to me.
* I liked written assignments because I could work on these whenever my schedule permitted.

Seven respondents mentioned tutor support as being helpful, which included tutor availability and access, willingness to offer help and e-mail support from the tutor: for example, “I could access tutors very quickly and found it very reassuring.” In addition, respondents appreciated advice during taught sessions, the use of tutorials, regular discussion about the assessment and clarification of the brief.

Formative feedback was identified as helpful by five respondents. Of these, four described having the assessed task split into two 3000-word sections, with the first 3000 words marked and evaluated before students went on to the second half of the task. The fifth was able to discuss drafts with their tutor.

Three respondents commented on the explicit structure of the assignment. Two of these said that they had found a guideline framework helpful.  
  
Regular discussion about the assessment throughout the course, combined with a clear focus on what was required was also considered helpful by two respondents. One person had found it useful to look at previous students’ work.

**What did not help completion of assessed tasks?**

In many ways the factors which did not help completion of the assessed tasks mirror the factors which helped completion.  
  
The nature of the deadlines and time to complete assignments was mentioned by ten respondents. Four commented that the deadlines were too short. One said that the deadline was too long. Several respondents found it difficult to find time to write assignments, especially if the deadline came at a busy time. “Very short time span for first task and scheduling of module at busiest time of the school year.”

Another aspect of timing concerned the point in the course at which the assessed tasks were discussed. Three respondents would have liked an earlier focus on the assessed task. Two others complained that they received feedback too late (one needed formative feedback on a draft; the other was concerned that it was a long time before assignments were returned to students).  
  
The relevance of the assessment also affected completion, according to six of the respondents. One felt there was too much theory, another that the writing undermined the practical outcomes, a third felt the assignments were too management-based, rather than being school-specific. Another found the focus of the assessed tasks too broad: “Tasks had to cover the whole primary age range and I struggled to get time to do this.” A fifth respondent found the tasks too demanding: “Some tasks were time consuming but not helpful on top of a full-time job.” One person suggested breaking down the assessed task into smaller steps, while another would have preferred a clearer link between the criteria for assignments and those for the dissertation.

Three respondents were unclear about what was required for the assessed work: “Clearer guidelines at the start on layout, completion dates, to be given at the beginning”. One would have liked help in how to pace the development of their assessed work.

Other comments concerned the need for more flexibility on the word limit (eg providing a range, rather than a specific number of words); reducing the length of the task; having too many assignments at once and difficulties in gaining access to a library.

## Sources of support

# School

27 respondents identified their school as being a key source of support. As well as the school generally, specific staff and others mentioned included:

Head teacher and SMT: (7)

Other members of the department/subject coordinator: (8)

School staff and colleagues: (8)

Colleagues doing the same course: (2)

Teaching Assistants: (2)

Pupils: (2)

Others: parents (1); the school science club (1); being given a day off for writing (1).

One telephone interviewee said the school had an “open ethos concerned with welfare of individuals and extended this ethos to staff, there was ready access to all documentation.” Another pointed out that school had been helpful in providing release time to meet the external examiner. A number of telephone interviewees said the support of their head teacher had been crucial, the “head suggested the course to me and got the money, the head was very supportive.”

# Higher Education Institution

21 respondents said that their tutor had been a source of support (although one added that their tutor “ was not always available and not able to give me the amount of time I would have liked”). Four respondents mentioned the library as supportive and one said that lectures and reading material were helpful. Eleven respondents had found course colleagues to be a source of support.

*Family*  
Three respondents mentioned their family generally as a source of support, a further five mentioned their husband or partner (one said her husband gave her support at home when writing up the tasks). Children were mentioned by one respondent and another identified his or her mother as a source of support.

# Local Education Authority (LEA)

Only two respondents had found their LEA to be a source of support.

*Other*Other sources of support were:

* A training day on circle time
* A presentation from the tutor on how to present the assignments
* Observed factors within the school
* Relevance to school practice
* Grant money for 4th year teachers up bursaries
* Websites
* Weekends.

One respondent felt that making the assignment a priority had helped and regretted that there were no meetings with the tutors after the course had ended. Another was not able to identify any sources of support: “None - found lack of time and support made life very difficult.”

## Sources of hindrance

# Time and workload

A lack of time, caused by having too many other commitments (primarily work and family) was the factor most commonly cited by respondents (25) as hindering their completion of assessed tasks. Issues mentioned included:

* Time! Each assignment has taken several days (perhaps 5 days) to read, research, organise, write and edit.
* Having a stressful job and working full-time
* Workload as a class teacher - feel under pressure all the time to get things done.
* Not enough time to write assignment while working full time, ie, 60 hours a week.
* Making time alongside work and other interests has been difficult, having been away from studying for over 30 years.
* In my second year of teaching with a mixed year group and responsibility for 2 core subjects, I had no time to do the reading and the other work for the assessed work.
* Not given any time to study - not able to leave school early, so resulted in 13-hour days.
* Head teacher - not having summer holiday to complete work (as originally promised).
* Me - too tired.
* Work-life balance.

A self-funding telephone interviewee pointed to her determination and organisation as a source of support in relation to time and workload. “I was self funding so was very determined to complete. I was systematic in planning and pacing myself to balance school work and the assignment. Being organised and determined meant that potential hurdles were avoided.”

Three respondents mentioned the need for more non-contact time to research and write assignments, though it was unclear who they thought should provide this time. For example, one respondent said “my head teacher [was a hindrance] - I would have liked more release time to work further with key stage two children and to write the main assignment.” Whereas a telephone interviewee said, “if LEAs are serious about CPD, they will have to offer more support with time.”

# Timing

The timing of course teaching, as well as hand-in dates for assessed work, were considered to be a hindrance by 5 respondents. One commented: “Taught sessions were after school – exhausting!” while another found the summer term a difficult time to study. One respondent would have liked the lead-up to the assignment to take place earlier in the course, while another said that a deadline in September meant that tutors were on holiday when students needed help over the summer.

# School

As indicated above, some of respondents had found that the pressure of school work interfered with their ability to complete assessed tasks. Two complained that their head teachers had given them insufficient non-contact time. Two others said that some staff in school had been unsupportive. Another commented “I have felt the need to underplay achievement with superiors who are now less qualified and may be threatened”. One telephone interviewee said, “school was not particularly supportive, neither financially nor in respect of recognising professional development gain.”

# Institution

Apart from the problems in the timing of courses and deadlines mentioned above, only four respondents identified ways in which their institutions were a hindrance. These comprised: unsupportive tutors, the lack of accessible books, the limitations of the library service, which meant that students were unable to use computers or borrow books in the holiday. One telephone interviewee pointed to seven day book loans as being a real pressure. Another interviewee said, “getting relevant reading material was hard. The HEI has now started posting materials to those off-site. Before it was difficult to co-ordinate library opening times with time to visit. It would have helped to have more on-line references because this is a readier source. On-line journals are very useful, but I spent a great deal of time searching the web for access points and relevant materials.” However, another respondent commented: “Internet at work was so filtered to render it totally useless and linked books were not really easily available on the subject. I found doing research on the topic extremely difficult. The subject was obtuse!”

*Other*  
Individual respondents cited a lack of interest in the assignment titles (because they were not sufficiently school based), problems caused by a change in course dates and feeling unclear about course requirements.

# **How HEIs could assist students further**

# Changes to assessment

Respondents’ suggestions included:

* offering a range of different assignment titles;
* shorter assignments (“The expectation for full time teachers to complete a 9000-word assignment is too much. University lecturers have no idea of the demands of a full time teaching position”);
* setting deadlines for separate sections of the assignment (eg, literature review, main body, reflection/conclusion);
* where two assignments are required, writing one halfway through the course;
* scheduling assignments with more space between them to reduce pressure on students;
* providing more guidance on the writing of the assignment, particularly on its structure, together with more examples of “layout, pagination over 2 parts, many more Harvard examples and how to phrase critical analysis”;
* tutors taking on a mentoring role.

One respondent pointed out the difficulties of writing the assignment at the end of the course: “When one becomes "stuck" there isn’t any recourse to advice or information and because you don't start writing the assignment until the end of the course there's little access to tutors for help or colleagues as the course has finished.” Another suggested having more contact and feedback whilst writing the dissertation.

Two respondents would have liked more guidance on how tasks could be carried out in schools. One suggested that their HEI should write a covering letter to the school, outlining what was needed for school-based work.

# Changes to the teaching

Six respondents made strong pleas for study days to be built in to the course. These included a home study day to replace one of the day release sessions, more unscheduled contact time for private study and paid cover for lessons to give teachers more study time.

Timing was also identified as an area for improvement. Respondents suggested allowing students more time to complete work; holding taught sessions on a Saturday or in school holidays; putting some of the tutorials closer together.

Travel was mentioned by three respondents, all of whom lived some distance away from the HEI where they studied. One suggested that instead of having six complete days at the HEI it would have been preferable to have shorter, local tutorials, held more frequently. Another would have liked less travelling and more locally-based lectures. The third suggested a negotiation with their local university, which would have enabled them to access materials there, instead of at the HEI library, 60 miles away.

One respondent suggested that the HEI should develop a more detailed knowledge of how the local LEA operated within schools, as many of the procedures recommended by the course were incompatible with the local LEA framework.

One individual suggested that lectures should be more focused, and that tutors should recognise that it was not possible for students to read large amounts of material prior to the taught sessions.

# Changes to the support system

Six respondents suggested that more contact time would have been helpful. Two would have liked more meetings with their tutor and other course members. Two suggested holding more one-to-one tutorials. One put in a plea for “more sympathetic tutors”. One commented that their tutor had “helped when I needed extra support when things were going wrong”.

Access to the library was mentioned by four respondents. Suggestions included: ensuring that books and journals on the reading list are in the library; providing access to books and journals at local libraries; extending the library card to cover time to research the assignment after the course has finished.

One individual commented that the administration of the course could have been more organised at the beginning, but said that this had improved later, taking a lot of pressure off the students.

# Changes to student motivation

One individual suggested that students need a lot of self-motivation to complete their assessed work, and felt that it was up to the students themselves to work to institutional deadlines, as long as they were given dates well in advance. Another commented that the course turned out to have the wrong focus for them, which had affected their motivation to complete.

# No change needed

Eight respondents felt that their institution was already very helpful. They could not suggest any ways in which support could have been improved.

# **D Conclusions**

Given the relatively low response rate to our questionnaire, the conclusions of our work so far need to be viewed as tentative. These are the issues which appeared to be important, and which would merit further investigation.

In terms of the profile of respondents, we noted the following:

* The high proportion of women students (83%)
* The relatively high proportion of students undertaking award-bearing CPD for personal, rather than professional reasons (38%)
* The high proportion of students who had been in their schools for four or fewer years (68%).

We noted earlier that our courses seem to attract more primary school teachers, which may account for the high numbers of women. Nevertheless, it would be useful to examine further why award-bearing CPD courses appear to be more attractive to women than to men.

We were interested that accredited CPD seems to offer an important quality mark for students – even students studying for personal reasons felt that it was important to be on an award-bearing course. (But this may affect their commitment to completing the assessed work.)

In relation to the proportion of teachers who had been at their schools for fewer than four years, this suggest that policy-makers need to examine provision for teachers changing schools and re-entering the profession following a career break (induction is focused on newly qualified teachers, rather than new teachers generally).

Our findings relating to assessment suggest a need for:

* clear but flexible deadlines, taking into account busy periods of the school year
* assessment approaches to be relevant to the student context
* assessment approaches to be varied, in order to reflect individual learning preferences
* formative feedback
* an introduction to assessment requirements early in the course, with regular focused sessions on assessment throughout
* clear guidelines.

Tutors need to provide support and to be available (especially when students are likely to be working on assignments). This may present practical difficulties, because students are most likely to be working on their assignments during school holidays – which is when lecturers are usually away.

Time and timing are highly significant. Deadlines need to take account of the school year, and to allow enough time for hard-pressed teachers to complete the work. Again, some academic institutions have time constraints, too (such as requiring course participants to submit assessed work within a certain time after the start of the course, or in relation to external examinations committee meetings). Similarly, the plea for tutors to recognise that teachers may not be able to complete reading in advance of a session fails to take into account the requirement of many m-level validation documents that students should undertake over 150 hours of work in their own time. It is possible that, in due course, the changes brought about by remodelling the workforce following the Pricewaterhousecoopers report on teacher workload (2001) may reduce the pressure on teachers.

In terms of support which respondents valued, that offered by head teachers seemed surprisingly low (mentioned by seven respondents), since head teacher support is sometimes regarded as crucial to successful CPD (Soulsby & Swain, 2003; Wood, 2003). Only two respondents mentioned colleagues from their school doing the same course (possibly because others did not have colleagues from their school with them). This has become intrinsic to recent CPD programmes, such as ‘Leading from the Middle’, (NCSL, 2004) which requires two to four applicants from each school.

There is scope for developing the role of LEAs in supporting teachers undertaking CPD, but this may prove difficult with the current changes in LEA funding. The latest Postgraduate Professional Development Programme bidding round ([www.tta.gov.uk/ppd](http://www.tta.gov.uk/ppd), 2004) encourages partnerships between HEIs and LEAs, however, which could provide an opportunity for LEAs to increase their involvement. The suggestion that higher education institutions (HEIs) should take into account the frameworks of LEAs may prove difficult, because sometimes there are fundamental differences between the views of lecturers and those of LEAs.

The issue of provision for students living a long way from the HEI where they are studying may be of increasing importance, since HEIs are developing markets nationally as well as locally. HEIs need to identify the special requirements of students not based locally and address their needs. In some cases this may be a matter of simply communicating what is available, for example, most HEIs are part of Library Plus, which gives access to libraries nationwide, but some respondents did not seem to be aware of this facility.

There is an inherent tension for HEIs in maintaining an academic perspective to m-level courses, while responding to the needs of teacher participants. All HEIs are required to work within the QCA framework, which sets out the standards of m-level courses. In order to maintain quality, HEIs develop their own frameworks for such courses, which usually include stringent regulations regarding the type of assessment, deadlines for its completion and criteria for marking. At the same time, new course developments increasingly mean that HEI staff work unsocial hours and are more restricted as to when they can take holidays. Some of the issues raised by the teacher participants relate to these constraints, and may be difficult for HEIs to change. Nevertheless, many of the suggestions for helping students to complete assessed work could be incorporated into course planning and delivery. By addressing these areas, HEIs may be able to achieve the responsiveness needed for the fast-changing, highly pressured world of teachers’ CPD.

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1. DfES, 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DfES statistics, 2000 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Small school - up to 200 pupils if a primary school, 600 if a secondary

   school (as defined by the DfES.)

   Medium school from 201 to 500 if a primary, 601 to 1000 if a secondary

   Large school over 500 if a primary and over 1000 if a secondary [↑](#footnote-ref-3)