

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Supply Teachers

Messages and issues from a research study and the GTC survey of teachers

October 2009



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of its vision for teaching in 2012¹, the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) is undertaking a project on the future of accountability in teaching. If teachers are responsible or accountable for their teaching, it is vital that they have access to, and are able to participate in, appropriate professional development, or learning. In the early stages of creating a research and evidence base to help inform this project, the GTCE commissioned a small qualitative study to help scope some manageable and strategic approaches to access and participation in continuing professional development (CPD) for supply teachers.
- 1.2 The GTCE was aware, from evidence generated from previous surveys of teachers that there were concerns about CPD in relation to supply teachers. Although surveys conducted by the GTCE have showed an increase in teachers expressing satisfaction with their professional development over time, of all the groups of teachers who responded to the GTCE *Teacher Surveys* of 2006 and 2007, supply teachers said that they were least satisfied with their CPD.
- 1.3 The most recent survey of teachers, conducted in 2009, shows that professional development for supply teachers is a continuing issue: two out of five supply teachers said they had not engaged in any CPD activity in the past year. Supply teachers are very different from the main teacher sample in terms of access to and time for CPD. They are more likely than the main sample to disagree that they have had access to adequate professional development and to disagree that their professional development needs have been identified in the last 12 months. One quarter say they have had access to adequate professional development opportunities (24%) and a fifth say they have had their professional development needs identified (20%) over the last twelve months². The 2009 survey shows that supply teachers are significantly less likely to have engaged in all CPD activities asked about when compared against the main survey of teachers' sample.
- 1.4 Evidence points to the fundamental differences teachers make to pupil learning, and the GTCE believes that making professional development more *systematic and systemic* is vital to improving teaching and learning. The GTCE, therefore, commissioned a team from the Institute of Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) to conduct a small, qualitative research study, to begin to identify *strategic* (likely to have impact in longer term) and *manageable* (practical or feasible) approaches to support professional development for supply teachers.

¹ See <http://www.gtce.org.uk.gtc.teaching2012vision/>

² TNS, Unpublished draft paper, GTCE *Survey of Teachers 2009* (supply teachers), October 2009

1.5 This small scale, qualitative study set out to:

- create a better understanding of potential barriers to professional development for supply teachers
- gain a sense of the perspectives of those who have a role to play (school leaders, supply teachers, local authorities etc.)
- offer some suggestions for improving planning, provision, and evaluation of teacher access and participation in effective, relevant, sustained CPD.

1.6 The purpose of this paper is to disseminate the findings of this study - *Scoping manageable and strategic approaches to CPD for supply teachers* and to comment on some of the issues raised by and potential implications of this work.

1.7 Since this research has been conducted, the government has signalled in the *Your child, your schools, our future* white paper³ that it intends to introduce a renewable 'licence to teach'. In order to hold a licence to teach or practise as it now known, the white paper states that, teachers will be required to demonstrate periodically that their skills are up-to-date and that their practice continues to meet the standards required for the profession. Supply teachers will fall within the scope of licence to practise as soon as is practicable after 2010. Accordingly, the GTCE believes that the professional development that supply teachers have access to, and participate in, and, critically its impact on their practice will be crucial to supporting the depth and currency of their skills and ensuring their practice meets the professional standards.

1.8 According to data from the GTCE register of teachers, 7.8 % of teachers (registered and in service) in 2007-2008 were supply teachers. Figures from the recent published digest of statistics presenting data up to March 2009 show that 10.4% of teachers are supply teachers.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 The study commenced with a literature review which discusses the findings of research literature on supply teachers and provides an overview of some policy documents on supply teachers.

2.2 Following this, six case studies were conducted in schools, involving interviews with supply teachers in all schools, and head teachers in five of the six schools. Interviews to inform case studies were conducted in other contexts where supply teachers might participate in professional development – including three supply agencies and four local authorities (LAs). Interviews were conducted with representatives of stakeholder organisations including the Department for Schools and Families (DCSF), Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and GTCE.

2.3 The study sample was purposive. Access to supply teachers and those who support their professional development in LA contexts proved particularly challenging. Any findings on LAs should be read in this context.

³ DCSF, *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*, June 2009

3.0 Findings & possible implications

3.1 Literature review

- 3.1.1 As set out in the literature review, supply teachers are a diverse group of teachers. They have varying employment conditions and development needs. This chapter, in the report, offers a review of some of the literature on development needs that supply teachers report, and their ways of obtaining employment.
- 3.1.2 The review differentiates supply teachers according to their circumstances – although, of course, some supply teachers fit into more than one ‘category’ – and maps their likely professional development needs.

‘Category’ of supply teachers	Likely CPD needs
Retired/near retirement	Professional practices, policies/initiatives
Recently qualified teachers	Induction
Returning after a career break	Curriculum developments, teaching & learning
Career supply teacher	Diverse needs depending on circumstances
Overseas trained teachers	ICT, policies & practices in England, Behaviour for learning
Part time teacher, supply on non-timetabled days	Possibly more access to CPD through school

- 3.1.3 The diversity seen within the supply teacher group makes suitable access or an offer of a CPD entitlement more complex. Although evidence shows that for supply teachers there are issues around access to professional development, these issues will vary according to the individual. Critically, supply teachers should not be seen as a uniform group with the same set of needs. This implies that a variety of tailored opportunities and different strategies will be needed if their disparate needs are to be met. There is a sizeable number of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) working as supply teachers who additionally need appropriate support to complete their induction period. From figures sourced in March 2009, there were 2713 NQTs working as supply teachers; this constitutes 5.3 percent of supply teachers, 10.3 percent of NQTs (registered on census date), and, 0.6 percent of teachers (registered and in service).
- 3.1.4 The literature review examined a range of current or potential barriers to accessing CPD as a supply teacher. These are set out by theme as follows:
- *Transience/intermittent working*
 - This can make access to CPD - for example mentoring or coaching, opportunities to observe practice and be observed, and collaborative learning - difficult. This in

turn can lead to supply teachers being or perceiving themselves as professionally marginalised.

- *No systematic arrangements for performance management*
 - This can make the identification of CPD needs and the planning of CPD or new opportunities challenging.
- *Responsibility for professional development and communication of existing opportunities and the importance of CPD*
 - The report contends that it is unclear where responsibility for CPD lies. Because supply teachers can work intermittently in schools they are not necessarily privy in the same way that most other teachers are, to school communications about professional development.
- *Practical barriers, such as finance, time and travel related barriers*
 - Where CPD takes the form of external courses, travel time and costs can make participation difficult. A supply teacher would have to, in many circumstances give up paid working time to attend an external course, where professional development takes this form. Similarly, funding sources for professional development for supply teachers are not identified.
- *Teacher motivation/perception*
 - Some supply teachers do not anticipate further development in their careers and are accordingly not as concerned about professional development.

3.1.5 The range of barriers identified hints at the difficulties of establishing appropriate CPD access, opportunities and strategies for supply teachers. Many of these barriers are practical, structural or circumstantial. While still problematic, with appropriate resourcing and structures they might be overcome. However, likely supply teacher perceptions of and motivations for professional development will need to be addressed. This is of particular concern with regard to any possible licence to practise (LtP) if the competence of all supply teachers is to be supported by the impact of participation in professional development.

3.2 How do supply teachers in schools access or engage in professional development? What might be the needs of teachers who access professional development through schools be?

3.2.1 Access to, and participation in, CPD for supply teachers is variable overall. Supply teachers generally experienced informal support and advice from other teachers. This often took the form of technological help, or advice on school processes. It sometimes took the form of informal conversations with or advice from headteachers on working with a particular group of students.

3.2.2 We can set this alongside the GTCE survey finding that the most common form of CPD activity cited by teachers over the last year is “collaborative learning with colleagues in my school”; with around two-fifths of supply teachers having experienced this at least occasionally (38%). A quarter of supply teachers have experienced “collaborative learning with external partnerships/networks” (26%), this is followed by “participating in an external course” (21%), “engaging with subject or specialist associations” (17%) and “being responsible for mentoring or coaching someone” (17%).

3.2.3 However, supply teachers are significantly less likely to have engaged in all the CPD activities asked about when compared against the main survey of teachers’ sample. Even

though the most common form of professional development cited by supply teachers was 'collaborative learning with colleagues in my school,' supply teachers were considerably less likely than the main sample of teachers to have engaged in this form of professional development.

- 3.2.4 In the study *Scoping manageable and strategic approaches to CPD for supply teachers*, supply teachers said they had been offered opportunities to be observed, but very rarely opportunities to observe. The report interprets these opportunities as being about monitoring teaching rather than explicitly about professional development.
- 3.2.5 Supply teachers reported that they were rarely asked to join professional development activities; where they did report opportunities, they seemed to primarily be speaking of Inset days or courses. Some head teachers interviewed said supply teachers would be welcome to join in with professional development within school, but the report suggests that this offer needs to be more explicit if supply teachers are to take advantage of these opportunities.
- 3.2.6 Those interviewed had a range of views on supply teachers' CPD needs. Some head teachers thought CPD needs might vary considerably depending on what career stage supply teachers had reached and their previous experience. Opportunities were thought to be greater for supply teachers on longer placements in schools.
- 3.2.7 However, overall supply teachers and headteachers agreed on some priorities for supply teachers development needs – because of the rapid developments in curriculum, changes in ICT and practice, these areas – and behaviour management were thought to be priorities.
- 3.2.8 However, it is not clear whether this encompasses the full scope of supply teachers' developmental needs. It is possible, that given the existing issues around access to CPD, they capture only a very basic set of needs which are needed in order to work as a supply teacher. Moreover, given the lack of performance management for supply teachers, it is likely that these priorities do not capture the individualised range of learning and development needs.
- 3.2.9 Supply teacher access to and participation in professional development seems to be somewhat variable, dependent on opportunity and to some extent on the ability or motivation of the supply teacher to seek out professional development. While aspects of provision could be addressed, again, how supply teachers view ongoing development and their motivation to participate will need to be addressed.
- 3.2.10 Overall, there is not much evidence of CPD as we broadly understand it – in these contexts. The lack of what is considered effective CPD⁴ is worrying and hints at the depth of the problem.
- 3.2.11 In addition to participation in CPD, its impact on teaching and learning is crucial. Given the lack of evidence of what is considered effective CPD found for supply teachers in the contexts that the report examined, evidence of evaluation of the impact of this CPD was also difficult to find.

⁴ Particular approaches to CPD are more likely to be effective and result in changes in teaching that positively impact on the learning, behaviour and achievement of all children and young people. Successive systematic reviews (EPPI) of research conducted over several years describe the characteristics of effective approaches to CPD as: having a clear focus on pupil learning; involving teachers in identifying their needs; using coaching and mentoring; including observation, feedback and collaborative working; providing opportunities for practice, research and reflective practice; and modelling preferred practice (e.g. active learning), both in classrooms and in adult learning situations.

3.3 *How do supply teachers who work through supply agencies access or engage in professional development?*

- 3.3.1 Where supply agencies facilitate CPD, this is to offer a 'quality' teacher to schools, and attract teachers to the agency. Overall, the motivation for agencies is to attract and retain teachers and school.
- 3.3.2 CPD often takes the form of courses, but there is evidence of teacher forums, professional development portfolios, online learning, and structured feedback. Where CPD takes the form of courses, topics tend to include behaviour management, child protection, ICT, and curricular changes.
- 3.3.3 The limited numbers of supply teachers who participated reported feeling positive about their experience. In particular, they welcomed the opportunity to meet other supply teachers as this helped address their sense of professional isolation.
- 3.3.4 Some agencies actively recruit NQTs. The report notes that many NQTs are working as supply teachers because they have not been able to secure permanent positions. However, some NQTs do want to experience different schools and environments. Many of the supply agencies involved believed that induction needs could be catered for, however, they noted there had been instances of NQTs exceeding the limit for the completion of induction and needing to apply for an extension.
- 3.3.5 Overall, where opportunities were available for supply teachers to engage in professional development, there was limited take-up of professional development opportunities, agencies spoke of the effort it took to persuade teachers to participate. This is thought to, in some cases, reflect the practical and financial issues that the report underlines on access and engagement with professional development. Examples of these issues are set out above in the description of barrier to supply teacher engagement with professional development. In particular, the report notes that where other teachers engage in formal professional development activities in paid working time, supply teachers do not have the opportunity to do so.
- 3.3.6 There is some suggestion that there are sometimes unintended benefits of more formal opportunities for supply teachers, namely the opportunities to network and perhaps learn from other supply teacher colleagues, and that these may be as useful if not more useful than the structured opportunities. It may be worth considering how these less formal opportunities, such as being part of a network or learning community could be provided for supply teachers. It is concerning that opportunities for collaborative learning are often absent, due both to the lack of a community and importantly the sense of isolation, either real or perceived, that this creates.

3.4 *What does this study tell us about access to and engagement with CPD needs in some local authorities?*

- 3.4.1 The researchers caution that in some cases information is partial where follow up with participants was not successful. The researchers had different levels of contact with different authorities, and this section of the report must be read in this context.
- 3.4.2 As set out in the reports' literature review, previous research (Hutchings) suggested that many LAs did not run supply services. The report suggested that LAs have played a limited role in organising supply – and that where LAs seemed to have effective practices in place, they were working with private agencies.

- 3.4.3 One way that CPD is supported for supply teachers in this context is through the Quality Mark, launched in July 2002, as a joint initiative between DCSF and the REC to help drive up standards for everyone in the sector.
- 3.4.4 The researchers considered CPD access in four LA contexts, including one which is said to work on the model of a CPD entitlement. For more information on these contexts, see the project report.
- 3.4.5 The concerns common to other contexts remain when considering LA contexts; there is limited information about supply teachers, limited involvement in their placement, and communications challenges.

3.5 *What does this study tell us about access to and engagement with CPD needs from sources that are nationally available?*

- 3.5.1 Nationally, CPD tends to be aimed at all teachers, with very little support specifically targeted at supply teachers.
- 3.5.2 At a national level, overall there were thought to be some opportunities, such as online support through the creation of virtual communities of practice, Teachers TV and the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA). However, the report logs concerns about participation in professional learning communities where they are anchored in schools because of some of the potential practical barriers to access noted in section 3.1 of this paper.

4.0 Suggestions for approaches to CPD for supply teachers

- 4.1 The report offers some suggestions for approaches at different levels in the system, through for example schools, LAs, and supply agencies.
- 4.2 Suggestions for approaches to access to and participation in professional development include:
- *Opening up and advertising school, agency and LA opportunities to a wider range of teachers.* The report notes that it would be important that many schools are able to offer these opportunities so that some are not overwhelmed by large numbers of supply teachers who might want to access opportunities.
 - *Mentoring for supply teachers.* It is suggested that a school that makes regular use of the same pool of supply teachers could offer mentoring to them. Each school could identify a member of staff as a 'supply' teacher mentor. Support could include observing lessons and offering feedback, and ensuring opportunities for supply teachers to observe other lessons.
 - *Each supply teacher could have a 'base school'.* Building on previous suggestions, the report suggests that every supply teacher could have a school where they would access performance management, have a mentor, participate in CPD, have access to collaborative learning, observe other practitioners.
 - *Performance management systems for supply teachers could be introduced.* Through this a more personalised approach to CPD could be developed, tied in perhaps with the suggestion that every supply teacher have a base school. It is worth noting that data from the GTCE *Survey of Teachers 2009* shows that supply teachers are less likely to

agree that performance management is an effective way of holding teachers to account than teachers generally (43% compared with 49% of the main sample), and to neither agree nor disagree on this matter.⁵

- *There could be a distinct role for training schools.* Training schools might take a lead in enabling supply teachers to access some forms of professional development that would be facilitated by school support.
- *Current online resources could be updated.* Teachers TV could address issues of interest and importance to supply teachers as well as advertise the opportunities they could access.
- *More use could be made of local grids for learning.* This would be both to communicate with supply teachers, and to host online networks and discussions.
- *An up to date record of professional development.* This could be required for registration with the General Teaching Council, and schools could check this record when new supply teachers started work with them. There were concerns about equity of access and different working conditions between supply and other teachers.

4.3 The report raises questions about the manageability of these approaches, and in particular the question of where responsibility for the professional development of supply teachers and an appropriate entitlement to such development lies

4.4 It suggests that schools do not see the professional development of supply teachers this as their responsibility, and questions whether schools will be willing to use budgets to support it.

4.5 As with schools, it considers whether agencies could further extend their current offer to supply teachers. This could offer supply teachers somewhat personalised/tailored development. Agencies could extend or adopt a system where they reduce the charge of supply if a teacher gets the opportunity to observe or be observed. This might be of benefit particularly to shorter term supply teachers – those not working with a school on a longer term basis. But as agencies are private organisations, they would need to be convinced of and able to balance these interests. The report raises concerns about equality of access. Why would, or how could agencies be inclusive? What would be the incentive for agencies to cater to any other than ‘supply teachers on their books’?

4.6 The report strongly emphasises that to make any approach *manageable*, it must be underpinned by a detailed consideration of funding and financial barriers, communication, and roles for all those involved.

5.0 Concluding remarks

5.1 Some of the findings from this report corroborate the findings from the GTCE *Survey of Teachers 2009* on access to professional development for supply teachers. They suggest that access to, and participation in, CPD for supply teachers is limited. Addressing access to effective CPD is problematic for a variety of reasons, not least of which are the diversity of supply teachers and the range of circumstances in which they work. However, this is

⁵ Unpublished draft paper, GTCE survey of teachers (supply teachers), TNS, October 2009

something that does need to be addressed, if the practice of all teachers is to be supported and importantly if, as the Government has indicated, a system of licensing which requires teachers to demonstrate their competence is to be introduced.

- 5.2 Underpinning any such requirement all teachers will need access to effective CPD which meets their individual learning and development needs. A key part of this for supply teachers will be securing access to performance management including identification of need, accompanied by the access to and participation in effective CPD to meet these needs.

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