

A Framework for Academic Professional Development in Higher Education

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Abstract

The higher education landscape is rapidly changing environment with shrinking budgets, greater demands and initiatives to drive greater collaboration with stakeholders and proposals suggesting integration amongst institutions. Coupled with changes in the technological environment within which staff in higher education work, academics continue to be challenged in an ever-increasing changing environment. Critical to sustaining higher educational institutions will be having efficient and skilful staff, an image as a progressive and dynamic institution committed to developing its people and providing opportunities for organisational learning to occur. For the individual who commits to engaging with CPD the benefits include; (i) career prospects may be improved, (ii) identify skills that may be of assistance to others, (iii) maintain and improve knowledge and abilities, (iv) being able to react more readily and adapt to a changing professional and dynamic world and (v) maintaining CPD records demonstrate a commitment to the profession. Key drivers in formulating a framework in the delivery of CPD are; (i) appreciating the pedagogy of learning, (ii) reviewing the broad range of acceptable activities that constitute CPD, (iii) acknowledging the myriad of challenges management and staff in educational institutions face in deploying CPD and (iv) recognising the role of professional bodies and the drivers in maintaining the status of CPD. A framework is presented that endeavours to capture the multi-faceted nature of CPD in academic settings, recognising that CPD may be formal or informal, collaborative and collegial, while attempting to record the broad range of activities that constitute CPD.

Introduction

The rapidly changing environment of higher education will continue to have a significant impact on higher education. Costs continue to rise, students are being further challenged to contribute more in terms of fees and budgets are typically shrinking, while demands for new services are growing. Lueddeke (2003) puts forward the argument that the ‘professionalisation’ of teaching practice in higher education is becoming more important as higher education institutions endeavour to respond to; (i) an increasingly diverse and discerning student cohort, (ii) dealing with issues relating to quality and standards, (iii) growing international competition and (iv) attempting to do more with less. Ferman (2011) suggests that academic roles and responsibilities have expanded to become more diverse and complex as academics are now expected to become

course designers, marketers, technology experts and administrators as well as the traditional roles of research and teaching. For academics, the changing nature of the role has resulted in academics requiring continued skill development in subject, teaching, leadership and administrative experience (Crawford, 2010).

While higher education has traditionally been slow in implementing change, external changes are challenging higher education's resistance to change (Folkers, 2005). More educational providers are being encouraged to move towards more online and blended courses to meet existing students' needs and to reach new students (Schrum et al., 2007). Folkers (2005) states that coupled with these external changes, higher-level institutes face the continued growth of Internet use, decline in governmental support for education and the emergence of a new student population.

Educational institutions benefit from having efficient and skilful staff, an image as a progressive and dynamic institution committed to developing its people and providing opportunities for organisational learning to occur. The profile of CPD has grown significantly across all employment sectors in recent times (Murphy et al., 2005). Due to challenges such as professional competency, regulatory requirements and health and safety legislation requirements, most professional bodies have persuaded their membership to accept professional bodies' requirements for continuing professional development (CPD) programmes (Becher, 1999). Individuals benefit from CPD as it may present opportunities for career development, illustrate commitment to the individual's chosen profession, enhance career opportunities, enhance self-fulfilment / personal development opportunities and help to overcome shortcomings an individual may perceive that he or she may have. This paper provides an analysis of professional standards frameworks with respect to what constitutes CPD based on the practices of a number of professional bodies and proposes a framework to capture CPD activities in an academic setting.

Definitions of Continuing Professional Development

According to the Institute of Continuing Professional Development (2006), CPD is a requirement within all professional bodies and is an essential part of the system that underpins and ensures the steadfastness of the services that professionals offer to the public. Brereton (2004, page 15), states that CPD is "The systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner's working life". What distinguishes CPD from other forms of learning, however, is that it is self-motivated, self-directed and self-monitored (Bridges and Grierson, 2000).

For the individual who commits to engaging with CPD the benefits include; (i) career prospects may be improved, (ii) identify skills that may be of assistance to others, (iii) maintain and improve knowledge and abilities, (iv) being able to react more readily and adapt to a changing

professional and dynamic world and (v) maintaining CPD records demonstrate a commitment to the profession (Source: Adopted from various professional bodies documentation).

This suggests that lifelong learning is an on-going challenge that all professionals face in their careers. To address employee needs, organisations must address three requirements; (i) the right information, (ii) an open culture and (iii) an effective technology (Rosenberg, 2001). All individuals learn in different ways from listening, watching, questioning, doing and helping others to learn (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994).

Role of Professional Bodies in Supporting Continuing Professional Development

All bodies have a role in informing, facilitating, encouraging and policing CPD. For example typically acceptable CPD learning across engineering and construction domains includes 35 hours of recognised activity or 100 points of CPD learning with a recommendation that an element of the professional's CPD be structured, i.e. classroom or lecture setting annually (Source: Various Professional Bodies websites and documentation). While other professions such as accountancy, medical and nursing may have a different requirement in respect of hours and equivalence of points in terms of recognition of CPD, all have in place a similar approach to recognising and recording CPD. Thomas (1995) suggested that CPD is well supported and regarded by members of a profession when:

1. There is an environment that encourages and facilitates access to CPD
2. The providers act in a professional way – i.e. providers must be prepared to determine the proper needs of their clients and then to meet these needs
3. Active and enthusiastic collaboration takes place between the providers, professional bodies, individual professionals and their employers.

Thomas (1995) and Browell (2002) state that the benefits to higher educational institutions in becoming involved in providing CPD include:

1. Information feeds back into undergraduate programmes to ensure relevance to industry requirements.
2. Opportunity for funding to carry out research and consultancy
3. Offering the potential for closer links with industry and the professions.

Supporting Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education

There is a significant body of research to demonstrate that professional bodies are actively engaging with technology to empower members in undertaking CPD. Friedman and Senior (2001) in a study of 68 professional bodies found that the professional associations surveyed

indicated that a wide range of further developments were planned for the various professional bodies websites, including formal online courses, interactive CPD planning and testing, more interaction for members via discussion sections, teleconferencing, virtual workshops, more links to other organisations and links to distance learning. A study by Brosnan and Burgess (2003) highlighted that 76% of professionals surveyed engaged in using the Internet to support their professional learning. Supporting this, Brosnan and Burgess (2003) cite the Macleod and Macleod (2001) study which found that out of 34 professional bodies, 33 anticipated more use of Internet technologies within a 2 year period to support members' CPD requirements.

More and more people are using the Internet to send e-mail, instant messaging, browsing, finding entertainment information and reading news – "... today's students think of the Internet the way their parents and their grandparents – and even their older siblings – viewed electricity: ubiquitous and only noticeable when not available" (Bruce, 2003, page 24). Garrison and Kanuak (2004) stated that given the increasing evidence that ICT and the Internet are transforming much of society, there is little reason to believe that it will not be a significant transformative innovation for higher education in the 21st century. Key enablers that both managers and academics in higher education have available to address the rapidly changing environment in education are the facilities and capabilities offered by e-learning and technology in the delivery of the curriculum. A review of CPD highlights that there are numerous options and alternatives available to individuals that count towards the continued up-skilling and improved knowledge of professionals. Recognition exists within professional bodies for both formal and informal methods of learning. Ferman (2002) suggests that traditional development in academia encompasses formal training and conference attendance, workshop attendance, research, publications, accessing online resources, mentoring, project-based work, keeping a reflective journal and working with instructional designers to design curriculum, teaching material or teaching strategies, etc. while informal CPD includes conversations with colleagues and reading (both pedagogic and discipline specific topics), receiving informal feedback from colleagues and students, being mentored and networking. According to Boud (2007) most academic development takes place in the locations where academics spend most of their time, i.e. professional settings, research sites and departments in which they work. Furthermore, Ferman (2002) suggests that in academia, staff development can be collaborative and collegial, individual professional development or both.

It is widely recognised that much of the lifelong learning development of a professional takes place through on-the-job training. This may be classified as informal CPD. Becher (1999) categorises informal learning into 4 broad groups, outlined in table 1.

Table 1 Informal Learning

Category of informal learning	Examples
Resource based	Draws mainly on magazines, journals, publications which professionals read or refer to, to keep up-to-date with developments in their field.
Practice based	Relates to “learning on the job”, learning by observation and learning by doing.
Practice related	Draws on practical knowledge and includes such activities as giving lectures, teaching, writing articles, carrying out research, etc.
Interpersonal	Includes networking, sharing knowledge among practitioners

Source: Adapted from Bridges and Grierson (2000) and Becher (1999)

Within each of these categories of informal activities there are a range of possible activities that contribute towards learning in an informal setting. However, it is very important to recognise that informal learning can be supplemented by formal CPD. Bridges and Grierson (2000) classify formal CPD courses as either technical, where professional knowledge and skills are updated, or contextual, where professional capabilities are enhanced or related to the solving of particular problems leading to specialisation. Wall et al. (2006) suggest that formal CPD can consist of (i) training courses, both internal and external, (ii) post-graduate academic studies such as diplomas and masters, (iii) attending appropriate technical lectures, as typically organised by professional institutions, (iv) significant involvement in the work of a learned institution, e.g. presentation of a technical paper to the preparation of a report, (v) participation in technical conferences or study visits and (vi) special exam leave. King (2004) in a study of Earth Science Teachers in Higher Education identified a series of CPD activity types that staff engaged with including; (i) discussions with colleagues in their department, (ii) supporting colleagues to develop their teaching, (iii) networking with colleagues from other institutions, (iv) reading books / articles on learning and teaching, (v) reading web-based information on learning and teaching, (vi) participating in a learning and teaching workshop, (vii) discussions with staff in their institutional educational development unit or equivalent, (viii) studying for / holding a learning and teaching qualification, (ix) attending a learning / teaching conference, (x) applying for teaching development funding and (xi) undertaking research into learning and teaching.

Hirshon (2005) suggests that the nature of education is changing in terms of; (i) what higher level institutes do and (ii) the financial resources available to do it. As the demographic profile of the population changes, demands for greater flexibility increase and a further expansion in the demand for lifelong learning can be expected, it is likely that higher education will need to continue to embrace change and remain flexible in the way it performs its role in order to address

these challenges. The changing role of academics presents a challenge for academics to continue to engage with development activities. King (2004) identified; (i) time, (ii) emphasis on research, (iii) lack of funding (e.g. to attend events), (iv) lack of personal interest and (v) lack of encouragement as barriers to undertaking CPD for teaching.

The Changing Role of Academics

The changing external and internal environment in which academics work has resulted in academics being involved in a host of teaching and learning practices that can offer convenience for students but may be far more labour intensive for staff in higher level institutes. For staff it includes; (i) creating courses, (ii) maintaining chat rooms, (iii) responding to students queries by email around the clock, (iv) the new expectations of students on these programmes including “anytime, anyplace learning”, “round the clock availability of instructors” and “24/7 advising” (Alexander, 2001 and Levine and Sun, 2002).

Coupled with the increasing demands on services from students and other stakeholders, educational institutions are faced with increasing costs needed to up-skill staff in today’s high technology environment. Educators are attempting to develop new training and teaching methods that will provide optimal transfer of learning and allow for complex skill acquisition (Andreas, 2004). There are many unique aspects to be considered when it comes to postulating a framework for CPD for academics. There are unique challenges in terms of; (i) CPD of teaching practice and (ii) the differing requirements of numerous professional bodies. Furthermore, developing a framework for continuing professional development in an academic environment must recognise; (i) the unique environment in which lecturing, teaching, research and support staff work within, (ii) the multi-faceted nature of CPD, (iii) the ever-changing environment in which academics work and (iv) ultimately CPD is self-directed, self-motivated and self-monitored.

Supporting the Delivery of CPD in an Academic Environment

Tynan and Lee (2009) state that the professional development of academic staff is one critical aspect that academic institutions will have to address in order to rise to the challenges of meeting the knowledge, skills and innovations in a global economy. Crawford (2010) states that CPD is a tool for improving the educational vitality of educational institutions through the attention to the competencies needed by academics and to the institutional policies required to promote academic excellence. When reviewing CPD in the further education sector in the UK, Peeke (2000) suggests that CPD could consist of 3 stages, (i) updating in areas covered by initial qualifications where knowledge and practice moves on and required acquisition of skills and knowledge for those roles have changed roles or assumed additional roles, (ii) development routes for those who wish to continue developing their teaching role and those who wish to develop as managers and (iii) required training or qualifications of senior managers.

Key challenges identified in deploying CPD include understanding; (i) the drivers and barriers for professional bodies both in the facilitation and support of CPD, (ii) the myriad of technological and support systems that may be integrated to deliver CPD and (iii) modes or models of deployment of technology facilitated learning in educational institutions. Studies such as Bridges and Grierson (2002), Brosnan and Burgess (2003), Klien and Ware (2003) and Ellis and Thorpe (2004) all reinforce the need for flexibility and support the use of technology in the delivery of CPD.

Engaging in CPD in educational institutions is a unique endeavour as there are the dual requirements of pedagogy plus requirements of professional bodies. The range of disciplines include; education, construction, nursing, medical, science, engineering, architecture, arts, law and business which brings another layer of complexity as the domain specific CPD requirements may be quite different. The challenges remains for all in, firstly developing a suitable framework that addresses the concerns of professional work and personal commitments of academic staff and secondly dealing with the technologies issues and support infrastructure to be put in place to support the pedagogical, technical and financial challenges for both management and staff in educational institutions.

Learning environments can be configured to facilitate an environment that can encourage and ease access to CPD in a flexible manner. Educational institutions can address both professional bodies' and work practice requirements while mirroring the strategic development challenges they may face through promoting the benefits of CPD. As suggested by Peeke (2000) it should be recognised that academics may be at different stages in their academic careers and traditionally academics determine their own development with possible reference to professional bodies' membership requirement. The formulation of a framework that may be embraced by educational institutions in deploying CPD will not be effective except through; (i) acknowledging the importance of appropriate pedagogical approaches, (ii) ensuring that adequate opportunities are created to facilitate capturing experiential learning opportunities, (iii) appreciating the multitude of roles technology can play in both the support and delivery of learning and (iv) facilitating experiential learning opportunities.

Table 2, based on the work of King (2004), Becher (1999), Wall et al. (2006), Bridges and Grierson (2000) and Ferman (2002), presents a framework that endeavours to capture the multi-faceted nature of CPD in academic settings, recognising that CPD may be formal or informal, collaborative and collegial, while attempting to record the broad range of activities that constitute CPD.

Table 2 Proposed Template to Capture Academic CPD

Nature of CPD engagement can be either formal or informal	Description of activity	Group / individual / both	Amount of time involved	Lessons learned / key elements applied
Training courses, both internal and external				
Post-graduate academic studies such as diplomas and masters				
Attending appropriate technical lectures, as typically organised by the professional institutions				
Significant involvement in the work of a learned institution, e.g. presentation of a technical paper to the preparation of a report				
Participation in technical conferences or study visits				
Special exam leave				
Undertaking research into learning and teaching				
Undertaking research in specific domain other than pedagogy				
Discussions with colleagues in their department				
Supporting colleagues to develop their teaching				
Writing a publication based on teaching or research work				
Networking with colleagues from other institutions				
Reading books / articles on learning and teaching				
Reading books / articles on subject domain				
Web-based information on learning and teaching				
Participating in a domain specific workshop / seminar				
Participating in a learning and teaching workshop				
Discussions with staff within educational development unit or equivalent				
Sharing experiences with colleagues through making presentations				
Mentoring or being mentored by colleagues				
Other - please specify				

Key drivers in formulating a framework in the delivery of CPD are; (i) appreciating the pedagogy of learning, (ii) reviewing the broad range of acceptable activities that constitute CPD, (iii) acknowledging the myriad of challenges management and staff in educational institutions face in deploying CPD and (iv) recognising the role of professional bodies and the drivers in maintaining the status of CPD.

Conclusion

A review of CPD highlights that there are numerous options and alternatives available to individuals that count towards the continued up-skilling and improved knowledge of staff in higher education. Educational institutions are dealing with new learners, new needs and new delivery methods. Academics can benefit from CPD as it may present opportunities for career development, illustrate commitment to the individual's chosen profession, enhance self-fulfilment / personal development opportunities and help to overcome shortcomings an individual may have. Educational institutions also can benefit from having efficient and skilful staff, enhancing their image as dynamic institutions committed to developing their staff and leveraging opportunities for organisational learning to occur.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 report recognises that there have been significant advances in Irish higher education with; (i) the establishment of centres for education development and academic practice, (ii) the availability of professional programmes focused on teaching and learning, (iii) developments in technology enhanced learning, (iv) the adoption of new forms of pedagogy to facilitate enhanced student engagement and (v) an increasing emphasis on teaching in the tenure and promotion process. Underpinning the delivery of the National Strategy for Higher Education strategically will require facilitating an environment for new learners, new technologies, a more explicit quality framework environment, reducing resources and increasing demands, facilitating a broad framework to capture CPD is strategically important for the continued development of academics.

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