

Support or Constraint for schoolteachers in England

We await a new Standard for Continuing Professional Development

I recently received a ‘call for evidence’. You might note the possessive apostrophe accompanying ‘DfE’ in the first line of this call for evidence below and perhaps raise an eyebrow when you come to the word ‘independent’. It is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that an ‘independent’ body can be said to be owned by government. Such is how we do things. As a result there are tensions and they just might be creative. If, however, there is a clash you can be sure that possession shall trump independence.

There are other causes for puzzlement. We have a government that appears to want a free-for-all schooling system (a non-systemic system if that makes sense), an anything goes approach to public examinations and that has no respect for professional qualifications, national pay agreements or for the coherence of term times and the length of school days. Less and less do schools have any local democratic legitimacy.

Visitors to this website may have noticed how often I have used the phrase ‘social fracking’ to describe the purposes and actions of government. And yet governments of all complexions have an urge to measure and to judge. Without coherence you can’t do that. Coherence of some sort has, therefore, to be reintroduced. Inspection certainly provides an element of coherence and Standards by which schoolteachers are judged also help. Now we have a proposed Standard for Continuing Professional Development. How might it be used?

My guess is that the Standard will become a specification to be used by private companies and consultants. It will provide some sort of validity for what they sell and be good for business. The purchasers will be the people that control school budgets. They will want value for money. Possibly universities will make links between the Standard and their accredited programmes. Such programmes, however, no longer receive a public subsidy.

The intention is, however, that the Standard will not be statutory. Surely that is the equivalent of passing a law that we can choose to ignore? Might the traffic warden give me a ticket or merely wave a finger and smile? Might I argue that double yellow lines are optional? Does government have a cunning plan? I note the reference to having consulted the unions representing what government perceives to be ‘leaders’. More and more do I believe that ‘leadership’ has become a cult.

My response to ‘the call’ is on page 3 below the box on the next page.

By the way, the words ‘thought-leader and influencer’ are not addressed to me.

DfE Standard for Teachers' Professional Development

Call for Evidence

On behalf of my fellow members of the DfE's [Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group](#), I would like to ask for your input and support for our forthcoming Call for Evidence.

Our independent group, formed at the invitation of the Department for Education, is putting together a series of recommendations and a new CPD Standard to ensure that every school can provide the sorts of professional learning opportunities for teachers that help young people to succeed and teachers to thrive in their jobs. By improving collaboration and access to evidence and expertise, the new Standard can help transform work-place learning in schools, raising teachers' morale and sense of professionalism.

We want to formulate a new Standard for Professional Development which is valued by our professional colleagues. Our priority is to listen carefully to teachers, school leaders and CPD providers to understand everyone's aspirations, concerns and suggestions so that the new Standard represents the best of our profession, inspired by the best ideas and firmly rooted in the practical realities of busy school life. We have already consulted carefully with all of the teaching and school leadership unions and look forward to engaging more widely across the sector.

Launching on Monday 7th September at midday and running until October 16th, the group has put together five key questions in our Call for Evidence for the sector to help us gather the best ideas and case studies.

As a thought-leader and influencer in education we would be grateful if you would kindly help us, both by submitting a response yourself and also using your networks and contacts to spread the word more widely. The Standard will address teachers, school leaders and CPD providers and we are keen to hear from those with an interest in on or more of these constituencies.

For more information please [download our Press Release here](#) which includes details about how to respond, who is on the DfE Expert Group, what the questions are and details about the evidence base for the work we are engaged in. I very much appreciate your support and look forward to receiving your thoughts and advice on how to make this a truly breakthrough moment for the profession.

Chair, Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group

David Weston

RESPONSE

1. I realise that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a term and a set of initials now well embedded. As a former chair of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) CPD Committee, university (Liverpool) Director of CPD, chair and fellow of the International Professional Development Association (ipda) and editor of CPD Update I am very aware of this. 'Learning' is, however, a better word because, unlike 'development', it does not suggest that professional life is constrained within a template. You might use the term 'Continuing Professional Learning (CPL). Many people now do. The change would not come as a shock. I suggest that it would signify openness.

For my own website I use 'critical' rather than 'continuing'. At one time a Google search for 'critical professional learning' was dominated by references to that website. Now it is only one of many. For me this is a welcome trend and one that I make no claim to have brought about.

Even although it is non-statutory might your proposed Standard serve to constrain professional learning?

2. I find the use of the phrase 'student outcomes' confusing. If intended to mean higher scores or perceived progress then that will belittle many of the subtleties of learning that professionals observe and to which they attempt to respond every day. Very often there is simply no pay off (certainly not in the short term) in the form of higher scores or perceived progress. There can, however, be many social and educational benefits that are difficult to reduce to percentage points or even to describe succinctly.

Please see the story of ***The Sheep and the Pig*** below. For me it brings into question conventional notions of 'progress'; Rita, the headteacher in the story, first told it during a CPD 'event'. I have frequently used the story in this form with schoolteachers and other educators from across the world.

Some years ago, in a Liverpool Nursery School where the headteacher was very keen on Records of Achievement, a four-year-old child asked the headteacher if she could put one of the two pictures she had done that day into her portfolio. The answer was 'Yes, which one?'. Now the child had done one picture of a sheep and one picture of a pig. The picture of the pig was really very good: clearly a well-delineated and recognisable pig. The picture of the sheep, on the other hand, was not very good at all.

When she asked the child which picture she wanted to choose the head was surprised to be told "The sheep, of course". Being an experienced

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teacher, and remembering that a purpose of Records of Achievement was that the child should own the decision about what went into the portfolio, the head refrained from intervening at this point. She did, however, ask the parent who came to collect the child why she thought her child had chosen the poor sheep rather than the much better pig.

The mother replied, "Well you see, she has been doing pigs for months. Our house is full of her pictures of pigs. That's her *first* sheep."

In other words, the achievement identified by the child as worthy of celebration was the taking of a first step towards new learning.

Having heard the headteacher tell this story it has stuck with me for a long time and I often wonder what happened to that four year old girl when she 'progressed' through a school system that required her to submit the equivalent of better and better pictures of pigs and hide her pictures of sheep.

For the purpose of the proposed Standard what is a 'student outcome' and what might represent 'progress'?

- 3. Politicians with responsibility for education have usually assumed that all professional learning has to be timed, targeted, tidy and tangible. When it is untimed, untargeted, untidy and intangible it becomes far more difficult to analyse in terms of value for money, relate it to official targets or to present evidence when an inspector calls. Its significance can, however, be considerable. The well-known anecdote about the accidental discovery of penicillin emphasises the importance of unexpected evidence for unintended outcomes. The key is to be open to the unexpected and the unintended and to be ready to make critical sense of it. This has to be important.**

Having read through the material on your website it appears to me that there is a perception of professional learning as a planned programme of events in which the emphasis is upon the acquisition of subject knowledge imparted by specialists working for providers. I am sure that such programmes have a part to play but they do not define and ought not to constrain the learning of a professional educator.

In my view all schoolteachers ought to maintain a *Journal of Critical Professional Learning* and accompany it with a *Portfolio of Evidence for Impact*. This would help capture and mediate the tidy and the untidy. Designing them for the National Strategies and the bridging assignments for the programmes of the National College, and so making links to programmes validated at masters degree level, is something I remain proud of. Without a mediated critical sense making process professional learning can become sterile and isolated.

Is a programme of events that is not subject to shared critical assessment what you have in mind for professional learning?

- 4. Possibly it is my age but I have a sense of a lost world: a world in which professional educators had the opportunity to engage with the Centre for the Study of the Comprehensive School (CSCS), the Northern Partnership for Records of Achievement (NPRA), both CSE and GCSE in Mode-3 form, the Schools Council Humanities Project, the Childwall Project, Integrated Humanities, Environmental Studies, thematic work, Denis Lawton, Lawrence Stenhouse, Stephen Kemmis, John Dewey, the Politics Association, the Entitlement Curriculum and many, many more organisations, initiatives and people dedicated to widening the professional horizons of learners and enablers of learning; and involving them with and connecting them to society. That professionally pro-active world has, for me very regretfully, passed away. Educators seem to have become an instrument of quickly made policy: policy that can also very quickly change and change again.**

The list of supports for the professional learning of educators that have most recently been lost includes the Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB), Teachers TV, Teachernet, Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) and the General Teaching Council for England (making England the only country in the UK and the Republic of Ireland without such a council).

LEAs (now LAs), furthermore, maintained links between schools and representative democracy. Those links become weaker by the day and an increasing number of schools have no local democratic legitimacy at all. Without such legitimacy schools, children and teachers are simply commodities.

I think we should add to this list of lost support and supporters the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA). The work it and its TTA predecessor did to create PPD was magnificent and very pro-educational.

I recently looked at a number of masters dissertations for the last of the Scottish Chartered Teacher programme. As with PPD in England there was some really significant and useful material there. Also as in England, policy makers have read none of it. The value of the professional learning of educators is reduced if policy makers ignore their voices. The attempt to obtain a hearing for those voices was, briefly, almost successful in England when Estelle Morris introduced her CPD Strategy and later when Charles Clarke became Secretary of State. When, however, Ruth Kelly took over, those voices were, once again, silenced. They remain so.

We now appear to be working to Michael Barber's belief that educators should be *instructed to deliver* (See his book, *Instruction to Deliver*). Barber even refers to educators as *instructors* in his co-authored piece for McKinsey's on 'getting to the top'. 'Dispiriting' is the mildest word I can use to describe my reaction to that.

Will your new Standard help obtain a hearing by policy makers for the critically examined experience, expertise, concerns, anxieties, interests, fears and hopes of professional educators? Will it open a door for them?

5. **A point made very strongly, persuasively and effectively by Denis Lawton in 1975 (*Class, Culture and the Curriculum*) is the importance of taking the trouble to establish shared values before establishing policy.**

If like me you believe this to be important then the entire project in which you are engaged requires the long term, thorough, inclusive and extensive involvement of the profession including universities, parents organisations and unions (not merely those representing 'leaders'). Politicians prefer their policies micro waved. Slow cooking is better for education. The Standard may be non-statutory but if enough trouble is taken it could gain widespread professional respect.

Your task is not insignificant. Why is your work being carried out so quickly?

6. **My website was designed to support and promote critical professional conversation among educators. Below are some links to items that you may find to be of interest. I have tried to keep them to a minimum and they were certainly not written specifically for this consultation so do pick and choose what takes your fancy, if indeed any do.**

The following link is to a document written some years ago. I have used the needs analysis activity included there over many years and also the professional learning framework (designed for sense making rather than constraining). The written support for the framework is very wordy because I was imagining a professional educator working without collegial support.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Devising%20Professional%20Learning%20Policies.pdf>

The next link is to a rather long essay on post war educational policymaking in, mostly, England. It might be thought that this series of changes to policymaking is not relevant to the proposed Standard. I believe that they are. The changes are unlikely to stop and the contexts in which standards (also subject to change upon change) operate will change and change and change. In fact, standards are not really standards at all unless they stay still and they will only stay still if they have been established inclusively and consensually.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebFor%20DH%20Lawrence.pdf>

This link is to a blog for BERA. To add it to my website I included an introduction and some endnotes. There is some repetition of points that I have made above

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but I would like to draw attention to Kemmis (1983). The relevance and usefulness of *Towards the Socially Critical School* continues today.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/StagnantSchools.pdf>

Recently I have been going back to the early editorials of ten years ago that I wrote for CPD Update and adding some commentary for my website. In this link to my first editorial of March 2005 there is, again, some repetition of points made above. There is also some explanation of various initiatives and sets of initials that may appear to be me teaching my grandmother to suck eggs. The reason for these explanations is that GoogleAnalytics reminded me of in how many countries across the world there are people going to the website. I thought some explanation was needed.

There is also a link to some bad poetry rather disrespectful of politicians that might well be skipped. Had I been writing exclusively in response to your request I would, naturally, have adopted a more formal, respectful and reserved tone. And, of course, I would not have dreamt of including a link to Fascinating Aida.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/CPDUpdateEditorial1x2.pdf>

Here is the link to my second editorial that I called ***What goes around comes around***. There is one repeat link and there are some links to book reviews that, again, I would not have included had I been composing a totally focussed response to you.

I mention Ron Dearing and a meeting with Charles Clarke that, I hope, supports a point I have made above.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/CPDUpdate%20editorialx2April%202005What%20goes%20around%20comes%20%20around-1.pdf>

This link is to a document I was prompted to compose because I felt that schoolteachers needed to be encouraged to disseminate their professional learning.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/webdisseminationdoc.pdf>

I regret not having had time to write a totally customised response to your call for evidence and I do understand that you may skip over much that I have presented. I am shortly to have some medical treatment that means I have had to do what I can in the time before my operations. I do, however, have one final trio of questions.

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Many professional variables and uncertainties have been introduced recently. Politicians have also shown a lack of respect for professional qualifications and accredited programmes. They have also discarded so many of the supports that were in place for schoolteachers and disconnected them from local representative democracy. The pressure for results and the threat from inspection, meanwhile, only increases.

Might Standards now become a (non-statutory) stick with which to beat schoolteachers?

Who shall own the Standards?

Are they being developed and deployed to provide cover for the educational incoherence brought about by government?

Cliff Jones, 23rd September 2015.