

Early Years Professionals: CPD Strategy

Background

Evidence from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education 2003 study shows that improving the quality of the early years experience is directly related to better outcomes for children. The Early Years Professional status (EYP) is one element of the Government's commitment to the Every Child Matters Agenda. It is recognition of excellence in leadership skills across a range of national graduate-level standards associated with working with children from birth to five years.

Within the "Children's Workforce Strategy", proposed by the Government, EYPs represent part of the aim to create a "world class" workforce and to improve the levels of qualified staff working in the early years, particularly in terms of providing career opportunities.

Nevertheless, Early Years Professional (EYP) status is still relatively new and no formal 'post certification' qualifications have yet been made available to provide progression routes that take candidates on to further levels of development. This is a cause of frustration for different EYPs for a variety of reasons complicated by the range of pathways into the status.

In certain instances EYPs who were previously working at level 6 have not necessarily found the status a truly valuable learning experience. Also, some EYPs have had limited experience of working with young children in their early years, particularly the 0 - 3 age range, and are in

need of more consolidation and, in some cases, confidence building.

It is clear that the varied pathways into EYP status have attracted a diverse range of people with assorted experiences all of which creates a variety of CPD needs. In considering a strategy for CPD it must be remembered that there will be both distinct requirements related to the EYP role as well as generic needs within the compass of the wider children's workforce.

EYP is not just a title; it represents a distinctive skill base.

Principles

1) CPD should be specifically targeted at the EYP profession

At present it is rare, for specific CPD programmes to be particularly aimed at EYPs. The focus on the 0 - 5 age range and especially the 0 - 3 age range demands specific attention.

Additionally, the newness of the role and of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as well as the need to develop EYP relationships with immediate colleagues indicates particular requirements to build from the initial training pathway.

2) CPD should take due cognisance of the varied starting points of EYPs

CPD for individual EYPs needs to use rigorous initial assessment as the starting point and build from there. A carefully considered self-evaluation process is necessary to support personalised approaches, based on the role of the EYP and what they are intended to deliver.

3) CPD should embrace a strong work-based focus

The initial training programme establishes the basis for continuous improvement in which reflective practice has a key role to play. A CPD folder linked to work impact would be a useful tool in promoting a developmental framework.

Also a model that includes a determination of the development needs of the setting with institutional strengths and areas for improvement identified should inform the provision for individual staff.

4) CPD for EYPs should be integrated with that for the wider children's workforce and should be mainstreamed.

Within a framework set by CWDC, Local Authorities should take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate short courses, conferences etc provided for teachers and other aligned children's services professionals are available to EYPs irrespective of work setting.

The children's workforce generally still has development needs with respect to multi-agency integrated service delivery and EYPs should be involved in any supportive CPD programmes. Alignment of the totality of award-bearing CPD for EYPs within the Integrated Qualifications Framework is an important consideration.

Local authorities should take responsibility for ensuring the supply of CPD opportunities for EYPs. Also, given the broad nature of what represents CPD, resource and professional centres managed by local authorities should incorporate provision for EYPs.

5) CPD should represent an entitlement for EYPs; EYPs should be committed to CPD

It is evident that apart from insufficient attention being paid to CPD for EYPs, there are funding and other

access issues to be addressed particularly for those working in private sector settings. A CPD entitlement statement with a minimum time allocation is a key factor in promoting a continuous improvement culture and enhanced provision.

This is an issue for employers and providers as cost and local provision are critical influences on CPD. In turn EYPs themselves need to demonstrate a commitment to taking up CPD; incentives are critical in this respect. These could emerge within an appropriate pay framework in due course.

6) CPD should be flexible and allow for individual rates of progression.

For EYPs wishing to progress to postgraduate qualifications, flexible provision is appropriate. Flexibility should extend to the availability of graded levels, with allocated credits, up to Masters Degree and the facility to accumulate modules over a flexible extended timescale. The predominantly female composition of the workforce brings relevant pressures to considerations of appropriate forms of delivery.

7) CPD should involve a partnership approach between CWDC, local authorities and higher education providers

EYP Foundation degree links between CWDC, local authorities and higher education providers have proved fruitful and such developments could bring similar benefit with regard to CPD.

8) CPD programmes should be developed on regional and national bases

The current emphasis on local provision limits the range of CPD experiences to which EYPs are exposed.

Regional and national courses and conferences would allow EYPs to broaden their contact base and bring the benefit that comes from seeing operations outside of one's immediate vicinity.

Provision

There are different elements to what could be delivered in practice.

1) General

CPD is engendered in wide variety of ways both in the workplace and by involvement in external provision. It is important that EYPs have access to general children's workforce CPD provision as well as their own dedicated inputs. The range of methods is extensive and includes:

- conference attendance
- induction
- leadership training
- mutual shadows and mentors
- postgraduate qualifications
- short courses
- visits to centres of excellence

Additionally it is important that local authorities develop:

- an information flow; e.g. newsletters, online discussion fora
- dedicated pages on the teaching and learning web to signpost research documents,
- an involvement of colleagues with EYP status to carry out mentoring visits to those undertaking their Early Years Foundation Degree studies

2) Networks

The allocation of funding to Local Authorities by CWDC to promote the establishment of local networks has, inevitably at this early stage, produced widely variable practice. It is important that networks are facilitated and well-managed with agreed focuses.

EYP's must be able to influence their own development and identify how to shape focuses for their networks. Within networks it should be possible for EYPs to pursue specialisms and then cascade what is learned to the others both in the network and in wider settings. Specialisms may arise from personal interest or local need.

It is also important that networks are fully inclusive across colleagues in all settings and are likely to benefit from linkages with higher education.

3) Promoting effective practice

As the EYP status becomes embedded it will be increasingly vital to create ways of understanding and disseminating effective practice. Successful networks locally, regionally and nationally have a part to play.

Research is likely to become more significant as practice develops though a large base already exists. Access to existing research information should be made readily available to EYPs.

Effective practice should be captured but the landscape is ever-changing so research with an early years focus will need to bring in a consideration of EYP work. Collaborative sharing of effective practice should be facilitated by Local Authorities and other CPD providers.

Note: It should also be remembered that EYPs are subject to certain compulsory fundamental areas of training such as first aid and many health and safety components. These affect the funding available for

other continuing development provision but should be considered separately from professional issues.

4) Managerial routes

The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership offers a path that addresses the needs of leaders within multi-agency, early years settings. It seeks to provide leaders/managers and emerging leaders/managers of integrated centres with the opportunity to create an ethos of community partnership working, by co-ordinating coherent and seamless high quality services for children and families.

Issues

The development of a set of principles and a consideration of provision are key parts of a CPD strategy. At the same time, it is essential that associated issues are understood so that obstacles to implementing the strategy can be addressed. Within this, CWDC and local authorities have a decisive role to play as they hold the basic strategic responsibilities, have a major role as “corporate parent” and need to enable and assure all provision across their area.

Issues that affect the implementation of the strategy include:

- The variety of existing courses and qualifications taken by EYPs given the different pathways available.
- Significant variations in the organisational support to EYPs depending upon the individual work settings
- The need for highly developed effective and meaningful career development paths for EYPs, with particular consideration paid to moving towards a Newly Qualified Early Years Professional status.
- The range of work settings themselves along with the variations in their size and scale, which in turn impact on CPD needs.
- A lack of total clarity about the how the role of EYPs will operate in practice in certain situations and their relationships to other colleagues.

Conclusion

A coherent overall CPD strategy is necessary though will take time to design and implement effectively. The current situation for EYPs is complicated, actual practice too diverse with the wide range of settings and work bases adding to the complexities.

The national target of one EYP in every Children’s Centre by 2010 and in every full day care setting by 2015 has clearly accentuated the emphasis on initial pathways.

However, the advent of EYPS as a way of improving the levels of qualified staff working in the early years and providing better career opportunities creates important on-going development needs which must be addressed.

A CPD strategy alone is insufficient. It needs to be transformed into real practical delivery. Agreed protocols committing all partners to ensuring that EYPs are supported in fully delivering their responsibilities in leading the delivery of the new Early Years Foundation Stage, enhancing the quality of early years' provision and improving practice across play, care and learning services offered in all early years settings are necessary.

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