



Consultation document

April 2006

# Professional Development for Staff Development Practitioners in Higher Education

This consultation arises from work being undertaken at three levels by the Staff Development Forum, on behalf of the HE staff development community. The project, funded by the Leadership Foundation, considers (a) the strategic positioning of staff development, (b) the leadership role in staff development, and (c) the professional development needs of staff development practitioners, broadly interpreted.

The present paper deals with the third issue – the professional development (PD) needs of staff development practitioners, and follows an investigation by questionnaire (to the whole staff development community), focus groups, and a small ‘Task Group’<sup>1</sup> charged with scoping other professional development schemes that could inform this work.

It considers:

1. Our skills and capabilities set
2. How might our PD needs be met?
3. What sort of PD scheme would be appropriate for our SD community?
4. Accreditation/recognition within such a scheme

In order to move towards practical outcomes, within each of the four sections we first present a summary of the findings, and then make suggestions that practitioners within the staff development community may wish to endorse, or reject – or reshape.

***To that end, we need all comments by no later than the end of Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May to our project worker, Jenny Wilkinson at [jmw@gwa.co.uk](mailto:jmw@gwa.co.uk). Silence will suggest assent, so please do make your comments – promptly.***

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<sup>1</sup> SDF Task Group ‘Benchmarking Professional Development’, report dated February 2006

# 1. Our skills and capabilities set

## 1.1 You told us...

We, as a community, support an extremely diverse range of areas including:

Management development	Organisational development	IT training
Academic Practice (Learning and Teaching, Research, Administration)		
Personal development	Health and safety	Post-graduate skills

Many practitioners have a very large individual remit. There is a general feeling from the questionnaire responses, and also from comments in some of the focus groups, that many staff developers are under considerable pressure and feel that the remit they have is too large given the present levels of resourcing.

You presented an extended set of skills and capabilities required to do your work effectively. They are listed in the next section.

## 1.2 We suggest...

Our skills and capabilities might be grouped into 'core' and 'additional' or 'specialist' skills and capabilities. 'Core' items are those that all practitioners might reasonably expect to exhibit.

We would welcome comment on the following suggested division. Such a framework can help us identify areas for our own professional development.

### (a) Core skills and capabilities

All SD practitioners should, as a matter of course, be expected to:

- Encourage professional development amongst the staff in their institution and, as opportunity arises, motivate learners and potential learners.
- Act as a role model to other staff, in support of good practice.

All SD practitioners should also be expected to have:

- A general appreciation of the working of their institution, and of HE more widely. Also of the SD team in which they work, and its administrative procedures in support of developmental interventions.
- An awareness of the strategic role of SD within their institution, especially set alongside relevant institutional policies, and of all HR-related legislation, e.g. concerning equal opportunities, disability, diversity, health and safety.
- Abilities in networking, general communication, advising, listening, collaboration and team working.
- Competencies in needs analysis, and an awareness of the main kinds of developmental intervention.

- Competencies in the design, organisation, running and evaluation of interventions appropriate to their role.
- Abilities in the creation/selection/adaption of materials to support both tutor-led activities and also 'open'/'blended' learning. Skills in writing and creativity are implicit.
- An awareness of good practice in 'customer care', and skills in time management and personal organisation.

**(b) Additional/specialist skills and capabilities**

Depending on their role, SD practitioners will:

- Develop specialist content for developmental interventions/programmes in support of :
  - Change management
  - Organisational development
  - Learning and teaching, to include policy, evaluation, peer observation and approaches to assessment
  - Research skills, to include both qualitative and quantitative, formulating proposals, and writing for publication
  - Management development, to include leadership training
  - Postgraduate skills
  - Personal development
  - IT applications, to include office functions, research applications, e-learning and understanding of blended learning

They may also require skills/capabilities in some of the following:

- Mentoring and coaching
- Facilitation, to include running action learning sets
- Team building, to include knowledge of Belbin, MBTI, and other psychometric tests as appropriate
- The ability to identify and propose *strategic* projects and interventions, and encourage engagement with these – at a national and local level.
- The management and execution of consultancy / projects / research.
- Leading and managing the SD function, or part thereof, and contributing to and implementing SD policy in support of institutional goals. To include the need for vision, and skills in influencing institutional (and perhaps wider) politics in order to promote the SD function and to obtain funding. Specific skills identified are:
  - Negotiating, mediating, planning, liaising with managers at all levels, and particularly with senior managers.
  - Management of SD staff, to include performance management.
  - Ensuring good administrative practice within the SD function.
  - Budgeting and reporting.
  - Developing individuals within the SD function, to include induction and succession planning.
  - Assessment of the impact of SD activities on the institution.
- SD Programme, and Programme content design, marketing skills.
- Implementing accreditation schemes for courses or programmes.

## **2. How might our PD needs be met?**

### **2.1 You told us...**

To support your developer role, of the more obvious approaches, you most widely employ reading, discussion and reflective practice. Doing research, and learning from courses and workshops constitutes the next most used approaches, while being mentored and receiving coaching form the least used group. These groupings, of course, in some part reflect the ease of implementation.

In terms of effectiveness you told us that reflective practice, together with approaches involving active input from other people, were generally considered superior to reading and on-line learning.

Many of you highly value your network of contacts with those in similar roles in other HEIs. You recognise the importance of seeing beyond your own institution, both in culture and approach to development. Some of you feel that you are aided in this by running events at institutions other than your own.

Of other approaches mentioned, several of you told how you value 'learning by doing', where you experiment with new ways, and sometimes give yourselves a major challenge by (eg) developing, with help and advice, a course in an *entirely* new way – perhaps online as opposed to traditionally delivered.

Co-facilitating with colleagues offers some of you opportunity to see a different style or get new ideas. 360 degree feedback was also mentioned.

You told us that some staff development teams schedule regular 'practitioner sessions' to share experiences, problems and issues, maybe demonstrate and discuss new materials obtained on trial, and so on; you stressed the importance of immediate colleagues as a major stimulus to your own development.

You also told us that you anticipate most of your developmental needs being met by attendance at appropriate physical (rather than virtual) events. This was a clear leader.

Other approaches that you anticipate, to support your developmental needs, were (in descending order of expected use): reading, networking, on-the-job/practice, discussion/working with others, academic study/working for a qualification, observing others/watching peers, research, project work/implementation, self reflection, conferences.

From the Task Group findings, we also understand that provision of a mentor from another HEI could also be a major developmental asset.

### **2.2 We suggest...**

A programme of developmental events. Content would be based around the skills and capabilities set identified in section 1 and events would be offered to practitioners on a regional basis where possible, backed up by recommended study materials. This would help practitioners to gain a rounded set of skills and capabilities appropriate to their role.

We further suggest that a mentoring scheme be established such that practitioners can be assisted and encouraged in their development by a practitioner from another HEI. Mentors would be either more experienced as a practitioner than their mentee, or experienced in an area that the mentee wishes to grow into. Pairings would ideally be made within a region, and might be reviewed on an annual or biennial basis to cater for changing requirements. This arrangement could, in principle, allow most practitioners to have a mentor, with experienced practitioners mentoring each other and perhaps one more junior practitioner.

The mentoring approach gives tailored support, while the predominantly regional approach to events would both help practitioner development in the chosen topic and enhance opportunities for regional networking. Such development events will also provide opportunities for the more experienced staff developers in the region to offer their services in leading such events, and thereby assist in their own development.

However, we do appreciate the pressure under which most of us work, and that these ideas – particularly the mentoring – might be seen as the straw that breaks the camel’s back. We nevertheless make these suggestions knowing that while all professional development has a cost, it is also of enormous benefit.

### **3. What sort of PD scheme would be appropriate for our SD community?**

Professional groups are being encouraged to work under formal PD schemes or frameworks. In the past many professions have done this of their own accord for a variety of reasons. However, the current impetus is particularly in support of organisational development, given the potential of such a scheme to raise the general standard of professional provision and perhaps set a baseline standard of practice.

#### **3.1 You told us...**

If a new PD scheme was constructed to formally support SD practitioners, it should be characterised by:

- a flexible and modular approach
- as little bureaucracy and paperwork as possible
- current work and experience being recognized
- clear standards
- an outline of the skill set required to be an effective developer.

The Task Group found that, whatever benefits a PD scheme might have for the organisation (the introductory paragraph to this section refers), to be effective any scheme must also show a clear advantage to those following it; here, the individual staff development practitioner. It is a matter of buy-in. A parallel may perhaps be drawn with the well-established recognition that university staff usually do not like to be *developed*, with the emphasis of something being done to them, while they are generally happy to take opportunities – through choice – for their own development.

The Task Group also identified a variety of other matters that appear to contribute towards an *effective* PD framework. These can generally be aligned with the characteristics that you identified, and so the following suggestions are based largely on that work.

### 3.2 We suggest...

Any PD scheme that might be created for staff development practitioners has:

- *Optional membership* – the scheme should be a carrot rather than a stick. While a ‘universal’ base standard of skills and abilities is not then immediately assured, if the benefits of PD scheme membership are sufficient (eg membership is seen as useful for promotion, or to help get a new job) then over time take-up will become widespread and the profession will move towards that standard.
- *Membership open to anyone working in HE SD*, irrespective of existing qualifications. This would recognize the extremely diverse range of entry to the SD role.
- *An Induction Day* (or similar process) for initial orientation.
- *A Mentoring Scheme* for ongoing development, as described in (2) above.
- A periodically reviewed *PD framework*, which identifies both ‘core’ and ‘specialist’ skills/competencies, as we seek to identify in (1) above. This gives direction to an individual’s PD, as they identify gaps or weaknesses and seek to address them.
- The requirement that those taking part produce an annual *PD plan* – ideally reviewed and progress checked at the scheme member’s *Appraisal*. The Appraisal offers an important potential linkage between the PD direction envisaged by the individual (under any PD scheme), and their employing HEI.
- *Submission of a sample of PD plans for auditing*. This offers some form of cpd quality control and therefore heightens credibility of the ongoing scheme. We propose this because schemes that simply require working for some assessed ‘step on a ladder’ (even if they suggest an annual time to be spent on PD, but do not audit) such schemes allow for freewheeling – perhaps of many years – between steps.
- Excellent *information flow to members* of the scheme, eg via a frequently-updated web site supported by emails direct to members advising of web site updates that match their specific interests and needs.
- *Good networking amongst members*. This suggests the usefulness of (at least) *Regional SD Meetings*, and an *Annual SD Conference*. For general staff development, an annual SDF/LF conference already takes place, continuing the HESDA series; there are also other, specialist, conferences (eg SEDA). Regional workshops specifically in support of framework items (section 2, above) would seem an appropriate addition to the portfolio of events.
- *Accreditation/recognition*. We suggest this be available to those participating; see next section.

## 4. Accreditation/Recognition

### 4.1 You told us...

Many of you feel you already have sufficient qualifications. However, a substantial minority (38% overall) would be interested in obtaining some additional accreditation/recognition. Most interest (by over half the respondents in each case) was shown by those aged between 21 and 35, and also by those who have held an SD role for less than 5 years – irrespective of age.

Those seeking a qualification requested that it should be

- nationally recognized
- transferable inside and outside the sector

The most popular format is a one year certificate of practice. Flexibility, the opportunity for part-time study and recognition of prior learning and experience are also important. A reflective, flexible, 'on the' job programme over two years was also suggested. In general it would appear that postgraduate level would be most appropriate.

It is also clear that you would value a framework and possible accreditation that complements, rather than competes with, existing qualifications. Some of you made reference to qualifications which already exist through SEDA and CIPD, and some suggested that links could be made to those.

### 4.2 We suggest...

The provision of a new PD scheme be considered by the SDF for those staff development practitioners whose needs are *not* already met by other schemes, e.g. SEDA for those who are primarily educational developers, or CIPD for those whose role is close to HR.

Some of the elements of a scheme, suggested in section 3, can be set up fairly readily; the SDF has already made a start, and this can continue whether or not other developments take place. Likewise, qualifications can be obtained by staff development practitioners independently of any PD scheme. However the full benefits of a PD scheme cannot be realised, nor professional accreditation/recognition be meaningful, without reference to a professional body with *individual members*. We suggest that the SDF considers if it wishes to enlarge its activity to fulfill that role, or to recommend another body.

If a new PD scheme is set up we suggest that its approach to accreditation/recognition is portfolio-based, akin to that used by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)<sup>2</sup>. Under their scheme, application for all qualifications is by the preparation and submission of a portfolio. This is a rigorous but flexible process that can be accommodated into existing staff appraisal schemes and other development activities. The focus at all levels is on evidence based practice ensuring that staff reflect on their own learning and the application of new knowledge and skills in their specific workplace.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.cilip.org.uk>

This approach would recognise that although SD (like Library and Information service provision) is a mainly graduate profession, practitioners come into it from a very diverse range of backgrounds. The portfolio can include evidence of any formal qualifications gained and their application, or the application of any less formal learning in the workplace, so that all approaches to PD can be accommodated.

Rewritten into SD terms, the CILIP model would offer:

- *Certification* for all SD practitioners in HE who join the scheme
- *Chartership* that distinguishes those SD professionals who have sought recognition for their commitment to professional development
- *Revalidations* via CPD
- *Fellowship* status that signifies that a Chartered Member has applied an increasing level of professional practice and contributed to the profession at large

We welcome comment on this suggested model.

***Please email any comments on the suggestions made in this consultation document to Jenny Wilkinson at [jmw@gwa.co.uk](mailto:jmw@gwa.co.uk), by no later than the end of Tuesday 2nd May.***

Thank you for your time and interest.

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6 April 2006