Scoping Study

CPD for CLD Workers in the North of Scotland

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Introduction

The purpose of the Scoping Study was to build on the existing work of the North Alliance to identify the character of the second action research cycle of inquiry. The North Alliance already had a quantitative study undertaken by Devlin Beattie Partnership and this Scoping study sought to build on this data through undertaking a more qualitative in-depth study of CPD needs of Community Learning and Development (CLD) practitioners, focusing in particular on methods relevant to remote and rural communities.

The North Alliance is a learning partnership which seeks to meet the CPD needs of CLD practitioners in the North of Scotland. Representatives from 7 local authority areas representing the public, private and voluntary sectors form a Steering Group which has secured funding for this action research project under the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) scheme of the Technology Strategy Board.

Action Research Context

The action research context is important because the Scoping Study is the first cycle of an inquiry process that is emergent. Action research is an approach to research not a methodology and is founded on principles of collaboration and partnership. Action research is not about problem solving, rather it is about inquiring into issues in a specific context. The North Alliance Steering Group has agreed to collaborate in the process of the research and this Scoping Study is intended to provide them with background data for decision making that will help shape the project and inquire into the methods that can be used to meet the CPD needs of people in a predominantly remote and rural setting. It is also a source of background data for the researchers to assist them to design the second cycle of inquiry which will be the first CPD educational intervention using innovative technology.

The action research process will implement and evaluate the methods used in the research process to meet the CPD needs of CLD workers in the North of Scotland.

Research Questions

What are the CPD needs of the CLD workforce in the North of Scotland?

What are the best means of meeting these needs?

What are the implications of using ICT to meet these needs in rural/remote/urban communities?

Methodology

This qualitative study used focus groups and semi structured interviews to explore the research questions above. The actual questions asked are included as Appendix A. Convenience sampling was used as we needed to take account of a wide geographical spread and we wished to secure a wide range of respondents in terms of qualification and employment levels. A mix of respondents was sought including individuals from all the 7 local authority areas. A range of levels of qualifications were sought from senior managers to unqualified sessional workers and both men and women. Respondents were generally but not always put forward by members of the North Alliance Steering Group. Al Bishawi conducted the majority of the interviews and these lasted generally half

an hour or more. A total of 74 people participated in the research and of these 40 were in focus groups and 34 were interviewed alone. The balance of respondents between geographical areas was not consistent as we were reliant on referrals by local gatekeepers; we were however pleased with the final balance across 6 of the areas. Only one area has had a more limited participation in the process and it is our intention to provide further opportunities in the course of the action research for the views in this area to be included in the action phases of the research.

The sample we consider to have been a good size for this qualitative study where the North Alliance database consists of 145 members. The data derived from the interview process was rich and in-depth, which is what we were seeking. Interviews were recorded but nor transcribed. Summary sheets of key themes were constructed for each interview process by Al Bishawi and these were analysed both by McArdle and Al Bishawi using holistic content analysis. This allowed the interplay of external objective interpretation and interpretation by the interviewer who has the direct experience of the interviews. Emerging key themes were then identified across the summary sheets as a whole group and across individual geographical areas.

Discussion of Findings

1. CPD needs

We were less interested in the stated needs of the CLD workforce in the North Alliance catchment area as this had been described in the Devlin Beattie Partnership Research and we were more interested in discovering the detail of these needs for our action research purposes. We did, however identify a wide range of suggested programmes for people at different levels in the CLD workforce and with different employment conditions (e.g. full time compared to part time/sessional workers). Our respondents suggested a total of over 70 different topics for North Alliance CPD of which many were suggested more than once. A full list of the topics proposed is included below.

Clearly this wide range of topics is impossible for the North Alliance to offer and the range may imply that only a few people would attend any one programme. There were, however, ways in which these topics could be clustered which will help decision and choices of programmes. A number of respondents would also consider training other practitioners or be willing to share practice; see Appendix B for specific areas staff would provide or facilitate.

Current Issues (8 mentions)

Curriculum for Excellence (mentioned 5 times)

The Big Society

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

Employment Law

Characteristics/Experiences of Participants (15 mentions)

Mental Health

Substance Misuse

Legal Highs

Employability

Benefits Systems

Sexual Health

Challenging Behaviour (3 mentions)

Alcohol and Drugs

New Youth issues

Social Networking

Child protection

Child development

Family learning

CLD Processes (27 mentions)

Values

Coaching and mentoring participants

Technical training/technology/ ECDL (4 mentions)

Evaluation/reflection (5 mentions)

Numeracy/literacy

Core skills training

Staying up to date with competences

Not CLD competences but improvement

Running social enterprises

Community enterprises

Managing independent community centres

Building capacity

Evidencing what we do

Thinking about practice and changing it

Funding applications

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

Self evaluation

Building capacity

Participation/Engagement

Creating a constitution

Management/Leadership/staffing issues (14 mentions)

Mentoring staff

Leadership

Managing change

Coaching

Shadowing

Funding

Resilience

Team spirit

Evidencing what we do

Assertiveness

Management

Planning and Finance

Train the Trainer

Employment Law

Administration (8 mentions)

Health and Safety (2 mentions)

Risk assessment (2 mentions)

Organisational filing/finance

Budgeting, Finance

Microsoft Excel

Planning and evaluating

Other Answers (15 mentions)

No specific CPD needs identifiable

CPD basics and CPD specialised courses needed

Individual needs so cannot be specified (4 mentions)

Staying up to date (2 mentions)

Core skills

Competences

Update old CLD competences

Qualification (4 mentions)

These lists show a strong focus on current issues; CLD processes and Management/Leadership in particular. This provides broad direction for North Alliance CPD provision in this KTP action research process. As many of the suggestions are made by only one person there is of course an issue of viability but contrarywise, just because someone did not mention it, it does not mean that they will not be attracted to it if it is offered. Clearly programmes which focus on more than one category e.g. current issues and CLD processes will be more relevant. It is also a reminder that balance across categories is important to CPD provision.

In the interviews, CLD managers distinguished between qualified and unqualified staff at our invitation and made the obvious point that needs were individual and needed to be identified individually but were able to make a distinction between core and basic skills and refresher or keeping up to date with processes and current issues. The need for qualification programmes that are accessible was strong. When distinguishing between full time and part time or sessional staff, frequent mention was made for the latter in terms of administrative skills; the need for sessional staff to learn Health and Safety and Risk Assessment. For us this raises key issues about the desirability for part time and sessional staff to also be aware of key current issues and indeed CLD processes even though they may be unqualified. Yes there may be priorities but given the part time and sessional workers are usually on the front line, there is surely need for CPD in core CLD processes. Perhaps this takes place on the job but it needs further exploration. One key issue mentioned in this regard was that sessional and part time workers needed to be paid to attend training programmes and we would support this position.

2. CPD processes

2.1 Introduction

We discussed CPD processes with our respondents in general terms but also specifically in relation to the use of ICT.

There was no doubt that face to face meeting were considered to be the best form of CPD. The reasons given for this were obvious but were often placed in the context of the particular need s of rural and remote professionals. Social isolation was frequently described and the need to meet to network informally was often mentioned. The North Alliance conference was mentioned frequently as a very good learning and networking opportunity. The need to visit other projects was considered to be important and study visits will be a feature of the next North Alliance conference.

2.2 Use of ICT for CPD

We were however most interested in the use of ICT in general and possibly a MOOC in particular in relation to our action research proposals. It came to us as a source of considerable optimism that the reaction to the use of ICT in general was extremely positive. CLD managers in particular and respondents in general recognised the need for on-line learning for a range of reasons:

- Online learning allows you to drop in and out rather than having to commit a block of time;
- Central belt focused CPD not relevant to the remote/rural context;
- Cost is important; training goes in a recession (the implication of this was that ICT training would remain as it is cheaper);
- ICT provides access to an international context which is good;
- Scope for cross-pollination of good work;
- Face to face training too expensive; no training budget;
- Flexibility of on-line learning good for people in busy jobs;
- Networking more widely possible.
- Avoids the problem of only 1 person wanting the training;
- Avoids the problem of everyone wanting the training at the same time.
- Great to learn from more experienced workers on-line (this from a socially isolated worker);
- More flexible; no travel so less time consuming .

Clearly the time and cost factors were important as well as the flexibility of ICT and this was not unexpected. The added value of ICT was pleasing in terms of the international and networking dimensions and the likelihood of the training being more relevant to the remote and rural context of the North of Scotland.

2.3 Blended Learning

There was no doubt from respondents that blended learning was the best methodology for CPD where possible in the North of Scotland.

This quite simply provides the opportunity for people to meet face to face as well as having the advantages of online learning. The importance of knowing the people with whom you are discussing issues online was considered to be important by some people, though this was not an issue for others who hoped to meet folk with similar interests from overseas. Perhaps this relates to the issue of confidence with ICT and with knowledge of CPD in general. Perhaps it also relates to a fear that ALL training would become ICT based, which would be inappropriate.

It is a mistake in our view to contrast face to face learning and on-line learning as alternatives to each other as there are strengths and limitations to both. ICT learning is arguably much better at providing access to resources and information quickly, accessibly and easily. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the social dimensions of face to face learning are important. It is our view that in an ideal world the pedagogy of the CPD should drive the CPD process adopted but the realities in the North of Scotland impose another layer of complexity, in that funding, time and accessibility need to be taken into account.

3. Barriers to and Facilitators of ICT for CLD Workers in the North
3.1 Age and attitude

The general barriers to use of ICT for learning have been well discussed elsewhere. Here we focus on the North Alliance and CLD context in particular. The issues faced by the CLD workforce are linked to certain professional characteristics, which were cited by our respondents. Firstly there was the issue of age of professionals and their familiarity with ICT in general. Yes, the CLD workers is characteristically of mature age and is less likely to have learned about ICT at school but many will be users of social networking technology and will have children themselves. Another characteristic of CLD workers is their perception of themselves as 'people' workers so that they prefer face to face communication over communication through ICT. This also may be true but there is increasingly a need in the job to be familiar with ICT if working with young people, for example to understand the influences on them, the channels of communication they use with each other and methods of contacting them yourself.

3.2 Time

A third barrier mentioned is the issue of time. This is crucial to the success of CPD. CLD workers work in a culture of busyness. In our experience this can be both self generated and workplace generated by peers and managers. Lack of time is frequently in our experience a safe reason given for inability to participate when other factors are in fact the real cause, such a lack of confidence which is less easy to admit. If we subscribe to a view that lifelong learning is important, which is one of the values of the profession, then we must apply this to ourselves and our staff as well as to our participants. Time for CPD is important but in the context of ICT it is important that time is made available for accessing ICT by the individual and his/her line manager. If you are at a face to face CPD programme the commitment to participate has been made and is generally non-negotiable. For CPD using ICT with time flexibility, it is always possible to find more pressing things to do if the

participant does not value CPD and if the manager does not value CPD. It is crucial in our opinion for time to be allocated for CPD and for sessional staff to be paid to participate.

3.3 Space

Perhaps the issue of space is also important in this regard. Frequently CLD workers are in open plan environments where the opportunity to concentrate or participate freely in CPD on-line will be difficult. Moving to another space for online CPD might be helpful in that it takes the individual away from the distractions of day to day practice and structures a commitment to the CPD work. This can be achieved through borrowing an office, using a community or learning centre or allowing time at home on CPD to be considered for TOIL, for example.

3.4 Confidence

Perhaps the biggest barrier and most frequently mentioned barrier to participation was confidence. This barrier of lack of confidence had many manifestations and surprised us with its complexity and multi-layered manifestation. Firstly, the most obvious layer was lack of confidence in using ICT which we had predicted would be an issue. Many examples of inaccessible and inappropriate technological applications and courses were given. It is quite clear to us that support needs to be given on the use of technology and it is much more appropriate for this support to be local and for time to be made available for the technology learning BEFORE the course gets started to avoid people finding that the technology prevents them learning. Given that people are likely to be technologically literate at some level, where possible these technological skills should use familiar and intuitive processes. It was also clear that technological skills need to be used to keep them current and up to date. Structuring the time and place will help overcome confidence issues and we propose that the local ICT support can be easily facilitated by having ICT buddies or mentors. In this situation a more confident CLD worker could work with a less experienced worker in the early stages to get the person familiar with the online course processes. A second method is to have a group, where a number of people are in the same room working on a course and can sit together and support each other.

The second layer of a lack of confidence is more concerning to us. There was an apparent lack of confidence in sharing information and ideas about CLD in an online context. In part this was a fear of putting things in writing on an online discussion board as you are more committed to what has been said than saying it. When you say something you can see the reaction and moderate it if necessary or change your mind. We came away however with the impression that it was deeper than this and consisted of a lack of confidence in the ideas and the challenging of ideas that might take place – a very solid fear of being wrong. Being critically reflective is central to learning and accordingly to CPD in CLD. This confidence needs to be built up in the process of the online CPD by the course facilitators but we think it is a more generic issue that can be tackled in the workplace by managers stimulating a process of critical discussion and valuing critique of ideas by peers as well as the more straightforward support and supervision they provide themselves. Literacy was also considered to be an issue for some unqualified workers.

A third layer to the confidence issue was the issue of who provides the courses. There was a strong desire from managers and staff for there to be accreditation for training. This was, however, balanced by a sense in which assessment or indeed provision by a University or College can

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contribute to a lack of confidence. It may be appropriate in this context for there to be a range of providers and for the more formal providers to provide taster sessions or courses for which assessment is optional.

3.5 Virtual Barriers

There are clearly virtual barriers to the use of online learning. These include poor internet connections, firewalls and blocks put on by the local authority, lack of computers, lack of modern technological equipment, blockages put on by hard/software providers, lack of broadband. Whilst there was some good news in improvements to connections, it is clear that the online learning will need to be time and location flexible as broadband in Orkney for example is better in the mornings but some workers may need to use the internet at home. There is clearly a place for line managers to influence local authorities to make allowances for online learning that uses common applications before courses start so that staff do not fall at the first CPD hurdle. The North Alliance could issue advice to Directors of CLD to this effect. Members of the North Alliance Steering Group could explore local solutions to virtual barriers and advise the KTP team of the best methods to reach their staff.

4.   A Quality Environment

We received many suggestions about what would be important to the quality of the environment and these are outlined below and were often illustrated with examples where things had gone wrong and the quality of the environment and, accordingly, learning had been poor.

The most important issue raised was that the VLE needs to be easy to use because of the confidence issues or frustration issues for more experienced users. One respondent phrased this as 'tecchy barriers' which need to be overcome. Accessibility of log in was important – not having a long personal profile to fill in. It must also be easy to exit and save. The online environment needs to avoid having multiple logins and it needs to be easy to navigate around the site.

Using a mixture of methods in the online environment was seen as essential to make sure that one methodology was not used to death. The quality of both content and process needs to be good; it will need to be good content to make people participate and will need to be highly relevant and engaging to motivate people to participate.

The length of the course resulted in differing views. Some thought it should be long so they can dip in and out; others thought it should be short to allow for sessional staff to participate easily. There needs to be careful consideration of the length of the courses and clearly this will depend on the topic and pedagogy of the CPD design as well as availability of participants.

A structured time online each week was considered to be important and should be built into courses as should follow up time to ensure people remain engaged. Speedy online response to posts and guidance on how to manage high levels of information so participants can avoid feeling overwhelmed were considered to be important.

An interactive online environment was considered to be crucial –people didn't want just text based courses and said a blend of participants from different areas and levels was important. Staff said that clear guidance on online etiquette should be spelt out early on because that was an area that caused

some confusion. A FAQ page would be much more helpful than an online facilitator because online facilitators cannot see what is happening for you online and it would be much more beneficial to get knowledgeable local people to help with online difficulties. During an initial test of Google Hangout participants said they found Hangout preferable to Skype given the variety of facilities and free access. We also found that in online discussion numbers need to be limited to make it work. When considering what sites people were most comfortable with preference was given to sites like Facebook and Twitter as opposed to Blackboard and other VLE's.

Those interviewed said the environment should be a fun place to be and stylish; people want to feel relaxed and enjoy learning otherwise they probably won't return to the site. A number of participants mentioned the necessity of providing incentives for people who participate so accreditation, socialising, ownership and empowerment from learning could be solutions to this. The MOOC learner level needs to be clear so that people do not feel they are over or under achieving and accordingly there needs to be a range of opportunities. Focus in a MOOC can be enhanced by online deliverables. The learning and technology need to be up to date. Mentors are important to help translate learning into practice and managers need to be really committed and promote online learning as an important CPD process. In people's experience group projects online can be frustrating as people have different deadlines so the course facilitators need to take this into account when designing the course and in order to keep people's interest in the course it has to have a variety of facilitators.

5. Conclusion

The North Alliance approach to CPD through action research using a MOOC fits well with the opinions expressed by our interviewees. We find this encouraging and can only quote one of our respondents who said she was ecstatic about the idea of the MOOC for CPD in her area. Many respondents indicated they would participate in a MOOC and some indicated they would support others to do so. Only one of our respondents said they did not like the idea and would not participate.

We've suggested that whilst the North Alliance cannot offer opportunities in every CPD area staff have identified, if topics are clustered CLD staff will get a clearer idea of the areas that are relevant and useful to them. It has also been suggested that focus be placed on raising awareness of current issues in part time and sessional staff and that staff members be paid whilst participating in training.

Due to social isolation, lack of confidence in ICT abilities and preferred learning styles we have suggested that staff have the opportunity to carry out online CPD in a group where people can seek support from other CLD staff. Respondents have highlighted a real reluctance for staff to ask for IT support so online learning groups could potentially lessen this barrier. By organising learning groups we believe we have identified a possible solution to some of the barriers online learning creates and fits the blended learning model that CLD staff prefer. Designated ICT learning spaces need to be provided so that people can avoid distractions in their regular work areas and ICT facilities need to be prepared so that technological barriers are eliminated prior to the online learning experience. We would recommend that staff be given ample opportunity to practice using the technology so they gain confidence prior to course start dates. Additionally course facilitators and managers need to continue this process of confidence building so that staff are able to make contributions online and use those environments as extensions of critical reflection. Respondents requested we allocate a

realistic time frame for the MOOC and would like to see an example of a MOOC before they participate. Overall the online environment needs to be of high quality and encompass all attributes staff members have mentioned. During the pilot stage of the project we will continue to evaluate the quality of the online learning and seek further recommendations for improvements.

The ethos of a MOOC is complimentary to the CLD culture where people engage in lifelong learning in an open and collaborative environment that encourages participation. Given that learning takes place online and is open to a massive community, participants have great access to a wide range of resources and perspectives. It is an environment that has both structure; in the form of course content, options for accreditation and material that can be accessed after the course ends and also creativity and flexibility in the fact that it uses resources that participants may already be familiar with and encourages collaborative and individual contribution. Overall the MOOC has the potential to fulfil many of the needs suggested by those we consulted in this scoping study and we aim to investigate its potential within the pilot stage of the KTP project.

Appendix A

Questions for managers (about staff needs)

1. Which organisation do you work for and how long have you worked here? Do you work on a full time or part time basis? How long have you been in the CL&D profession?
2. What do you think your full time, part time and sessional staff needs are?
3. Are CPD needs different for qualified and unqualified staff?
4. Do you think staff will participate in a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)? If not what are the barriers to participation?
5. If they do what makes them do it?

Questions for CL&D workers about their own needs

1. Which organisation are you from and what's your position there? Do you work on a full time, part time or sessional basis?
2. How long have you worked for the organisation? How long have you been in the CL&D profession?
3. What are you needs for CPD? What are your experiences of CPD so far?
4. Is there anything you can offer in CPD that you would be willing to share with other CL&D practitioners?
5. We're thinking about creating an online environment such as a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) that CL&D workers can use to carry out their CPD. What do you think about this as a tool for CPD? What do you like and dislike about it?
6. What's your preferred method of CPD? (Action Learning Set, Study Visit etc)

Appendix B

Topics practitioners would deliver

Community Enterprise

Funding

Equality and Diversity

Financial Literacies

Engaging Hard to reach groups

Participatory Budgeting

Social Enterprise

Using film to engage learners/Media training

Train the Trainer

Family Awareness

Confidence Building & Assertiveness

Healthy Minds

Employability

Intergenerational work

GIRFEC

Communication through Drama

Awareness in specific learning differences

Working with offenders

Project Management

Willing to share practice in

Motivational Leadership

Partnership Working

Dynamic Youth Training

KETSO (An online tool kit in methods of Evaluation & Reflection)

(Respondents were also interested in organising a knowledge exchange program as a way of sharing practice)