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Introduction

In the UK, in common with other English-speaking countries, successive government initiatives and policies focused on teaching quality have led to the emergence of a clear agenda for teaching-related continuing professional development (CPD) for those leading and supporting teaching and learning (Spowart et al, in press). Whilst training for new lecturers is routine, following the Browne Review (2010), the spotlight has also been placed on CPD for more established staff (HEA, 2012). This reflects the role of teaching and learning increasingly plays in determining student choice of institution, aided by the availability of data on staff teaching qualifications.

CPD in teaching is manifest in a number of guises including (but not exclusively) postgraduate qualifications in teaching and learning, short training courses, in-situ training, consulting, peer review and mentoring, student assessment of teaching and intensive staff development (Prebble et al. 2004). Although some UK institutions have had a long history of teaching-related CPD, it has flourished since the 2003 White Paper, with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) acting as the benchmark for much provision (Turner et al., 2013).

Interestingly, much less attention has been paid to the evaluation of teaching-related CPD, particularly with respect to the impact it may have on the student experience. Indeed, Parsons et al. (2012:32) note the ‘substantial lack of direct evidence on outcomes for students’, which given the significance placed on the student voice, is a notable oversight in current practice. Existing work has highlighted methodological issues relating to the evaluation of provision with factors such as sample sizes, ambiguous methodological frameworks and localised context, limiting the extent to which we can gain insights into the impacts of teaching relating CPD (Chalmers et al, 2012).

In this paper we report the outcomes of a national survey that sought to examine current practice around teaching-related CPD and the methods used to evaluate its impact. This survey was undertaken as part of a project implemented to develop practices around the evaluation of teaching-related CPD.

Methodology

The survey was administered online to those with a remit for providing and supporting teaching related CPD in HE. Using a combination of closed and open questions, the survey captured data around the provision and support for teaching related CPD. The survey also revealed information concerning the connections of CPD to mechanisms of reward, recognition and appraisal, as well as the methods of evaluating the impact of CPD on teaching and learning / the student experience. The survey was extensively disseminated via UK-based networks such as the Higher

Education Academy and the Staff and Educational Development Association. The survey was open for two-weeks, obtaining a response rate of approximately 16%, with respondents drawn from representatives of CPD providers in teaching and research focused universities, FE colleges and private providers.

Findings

The provision of teaching-related CPD

The provision of teaching-related CPD commonly centred on postgraduate qualifications for new lecturers and the accreditation of experience for established lecturers. Whilst this was not unanticipated, the significance of this CPD across institutions perceived as teaching or research focused was observed, with those at teaching-focused universities more likely to have a formal teaching qualification compared to those in research-focused institutions. Teaching-focused institutions were comparatively more consistent in setting an expectation around CPD for staff in different teaching and learning roles (including experienced staff), compared to research-focused institutions.

A number of factors were identified as influential in shaping the provision of CPD, with the UKPSF having the greatest impact, followed by institutional priorities (e.g. teaching and learning strategies) and evidence-based practice. This indicates the role of teaching-related CPD in introducing participants to pedagogical theory and practice as well as aligning these with the institutional context. For new staff this is a particularly important function of CPD.

Evaluating CPD

Generally where CPD activities were evaluated this took place during or immediately after a CPD activity. They focused on participant satisfaction, changes in beliefs about teaching and learning and changes in teaching practice, and to a lesser extent, the impact on students or the institution. Given the immediacy of these evaluations it can be questioned as to whether the CPD participant is in a position to comment on most of these potential impacts. Only 15% of respondents evaluated the impact of their CPD longitudinally, seeking to ascertain student learning and impacts on institutional culture. Therefore only a minority of respondents were gaining the insights about their teaching-related CPD they were hoping to ascertain. Likewise, most respondents used questionnaires to evaluate CPD provision. As these generally capture only brief reflections they may provide limited information that can be used meaningfully evaluate practice. However, evaluations conducted six months after completion of the CPD offer tended to employ interviews/focus groups with participants rather than only questionnaires allowing collection of more rich and descriptive data.

Student voice input evaluating the impacts of teaching-related CPD

The overall goal of much teaching-related CPD is to enhance the student experience. However, the data suggests the contribution of students to evaluating the impact of CPD is minimal. Most evaluation is concentrated on the participants experiences and the influence it may have had on their practice, colleagues etc. Whilst it is recognised that determining the impacts of CPD on students is challenging (Parson et al., 2012) the apparent absence of students in the evaluation process, either directly or indirectly

(e.g. through inclusion of reflections on NSS data) is a notable oversight and highlights a clear direction in which evaluation practices need to develop in the future.

Concluding comments

Although much attention has been paid to the provision of teaching-related CPD, the evaluation of this offer has been somewhat overlooked. Through this survey insights were gained into current evaluation practice which should be reflected upon to direct future developments in this area, considering particularly the use of longitudinal approaches to evaluation and the contribution of students. These are essential to ensure that teaching-related CPD remain responsive to the changes demands of contemporary HE.

References

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