

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development

in ELICOS

2015

## Project Writer:

Katherine Brandon

## Reference Group:

Ian Aird, Greenwich College  
Lynda Beagle, RMIT English Worldwide  
Nicki Blake, Kaplan International College - Perth  
Pamela Humphreys, Griffith English Language Institute  
Sharon Luhr, Australian Pacific College  
Usha Rao, La Trobe Melbourne  
Marian Star, University of Tasmania English Language Centre

Phil Chappell, Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University  
Liam Brown, British Council, Dubai



# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



## Contents

## Page

Introduction .....	3
What is professional development? .....	5
Key features of best practice in professional development management .....	6
Professional development goals.....	7
Induction .....	9
Professional development initiatives .....	11
Professional development for more experienced staff .....	18
Professional development for managers .....	19
Case studies.....	22
Appendix A: Reflective practice.....	39
Appendix B: Maximising conference attendance .....	41
Acknowledgements .....	44

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## Introduction

English Australia wishes to support its member colleges in all areas of ELICOS operation to achieve high levels of professional practice and to this end periodically develops *Guides to Best Practice in ELICOS* on a range of issues relevant to ELICOS delivery. Sharing best practice in ELICOS leads to improved educational outcomes for all students and enhances Australia's reputation as an ELT provider in the international market. Staff at English Australia member colleges report that the Guides developed by the English Australia Secretariat are a highly valued member service.

It is a huge challenge for a manager with responsibility for different areas of operation, programs and even shifts to make sure the staff they are responsible for, whichever area of ELICOS operation they work in, have opportunities to learn and grow throughout their employment. A typical teaching centre will comprise academic staff ranging from recent CELTA graduates through to teachers with more than 25 years under their belt, and most will have at least some staff on casual contracts as well as a number of marketing, admin and support staff. It is also crucial that managers themselves have opportunities to learn and grow. Supporting staff to develop professional skills and knowledge throughout their career is one of the biggest challenges identified in various surveys and discussions by those in management positions. The Board of English Australia approved this project following requests from managers in member colleges in recent member surveys.

This Guide was compiled by English Australia following considerable consultation with managers in member colleges around Australia and with guidance from the project Reference Group. A comprehensive initial online survey, designed to elicit responses to multi-choice and open-ended questions on organisational approaches to PD; induction processes; the range of initiatives available to meet staff needs; and evaluation, was distributed to managers in all 104 (then) member colleges, 42 of whom responded. The Professional Support & Development Officer (PSDO) then followed up with interviews by phone or face-to-face with 19 respondents who indicated they were willing to discuss their context further. The PSDO also included information from published research, and discussions with academics and others experienced in professional development within and outside ELICOS: however the main focus is on current successful practice as it happens in ELICOS colleges in Australia.

It is evident that, while some colleges have wide-ranging and innovative programs to ensure that their staff have opportunities to learn and grow professionally, some are just getting by, struggling to offer meaningful professional development in a time- and resource-poor context. However it is gratifying to know that there is a plethora of options available to people responsible for the management of others' professional growth and development, many of which are cost-effective as well as useful and engaging.

What is very clear is that the time spent in making sure staff are aware of and are positively engaged in their own professional learning is well worth the effort, with return on investment in terms of increased staff satisfaction, leading to a happy, productive workplace, students receiving the best teaching and support and, overall, a successful business.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



The Guide covers a number of areas relating to professional development management in ELICOS. For most areas there are examples of good practice carried out by member college staff, and there are five case studies detailing responses to common challenges identified in the project survey or particularly innovative approaches to PD management. We hope that, no matter what your college context or what level of experience you have in managing staff professional development, you find something in this Guide to enhance staff professional growth and development.

Sue Blundell  
Executive Director  
English Australia  
February 2015

## What is professional development?

In the simplest of terms, good professional development leads people, whether a teacher, an academic manager, a business manager, a marketer, a student counsellor, administration staff or a homestay coordinator, to do their job better. The 2014 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) defined professional development very broadly as ‘activities that develop an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics’ (p. 95); this can be applied to all staff, not only teachers.

**Professional development is more than observations and workshops and conferences.** It is a coherent and multi-faceted approach to an individual’s professional growth. It is not an optional extra: it is an integral part of a healthy ELT organisation. It is not something that is ‘done’; staff engage with and respond to opportunities for professional development and no initiative is effective unless it leads to a positive change in practice which will, in turn, have a positive effect on the experience of students at that college. Good practice in professional development is about providing opportunities for staff to grow rather than monitoring staff behaviour.

Several managers who had strong professional development frameworks in their colleges mentioned they had been greatly influenced by Wenger’s concept of ‘communities of practice’, characterised by three main features: mutual engagement in the development of shared norms and collaborative relationships; shared understanding of what makes them a group; and a shared collection of communal resources that contribute to group learning. Wenger and his colleague Lave developed a description of how people learn from the time they start a job or profession to when they become an ‘expert’, positing that much of this growth happens through interaction with others in their area rather than formal training (see <http://infed.org/mobi/jean-lave-etienne-wenger-and-communities-of-practice/> for more information).

This type of learning happens naturally, as people find others who share their interests or who can help them. It is unpredictable and difficult, if not impossible, to control. In a 2004 reflection on changes in approaches to professional development Adrian Underhill identified the growth of networking, support groups, learner centredness and reflective practice and commented that there appeared to be a movement towards ‘an increasing valuing of participation in the creation of knowledge, a greater voice for diversity and difference, a preference for connectivity and relationship and a developing tolerance for, even delight, in working with the fuzzy, the unclear, the unfinished’. It takes courage for a manager to let go of control, and skill to ‘co-ordinate and communicate’ rather than ‘control and command’. If you, as someone responsible for supporting others to learn and grow in their profession, can ensure that the staff member, rather than the system, is the starting point you will be implementing good practice.

Effective professional development works best when there is honest and open communication and trust between staff and management, facilitating a partnership. This is not easy to achieve, but even the most toxic environment can change over time with sensitive strategic management (see the Curtin English case study on p. 22). Staff who are engaged in continuous learning and growth with opportunities for collaboration can be more innovative, which is crucial for the future health of ELICOS (see [English Australia Scenario Planning Report 2014](#)).

Unfortunately there is no easy solution to ensuring all staff have access to appropriate professional development. Managing this takes time, attention, skill and resources, but effective professional development management is a responsibility, not a luxury, and it is a goal well worth pursuing.

## Key features of best practice in professional development management

Colleges demonstrating best practice in managing professional development of ELICOS staff evidence the following features.

1. The organisation's **culture of professional development** is 'co-ordinate and communicate' rather than 'command and control' (Underhill, 2004). The emphasis is on a partnership between manager and staff working together and with each other to enhance staff growth and development rather than on the manager as an authority who monitors staff performance. The rationale and framework for professional development within the organisation is clear and explicit and accessible to all, and all staff have access to the opportunities they need to learn and grow professionally. Collaboration between staff, and between staff and management, is fostered and valued.
2. **Recognition by business managers** that the ongoing professional development of all staff can result in increased staff and student satisfaction and enhanced student outcomes and is thus essential to a thriving business. Student satisfaction with all aspects of their experience at the college is regularly monitored (see the English Australia [Guide to Monitoring Student Satisfaction in ELICOS](#)) and this feeds into the professional development planning process. Sufficient resources, including budget and time, are committed to all those who manage the professional development of staff. For a large college this includes support for an infrastructure of senior staff who can share responsibility and tasks.
3. Those responsible for managing the professional growth and development of staff have the **skills and knowledge** required to undertake their role. Managers need to be outward-thinking, resourceful and creative to meet the needs of the staff they have responsibility for. **Training and support** is available before and during their appointment so that they are able to undertake their role confidently and effectively: this includes induction and formal management courses as well as ongoing mentoring and access to new ideas or approaches.
4. Those who manage staff professional development **understand the value of PD** and work to ensure all their staff have opportunities for professional growth, from initial induction through to resignation or retirement. All staff, regardless of their contract type, are able to participate.
5. **Staff accept responsibility for and are actively engaged in professional development.** There is an atmosphere of curiosity and reflection at all levels. As well as asking 'what's in it for me', staff ask 'how can I contribute?', and there is a willingness to learn in collaboration with others within and outside the college.
6. There is a **range of options** for professional growth and development of individual staff that encourages and enables self-reflection, access to new knowledge and approaches and collaboration with colleagues. There is a **flexible framework** for managers to operate within, and this framework enables rather than constrains and confines professional development.

## Professional development goals

### Establishing an organisational framework

If staff and their managers share an understanding of what is expected in terms of job skills and knowledge, or strategic goals then it is a lot easier to achieve them together. Managers foster opportunities for the development of innovation and best practice, and this is supported by good professional development.

Colleges report that highly structured, formalised and detailed systems create a lot of work and stress and do not necessarily result in staff learning. Many colleges, particularly those associated with larger VET or university institutions, have a set of KPIs that they must work with, and managers report that they need to be particularly creative to ensure that there are opportunities for individual learning.

There is universal support for the involvement of staff in the development of a professional development framework and options for growth within that. In Issue 28.2 of the [English Australia Journal](#) Karen Benson and Phil Chappell outline a detailed approach to changing teacher professional development in their article 'A sustainable, collaborative, teacher-focused professional learning program for English language colleges'. They described a move to a dynamic planning process that resulted in a teacher-led, inclusive framework which had individual as well as collaborative focus points. They emphasised that teacher involvement early on in the process was key for achieving staff buy-in, helping ensure the framework was viewed positively by staff.

The University of Sydney's Deputy Director [Dan Bruce's slides](#) from his presentation at the 2010 English Australia Conference, describing his approach to reviewing the professional development framework at his college, provide food for thought, and Sheree Millen's account of how she worked with staff to set up effective professional development to change the culture at Curtin English is on page 22.

#### Example of good practice

✓ College A has an annual process where all staff discuss the direction of professional development for that year, within the overall strategic plan. In one or more meetings staff evaluate the effectiveness of existing approaches and may suggest alternatives. The end product is a framework that is agreed on by all staff.

### Establishing individual goals

Individual goals are best kept simple, specific and achievable; however they also need to be enabling and supporting rather than constraining and limiting. PD goals are best negotiated with individuals according to their context, their need and their interest, resulting in clear direction for managers as well as for staff.

In his address at the 2013 English Australia Conference Liam Brown proposed a simple framework as a basis for professional development discussion. Liam suggests four questions to help all staff identify their professional goals:

1. What do you want to be doing better over the next 12 months?
2. How do you think our students and other stakeholders will benefit?
3. How do you think our organisation will benefit?
4. How do you think you will benefit?

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

The focus is thus squarely on learning and growth and identifying value and benefit. Staff can then negotiate clear and achievable goals with their manager that are followed within a specified time frame.

For academic staff, the British Council has developed a [Continuing Professional Development framework](#) that outlines three broad stages of a teacher's career, and sub-stages within these that can guide discussions about overall goals for professional direction and development. In 2014 Cambridge English Language Assessment released their [Teaching Framework](#) along with a detailed survey that enables teachers to assess their skills and knowledge in a range of areas relating to learning and teaching.

## Example of good practice

✓ College B staff select PD goals for the year in discussion with their manager. Goals will depend on the staff member's experience and interests and are evaluated in a mid-year meeting before a final evaluation at the end of that year. Managers report a positive take-up by staff, who feel they are part of the 'system' and that they have a say in their own development.

## Record-keeping

Ideally, records of professional goals identified and progress towards their achievement are kept online and are accessible by the staff member concerned as well as by their manager. A portfolio approach can be used for all staff members, comprising a statement of the staff member's approach to managing/ marketing/teaching etc, details of duties, markets covered, trips taken, courses taught (as appropriate) etc together with a PD plan and any activities undertaken to achieve that plus feedback and reflection.

## PD Committees

Managers can share the load of facilitating professional development by establishing a PD Committee comprising two or more staff (depending on the scope of the role) who are interested in professional learning and also keen to take on a different role. These staff may have varying levels of experience and work in different programs or areas of operation, eg student services, marketing and education, to ensure that different needs within the college are represented as well as different ideas expressed. The PD Committee can work with staff and managers to plan and organise opportunities for PD; if necessary, getting time from their normal roles to undertake their responsibilities. A PD Committee role offers valuable experience to someone who would like to take on a staff management role in the future. PD Committees can take responsibility for as much or as little as needed and agreed.

## Examples of good practice

✓ University centre College C has a PD Committee comprising three staff: the Academic Manager, a senior teacher and the Student Services Officer. Their main role is to plan and organise the college's PD Days, held at the end of every 10-week cycle. Planning meetings are held every two weeks, more regularly as each PD Day arrives. The Committee takes full responsibility for the program and for the logistics, co-opting other staff as required. To provide support to the Committee the college has a documented framework for organising a PD Day which the Committee follows, evaluates and adds to/modifies with each event. One person from the college PD Committee attends meetings with university staff to plan organisation-wide events or approaches.

✓ College D invites experienced trainers from their teacher training department to participate on the PD Committee. The college benefits from the trainers' skills and experience and the trainers are able to keep in touch with what's happening in ELICOS teaching and learning.

## Creating a positive professional development culture

Many managers report that there is a culture within their staffroom (and this is specifically about teachers) that is not constructive or positive towards professional learning, where staff come in, teach their hours then leave as soon as they can. These teachers are not willing to discuss any changes to their professional practice or spend time in development, even when they are paid to do so. This applies to experienced staff in particular, who say that they have nothing to learn. Managers report that this is demotivating for all.

However change can happen. Other managers report that they have changed the culture of their staffroom through demonstrating that they value their teachers, and actively seek their input as partners in the system. This is not easy to achieve but it is possible over time, with managers reporting that it can take around three years for the process to bear fruit (see the Curtin College case study on p. 22 for an example).

## Induction

To ensure that new staff have the best start it is essential that they are introduced to their college, their colleagues and the requirements of their roles so that they feel confident and can ease as smoothly as possible into their new roles.

### Features of best practice induction

1. There is a **documented procedure** that all staff follow.
2. Induction is **staged over time**, with the most important information presented on or before the first day. There is always a large amount of information for new staff to ingest so the question to ask is 'What is the risk to the college and/or the individual if this information is NOT given at this time?'
3. **Key information is regularly evaluated for relevance** and is updated as required by the person/people with responsibility for staff induction.
4. **Key information is available in written form** (in hard copy or online) for future reference by staff. Online information is easiest to update.
5. **Staff have input** into the development of procedures and information, engaging in an opportunity for their own professional development as they learn about legislative and operational requirements.
6. Once induction is complete **it is signed off** by the staff member and their manager and the staff member is given a copy, or access to a copy for future reference.

### Content of induction

Below are the points that are generally covered as part of staff induction, including for casual staff. It will depend on the area of operation as to when they are addressed. Most staff surveyed indicated that checklists are extremely useful in monitoring what is covered and that having induction conducted by different people in key roles was interesting and useful for new staff.

#### Pre-Day 1/Day 1

- Introduction to college – history, goals and values, staffing structure etc
- Introduction to key staff within an area of operation
- Specific requirements of the position

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

- Staff resources (for teaching staff)
- Pass keys, passwords etc
- A tour of facilities at the college
- Indication of facilities near the college eg where to park, get coffee/lunch, shop etc
- Orientation information that is given to students (to ensure shared understanding of key points)
- OH&S requirements and procedures
- Appointment of a 'buddy' or mentor as appropriate (see details on p. 12)
- Observation of students (for teaching staff)

## **Week 1**

- Administrative procedures eg how to apply for leave
- Reporting and admin requirements (for teaching staff)
- Curriculum approaches & underpinnings (for teaching staff)
- Introduction to key staff outside area of operation
- Range of programs available to students
- Opportunity to meet socially with colleagues
- Marketing materials and practices

## **First month**

- PD meeting – establish general directions, discuss initial goals, identify specific actions/initiatives
- Information about context of ELICOS, English Australia etc

## **Internal appointments**

Staff moving from one role to another within an organisation also need induction and although they may not need an orientation to operational aspects they will still need to know about their new role and to meet their new colleagues.

### **Examples of good practice**

- ✓ College E has prepared a printed Induction Guide that has step by step outlines of how to use the college intranet and student management system, as well as a summary of daily, weekly and end of term tasks for teacher reference. This was compiled by staff (rather than managers or specialist HR staff), is regularly updated by staff and is valued as a reference.
- ✓ College F tries to provide opportunities for new teaching staff to observe their mentor teach a class at the level and on the program they will be teaching.
- ✓ A large college, College G often has a number of new teachers starting at the same time. This means that the new staff have the opportunity to undertake a substantial group orientation and induction, and meet each other before they start their new jobs.

## Professional development initiatives

The following are options that can be considered to enhance staff professional development. The initiatives that are implemented will depend on the individual's goal(s); operational context, the size of the college; and the time, personnel and financial resources available.

### Physical space

The layout of the office or staffroom is an important starting point. No matter what size the organisation is, or what area of operation within the college, an area where staff, especially teachers, work together is invaluable, enabling them to ask each other questions/offer solutions as they plan or come out of class, debate, discuss or just 'shoot the breeze', and the site of considerable professional learning, particularly for teachers. The advantage of this physical context cannot be overemphasised. Preference is for space, light and attractive decor combining to best effect. One academic manager reported that during the recent downturn everything in the budget was up for review, except for 'PD and the pot plants'. He feels this made a major contribution to the development of the current positive, productive culture within the staffroom.

### Staff meetings

Weekly or fortnightly meetings of staff – teachers and others – who work in program areas are very common across English Australia member colleges. Staff meetings are ideal opportunities to discuss and learn, and casual staff or part-time staff should be included in these. The trick is to get the right balance of administration and professional learning.

#### Examples of good practice

- ✓ In approach similar to the 'flipped classroom', where students receive lesson materials ahead of class and time in class is spent maximising opportunities for discussion and exploration, College H sends out administrative information via email or posts it on the staff Moodle. Staff read this and come to the meeting with any questions, meaning that more meeting time can be used for professional exchange.
- ✓ At College J senior staff take turns at organising staff meetings; putting together the agenda, preparing any material, sending out reminders, chairing the meetings and taking and posting minutes/outcomes.

### Social media & personal learning networks (PLNs)

Personal learning networks (PLNs) are one of the most exciting developments in recent times and one which can only have taken place with the advent and proliferation of social media. PLNs enable people to access information from or join virtual communities of those who share an interest eg student support, marketing, educational management, educational technology, assessment, systems thinking, or just teaching in a particular context eg Australian ELT. Information is available via blogs, wikis, Google Groups, Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, to name just a few, and many (if not most) of these are interactive, giving participants the opportunity to comment on, question and add to content that has been posted, not to mention the opportunity to virtually meet and get to know others in a different college, city or even country. Rather than a formal and structured interaction there is a natural flow of information and support and even 'lurking' (joining a virtual community but not actively engaging) can be valuable as staff are exposed to information and views. It is entirely up to the individual to connect as they like.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

PLNs create connection and communities for people who may otherwise be isolated, whether this be because they are in a remote location with few opportunities to interact with others; they don't have time to attend events; or there is simply no one else in their organisation who shares their particular professional passion or role. Nicki Blake has provided an account of how her PLN supports her role as Director of Studies (see p. 26).

## 'Buddying' and mentoring

'Buddying' occurs where staff of similar knowledge and/or experience pair up to achieve a common goal, perhaps where both are teaching a particular program or to provide mutual support in an action research project.

'Mentoring' teams up a staff member with someone with more experience, someone with expertise in a particular area the 'mentee' needs help with, including individuals who may work within or outside the organisation. This could be informal support by staff of another who may be new to the college, the area of operation or the program (see Induction on p. 9). An induction mentor will generally provide considerable support early in the process, gradually pulling back over time.

If carried out within an organisation, mentoring and buddying offer opportunities for professional development for both of those involved: the new/less experienced staff member has access to one particular person if they need support, and the buddy/mentor gains valuable experience of acting in the role.

With both buddying and mentoring the staff involved can arrange their own pairings in consultation with their manager, or management staff with good knowledge of staff strengths and interests can assist in matching people up. Managers report that they generally match staff who are close in experience, known as 'near peer' mentoring, so that the gap in expertise is not too daunting. Expected behaviour or goals are discussed at the beginning of the relationship so that expectations are explicit and shared, and a (flexible) timeframe is agreed. The experience for both is evaluated on conclusion.

## Newsletters

Regular eg quarterly or per course internal newsletters can help staff at large colleges or multi-campus organisations to keep in touch with each other, feel part of the organisation and contribute to a positive culture. Newsletters can be for all staff or targeted at specific areas of operation eg teaching, student services or marketing. They can be compiled by the marketing division or by one or two interested staff members with contributions from all staff. Suggested content includes:

- news on business outcomes;
- achievement of staff eg formal qualifications achieved, particularly good student feedback, a successful project completed;
- profiles of new student markets;
- tips and tricks for various business areas.

Staff can also post ad hoc information and achievement that staff can 'Like' or comment on in closed Facebook pages, Moodle or internal online social network platforms, such as Ning, that can only be accessed by staff from a particular organisation.

### Example of good practice

✓ College K has a large teaching staff that includes many on part-time and casual contracts. It puts out a newsletter every three months. The 4-page PDF contains photos of college activity; profiles of staff; acknowledgement of papers presented at conferences; achievements of the college eg new contracts recognition & awards; plus information on what's 'new and interesting' to teachers.

## Peer learning

Informal peer learning takes place as a natural result of people with common roles and goals being together, hence the need for a space where this can take place, be it virtual (a Web 2.0 platform) or physical (a staffroom). However peer learning can be more formalised and structured so that staff who participate in any kind of professional development activity are encouraged to share their learning with others in a systematic way. This doesn't just include conferences and workshops: any activity can be shared. For example:

- staff can share what they're learning in their post-graduate study, particularly if they're carrying out a research project;
- staff who have been involved in a curriculum project can share the highs and lows of the process as well as learnings and the eventual outcome;
- staff involved in an action research project can share their research goals and their progress;
- staff who attend external advisory groups can share outcomes.

A written report may not always be the most effective way of achieving this: for one thing, it may be seen as 'payment' (and even as a punishment!) for participation and secondly, a staff email; an article for the college newsletter; a chat about the activity in a meeting; a comment and/or resources posted on the college Facebook page, wiki or Moodle; or a presentation for staff may be more engaging. A good manager will select/make available a method that is appropriate to the information being shared as well as to the audience.

## Observations

There are very few colleges that do not facilitate at least some opportunities for teaching staff to observe each other or be observed. Observations can contribute greatly to the professional development of the observer as well as the person being observed.

### Features of best practice in observations

1. There is a clear **purpose** for the observation: either the observer wishes to see a particular aspect of teaching or classroom management in action eg use of technology, a 'demand high' approach to student feedback or the teaching of a particular skill; or the person being observed is trying out a new approach or wishing to identify an aspect of their teaching that they would like to improve.
2. There are clear **guidelines** for the observation: feedback is generally only provided in respect to the purpose of the observation.
3. The observation is **followed up** as soon as practicable with reflection, feedback and discussion, and possibly with a subsequent observation following any action the teacher takes as a result of the feedback.
4. Those involved in observations for performance management, eg for new teachers or teachers who have received student complaints, receive **training** in observing and giving feedback in a constructive and sensitive manner.

Most people think of observation as carried out by a manager. However there are other options.

### Self-observation

The ubiquity of mobile devices means that anyone, whether they are teachers, student services or marketing staff, can video their own performance using their phone or tablet and reflect on it by themselves or in collaboration with colleagues. These videos can also form part of a portfolio, to demonstrate staff professional learning over time. NOTE: make sure that making this kind of recording is permitted within your college guidelines.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## Peer

Staff at any level of an organisation and in any area of operation can learn a lot from observing each other. If those involved are teachers, a senior teacher with a non-teaching load can cover the observer's class. Teachers can collaborate to team teach a class, sharing stages of the lesson and both monitoring for feedback to students (see Nicki Blake's article on team teaching in Issue 30.1 of the *English Australia Journal*).

Again, these situations can be videoed for later analysis/reflection or sharing and can be used to identify areas for development.

### Is observation by academic managers necessary?

An increasing number of academic managers report that they are cutting down on the amount of teacher observation they do, freeing them up for other activities, especially individual meetings with staff. Directors of Studies can ask themselves the following questions:

- Is the teacher in their first year post-qualification?
- Have there been student complaints about the teacher's performance?
- Do I have concerns about the teacher's performance?

If the answer is 'No' to all questions, 'performance management' observation by senior staff may not be necessary, and the teacher may be better observed as part of a peer program. Read Steve Heaps' case study on ICTE-UQ's approach to observation on p. 29 for a further exploration of this topic.

### Examples of good practice

- ✓ At College L, teachers participate in 'near peer' observations, where there is a moderate difference in experience between the observer and the observed. The DoS states that this presents a more achievable goal for the observer.
- ✓ College M has a CELTA training arm and is able to support new teachers' professional development through using their highly skilled and experienced trainers as observers. Teachers who are more experienced also request these observers, when available, to help them focus on areas to improve.
- ✓ Observations are not limited to teaching staff. At College N the Marketing Manager invites her staff in to sit in on meetings or phone calls that she may have with key agents. What ensues is then discussed, and the key communication or marketing strategies involved are identified. The manager then participates in role plays with the staff to practise any new strategies they might like to try out. Staff report that this activity is very beneficial for them.

## Article discussion groups

Article discussion groups use short articles published in journals or blogs, related to their area of interest, as a catalyst for discussion. The selected article is read by group members before a 60-90 minute meeting, where discussion points may have been identified to keep the conversation rolling. A summary of outcomes of the discussion is often recorded and shared, and further resources on the topic may be collated and shared. In this way staff can keep up with new approaches to aspects of ELICOS delivery. Managers who have most success with article discussion groups are those who have given senior or other interested staff responsibility for organising, managing and reporting on the meetings.

There are also article discussion groups available online eg via #AusELT and the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group. Online discussion groups generally take place via Facebook or other Web 2.0 platforms and may take a week or more. Colleges can set up this type of group for staff within their

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

organisation, using articles and questions within their own staffrooms before sharing outcomes and furthering the discussion online afterwards. This is a great way to build relationships between staff at different campuses.

## Example of good practice

✓ College O holds a monthly article discussion group for teachers, which is keenly anticipated by its members. Members take turns to identify an article or blog post they have found interesting, and they prepare discussion questions for consideration. The main points of discussion are posted on the organisation's closed Facebook page and further online discussion often takes place.

## Action research & reflective practice

Initiatives where staff identify an area of their own practice they'd like to work on or explore and take steps to do this systematically through action research are fast becoming recognised as extremely valuable ways to effect learning and change. Managers who have supported staff to undertake this type of professional development report that it is highly effective for:

- the growth of the individuals directly involved (and their students, if the action researchers are teachers)
- the growth of interested staff around those directly involved; and
- development of a sense of cohesion within the area of operation.

It can also be highly motivating to all concerned.

With action research, a staff member identifies an aspect of their practice they would like to know more about; plans a course of action that they can take to do this; implements that action, observing what happens and recording the outcomes; then finally reflects on the process to come to a conclusion or take further action. Sharing this conclusion can be very helpful to others in a similar work context, and is an essential part of the process.

Most ELT action research takes place within the classroom, however there is a great deal that can be learnt through this approach by anyone working in an ELICOS college. For anyone interested in learning more about action research, Anne Burns' book *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching* (Routledge, 2010) is highly recommended. The [English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program](#) offers teachers the opportunity to carry out a small-scale action research projects supported by a key reference person (currently Anne Burns) and in collaboration with teachers from around Australia in a stimulating and enriching experience.

Reflective practice is perhaps a less structured approach to teacher reflection. Phil Chappell, *English Australia Journal* Executive Editor and lecturer in TESOL at Macquarie University, has prepared some information and resources in Appendix 1.

## Presentations and workshops

Presentations and workshops can be held in-house, presented by staff or by external speakers, or in association with other areas of operation eg a university context where the teaching centre staff attend PD with lecturers. And with technology staff can listen to presentations via Skype (with opportunities for interaction) or on YouTube. All colleges in the survey, big or small, reported they organised presentations and workshops for their staff, however there were significant differences in the way they are organised and the content.

There are also many webinars and workshops for staff organised by associations such as English Australia, ACPET, NEAS, IEAA and ISANA, however these may incur a cost for registration. The benefit

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

of externally organised workshops is that they offer valuable opportunities for staff to meet others in the same role outside their own organisations and share challenges and successes.

Managers report that the most successful workshops are organised or offered (in the case of external workshops) in an explicit response to identified staff need, whether this has been expressed in a survey or other feedback, and discussed collectively and/or individually.

The topic of presentations and workshops can focus on a number of different areas relating to staff and operational needs. The broader the understanding that practitioners have of their work context, the better equipped they are to carry out their jobs and fulfil their roles, so content of the input can include any of the following:

**Context of ELICOS** – international education as a sector; the role of government departments in ELICOS; the regulatory framework; changes in markets; the role of English Australia.

**Context of the college** – colleges demonstrating good practice make sure that staff working in different areas of operation eg business management, marketing, teaching and student services and support are aware of the main challenges and issues in all areas. What are the college's key markets? What does the college see as its brand or position? Is there a new course or service that has been set up?

Colleges that set up opportunities for staff from different areas of operation to meet together, hear about and discuss relevant areas of business operation report that this leads to increased understanding and prevention of some common problems eg the marketing staff promising educational services that can't be delivered, or teachers not understanding why resources haven't been purchased.

**Context of the position** – opportunities are provided for staff to develop knowledge and skills related to their role at the college.

Managers report that giving staff opportunities to present to their peers builds their skill and confidence in presenting and is an encouragement to consider submitting a proposal for a state-based PD Fest or a national conference.

## Examples of good practice

- ✓ College P holds 15 minute 'express workshops' that introduce new technology or other easy-to-cover topics with an emphasis on practice. The sessions are generally presented by staff within the college who may have a particular interest or expertise. This is established practice and staff are very willing to present as well as to attend.
- ✓ College Q lets managers from other English Australia member colleges in the area know when they have scheduled a particularly interesting presentation or workshop, and offers places for staff from other colleges. This has the potential to be a more formalised practice, with small groups of colleges planning 'workshop exchanges' to share expertise that is needed by all.

## Follow-up

Participation in any presentation or workshop, whether in-house or external, can do little to enhance an individual's professional development unless there is **follow-up**. RMIT English Worldwide has set up a very practical framework for using workshops as a starting point for reflection and action (go to p. 32 for details). There are further examples of follow-up in 'Peer learning' on p. 13.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## ‘PD Days’

The college PD Day, structured as a mini-conference, is an intensive PD experience and established practice in many organisations, especially those which are large and/or have more than one campus within the same area. They may be held once a year or once a semester, and presenters may be staff members with something to share or specialists invited from outside the college. Staff, who may be teachers or from other areas of operation, are paid to attend and attendance by all, regardless of the type of contact they hold, is expected.

Nick Kirk has outlined how Ability English approaches the organisation of PD Days in a case study on p. 35.

## Conferences

There are many conferences in and around Australia that can provide a great deal of valuable professional growth to staff in terms of input and also connection with peers. Those managing staff PD can get on mailing lists for the main associations relevant to their area of operation so they are informed of any upcoming events. English Australia also sends out a three-weekly ‘PD Update’ that lists the main national and international educational conferences as well as other relevant PD opportunities, and the ‘Profiling and Promotions Update’ also alerts member college staff to important conferences in the marketing sphere. Contact [easec@englishaustralia.com.au](mailto:easec@englishaustralia.com.au) if you would like to add your name, or the names of staff members, to a mailing list.

Sending staff to conferences can eat into the PD budget so you need to make the most of your registrations. The English Australia Conference encourages shared registrations, for example, so if the conference is in your city you can schedule a number of staff to go during the event, and support their attendance at any relevant getting-to-know-you events such as the Welcome event and the networking breakfasts, for which tickets are sold separately from the main conference registration.

Make sure staff attending a conference or external event are aware of college policy and procedure on administrative issues such as any meal and travel allowances.

There is more information about making the most of conference attendance on p. 41.

## Formal study

There are plenty of opportunities for staff to undertake formal study towards post-graduate qualifications or other study such as the International Diploma of Language Teaching Management (IDLTM) offered by ICTE-UQ (see <http://www.icte.uq.edu.au/idltm>). There are universities in all states and territories that offer post-graduate courses in TESOL, ELT management, marketing and other aspects of ELICOS, many of which are in distance mode. The [Cambridge DELTA](#) also has a module on English Language Teaching Management.

Colleges can offer full or partial scholarships to support staff participation, and staff undertaking further formal study can be excellent sources of current approaches and information.

## Evaluating PD experiences

It is always important to find out how staff respond to a PD activity or initiative, whether it be an article discussion group, a PLN, an action research program or a workshop or conference. The following general framework can provide focus for discussion with staff:

- Did this initiative meet your PD needs?
- Would you recommend this activity to others? Why/not?

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

- What did you get from this initiative that you can apply to your own role? What more would you like to find out?
- What did you get from this initiative that would you like to share with others? How could you best do this (email, newsletter, meeting item, Facebook post, presentation etc)?

The information provided can help a staff member focus on their response to the activity/initiative and also inform managers' future recommendations and support.

## Should I pay for staff to participate in professional development opportunities?

As a manager it is in your best interests to ensure that all staff, not just those who are full time, are as competent as possible. It is also your responsibility. You need to ensure that part-time or casual staff have access to discussion about their professional development and opportunities to make this happen, and their time may need to be paid for if it is outside their normal hours. Most colleges pay their teachers at an administrative rate to participate in activity outside their normal teaching hours. Best practice is to discuss this with staff and agree on a reasonable rate.

## How can English Australia help?

### English Australia branch meetings

English Australia branch meetings provide an ideal opportunity for member college staff to ensure they are up to date with the latest issues affecting the context of ELICOS operation eg an analysis of recent government decisions and the outcomes of recent English Australia Board meetings. They also offer an excellent forum for suggesting possible actions, projects or initiatives to the English Australia Board for consideration and the chance to develop local networks where people working in similar roles can share experiences, challenges and successes.

All staff at all English Australia member colleges are welcome to attend. Please contact your [state/territory delegate](#) for information about your next branch meeting.

### English Australia Special Interest Groups

Some of the larger branches have special interest groups of individuals, especially academic managers, who meet on a regular basis to discuss topics of particular interest to them. Contact your [state/territory delegate](#) to find out if there's a SIG in your branch, or if you'd like to set one up.

### Action Research in ELICOS Program

Since the pilot program in 2010 this program, sponsored by Cambridge English Language Assessment, has supported teachers from around Australia to undertake short projects exploring an aspect of their classroom practice. Details can be found at [www.englishaustralia.com.au/action-research-program](http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/action-research-program), including an elaboration of each year's theme.

## Professional development for more experienced staff

Professional development occurs throughout a person's career, regardless of length of service.

Experienced staff who have been in the same role for a number of years still need opportunities for professional growth to keep them engaged and curious, and active contributors to the learning organisation. These staff can be encouraged to share their skills and knowledge with less experienced staff or to stretch their own skills and knowledge. It is particularly important that experienced staff are involved in the process of planning the college PD framework.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

The following initiatives can engage and motivate experienced staff:

- mentoring new staff;
- being part of a PD Committee;
- organising staff meetings;
- collating a staff newsletter;
- participating in action research to explore their own practice;
- preparing and presenting workshops for staff;
- preparing and presenting presentations and workshops at conferences;
- writing an article for a professional journal eg the [English Australia Journal](#) to share their expertise with the sector;
- representing the college at relevant meetings and forums;
- leading or participating in projects that stretch learning and widen perspective eg working on curriculum renewal with an external expert.

Senior teachers may also benefit from workshops and courses which help them learn more about non-teaching areas such as networking, marketing and how to present themselves in a business environment so they can make the most of current opportunities as well as prepare for a future role in management.

## Example of good practice

✓ College R has explicit mention in their employment contract that staff are expected to take part in activities and initiatives that contribute to their own professional development, as well as that of others, for the duration of their employment. This policy was developed with staff as part of a reviewed enterprise agreement and is discussed with new employees as part of induction.

## Professional development for managers

### Management skills and knowledge

Those in charge of significant areas of college operation or even a college itself have knowledge and skills in business management. Managers have confidence and aptitude in financial control and risk management; compliance; marketing; IT and HR issues as well as the 'softer' skills of people management; project management; and relationship building for influence. Ongoing appropriate training is provided to these managers as well as opportunities to network with others.

### Initial training

As well as general business skills those responsible for managing the professional growth and development of staff in ELICOS colleges have opportunities for their own training and professional support. The International Diploma of Language Teaching Management (IDLTM), offered by the Institute for Continuing and TESOL Education at the University of Queensland, was reported by several academic managers as an excellent introduction to PD management, and other managers who had backgrounds in human resources management before they took positions in ELICOS colleges felt they had an advantage.

### Ongoing support

Managers need access to support from their peers, and find that making the time to attend **meetings or conferences** with others in the same position has tremendous payoffs in terms of new insights

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

gained and connections made. Specific events include English Australia branch meetings and special interest groups (currently Academic Managers' SIGs in NSW and WA). Managers find that attending conferences such as the English Australia Conference, AIEC and the NEAS ELT Management Conference invaluable as a source of up-to-date information impacting their area of operation and, often more importantly, opportunities to reflect on their roles and to meet others in similar positions. Having time out of the office to put your head up and look around can lead to new insights and understandings that can be applied back at the college.

**Personal learning networks (PLNs)** can be invaluable to managers (see Nicki Blake's Case Study on p. 26).

For those in senior management positions **formal mentoring** with someone from outside the college can be extremely valuable, whether it's with someone in the wider organisation such as an associated university or vocational college or with a professional career coach or mentor. Mentoring/coaching programs generally range from three months to over a year, and people reported that identifying clear objectives and outcomes to work towards eg to develop skills in managing staff, managing projects and dealing with challenging behaviour; to increase self-confidence; made the process particularly useful. For some, meetings were held face-to-face off-campus whereas others participated via phone or Skype. Everyone interviewed for this project who had had this experienced found it positive and practical.

**Postgraduate study** in business management and/or leadership can be beneficial and many managers reported that their MBA study gave them up-to-date theory, approaches and strategies to help them with their roles as well as opportunities to meet others in similar roles and share experiences.

## Examples of good practice

- ✓ The Director of Studies at College S was allocated funds by her director to take part in a local management mentoring program. The DoS took time to identify a mentor she felt was a good fit with her personality and teaching context and she reported that this was an important step. The program comprised monthly meetings for one year where the mentor helped the DoS with specific areas identified in the first meeting, which were evaluated for success on an ongoing basis. Although the DoS was initially sceptical of the effect of the program she had nothing but praise for the experience and her mentor and would like to undertake ongoing mentoring.
- ✓ Members of the English Australia Board, comprising managers from large and small colleges around Australia, report that the Board meeting papers, the meetings themselves and the regular email exchanges between the Executive Director and Board members provide excellent professional development at their level. Nominations for membership of the English Australia Board are called in August in preparation for elections held amongst member colleges. Contact the English Australia Secretariat at [easec@englishaustralia.com.au](mailto:easec@englishaustralia.com.au) for more information.

## Managing staff underperformance

Although this relates to performance management rather than professional development and thus not directly relevant to this resource, how to manage someone whose work you're not happy with is an area of concern for many managers and needs to be addressed promptly if the need arises. The Australian Fair Work Ombudsman has an excellent website that can help managers who feel that staff are not fulfilling their roles satisfactorily.

Go to <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/best-practice-guides/managing-underperformance#bestpractice> for resources and information.

## References & resources

British Council *Going forward: Continuing Professional Development for English Language Teachers in the UK*. Retrieved from

[http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/B413%20CPD%20for%20Teachers\\_v2\\_0.pdf](http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/B413%20CPD%20for%20Teachers_v2_0.pdf)

Brown, L. (2013) *From passion to performance: what does it mean to work here?* Presentation given at English Australia Conference.

[http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/visageimages/about\\_us/conference/2013\\_Conference/2013\\_Brown.pdf](http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/visageimages/about_us/conference/2013_Conference/2013_Brown.pdf)

Burns, A. (2010) *Doing action research in the English language classroom*. Routledge: Cambridge

Cambridge English Language Assessment (2014) Teacher Framework Accessed at

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/172990-developing-the-cambridge-english-teaching-framework.pdf>

English Australia (2014) *ELICOS Industry Scenario Planning 2014-2017* Accessed from

<http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/visageimages/ELICOS-ScenarioPlanningReport.pdf>

*English Australia Journal*, <http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/journal-issues>

OECD (2005), *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*. Paris : OECD

Richards, J. C. and T. C. S. Farrell (2005) *Professional Development for Language Teachers: Strategies for Teacher Learning*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press

Underhill, A. (2004) 'Trends in English Language Teaching Today' in *MED Magazine*, Issue 16, April 2004. Retrieved from [www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/April2004/18-feature-trends-print.htm](http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/April2004/18-feature-trends-print.htm)

**Please note that case studies and appendices follow.**

## Case studies

### Case study 1: Establishing a positive PD culture

Sheree Millen, Director of Studies, Curtin English, WA

#### Context

In November 2011, Curtin English (formerly Curtin English Language Centre) had no clearly defined continuing professional development (CPD) program. Professional development amounted to an occasional workshop led by the Director of Studies, and this was poorly attended unless compulsory. There were no observations or formal systems of feedback on teaching practice. In November 2014, three years on, Curtin English has a multi-faceted CPD program that is embraced by the teaching team and contributes to a positive and inclusive community of professional practice:

*'There are many differences [among teaching staff], but everyone shares a common collegiality, a willingness to collaborate and a sense of professional generosity that extends in all directions.*

*Just like our students, teachers need support, understanding, encouragement and the removal of threat and stress to give of their best. I think the key [is that] management genuinely listens to staff and the needs they express, and encourage people to make PD-related contributions or engage in reflective action-research when and where they can - either privately (monitoring their own practice) or publicly (where they share their action research with others).'* (Teacher A, 2014)



*Curtin English teachers share their skills and knowledge during a collaborative workshop*

Curtin English (CE) has a student population of between 300 and 450 and approximately 25 full-time and 15 part-time teachers. There are three Coordinators (similar to an ADOS role) and three Senior Teachers. In 2011, the college was dealing with the aftermath of a restructure that had led to redundancies and reduced salaries. The teachers had formed factions, were hostile to management, and wary of further changes. A positive, new approach was needed so a decision was made in late 2011 to establish a CPD program with a clear and definite long-term goal: to develop and cultivate a more cohesive and collaborative team of teachers working towards the same aim i.e. to improve the student experience at Curtin English.

#### Year 1

In the first year (2012), the short-term aim was to establish a CPD focus and encourage teachers to view observations and CPD as 'business as usual'. Regular teacher observations by management were introduced – one per semester- and when a teacher moved to a course that they had not previously taught, for example, a General English teacher moving to the Bridging Course. Observations for teachers new to Curtin English and existing teachers who were teaching a new course were *evaluative*, which meant that they were being assessed on whether they were teaching to the preferred methodology and aims of the course. Observations for experienced teachers were *developmental*, meaning that the focus was on developing their teaching technique and effectiveness.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

In addition, teachers were required to deliver workshops to each other. This was set up in the context of Tessa Woodward’s ‘professional lifecycles of teachers’ concept, outlined in Table 1 below:

Years of teaching	Emerging themes
1-3 (novice)	Career entry – survival & discovery
4-6 (mid-career)	Stabilisation
7-18	Experimentation/activism      Reassessment/self-doubt
19-30 (late-career)	Serenity/relational distance      Conservatism
31-40	Disengagement

Table 1: Professional lifecycle of teachers (adapted from Woodward, T. (2010) *IATEFL opening plenary*. Harrogate. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq\\_sNzlxrk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq_sNzlxrk))

CE teachers were encouraged to see that the team as a whole was made up of individuals at different stages in their careers, and to recognise that *‘whatever we are going through at the moment – survival, serenity, or burnout, someone else probably is too!’* (Teacher B, 2011).

This allowed CE teachers to team up to prepare and deliver workshops that took into account all the *Professional Lifecycle* stages of their colleagues in order to:

1. support new teachers;
2. utilise the experience and skills of ‘veterans’;
3. provide opportunities for ‘activism’;
4. create a positive attitude towards experimentation.

## Year 2

In the following year, (2013), building on teacher feedback about the previous program, the emphasis shifted more towards developing a ‘positive community of practice’. This meant a focus on non-evaluative observations, conducted by peers and Senior Teachers as well as management, and teachers working together to deliver theoretical workshops. Exploring and sharing theory created an environment where the entire teaching staff began relating to each other as members of a ‘learning community’ – sharing ideas and engaging in discussions about teaching practice:

*‘I am seeing the benefits [of doing PD] on my students, and PD is a social experience; it really contributes to a pleasant working environment.’* (Teacher A, 2013)

Woodward’s idea of ‘pedagogical tinkering’ began to occur throughout CE, which led to the informal development of what was known as ‘swapsies,’ i.e. teachers getting together between lessons to share tips and tricks with each other. There was also an engagement in the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program by one member of staff, and five teachers presented papers at the English Australia Conference, which were based on workshops originally delivered as peer workshops. The teacher feedback at the end of 2013 clearly showed that ‘experimentation’ was seen as a positive force for improving the learning experience for students as well as for creating a collaborative working environment for staff.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## Year 3

In 2014, developmental observations were renamed ‘reflective observations’ and were linked directly to the teacher-led workshops. This was a deliberate strategy to connect theory and industry best practice to classroom practice and was also designed as a ‘mentoring’ opportunity for observers.

The observation was structured as a series of stages:

1. The area for observation was chosen and researched by the teacher;
2. A task to help both teacher and observer focus on specific aspects of the area of observation was then designed by the teacher and discussed with the observer;
3. Responses from students collected via observation were analysed by the teacher, and
4. A workshop, led by the teacher, reflected on the complete process, including the impact of the lesson on the learners.

The feedback from participants about this structure was positive: ‘*Reflective observations give us the scope to develop from where we are. The framework has created a supportive and inspiring atmosphere.*’ (Teacher C, 2014)

The complete CPD program has expanded in 2014 to include all the elements outlined in the diagram below. Teachers now volunteer to be involved in peer observations and attend workshops – which have become exceedingly popular. Post-CELTA observations, which follow a different format from the reflective observations, have also been introduced to support new teachers. In addition, two teachers participated in the 2014 English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program, and eight teachers, given support in the form of out-of-class time as well as a contribution to the costs, were supported to complete a DELTA or MA studies. Curtin English teachers now have a strong presence in the wider Australian ELT community due to the supportive community of practice that has developed: two teachers presented at the English Australia Conference in September 2014 and five teachers presented at the ‘PD West’ state PD event in Perth in November 2014.

‘*The PD program this year, which is grounded in our own context, allows us to collaborate and learn from each other and to draw on the wealth of our collective expertise. The opportunities this creates for sharing and peer learning and peer feedback are very powerful*’ (Teacher D, 2014).

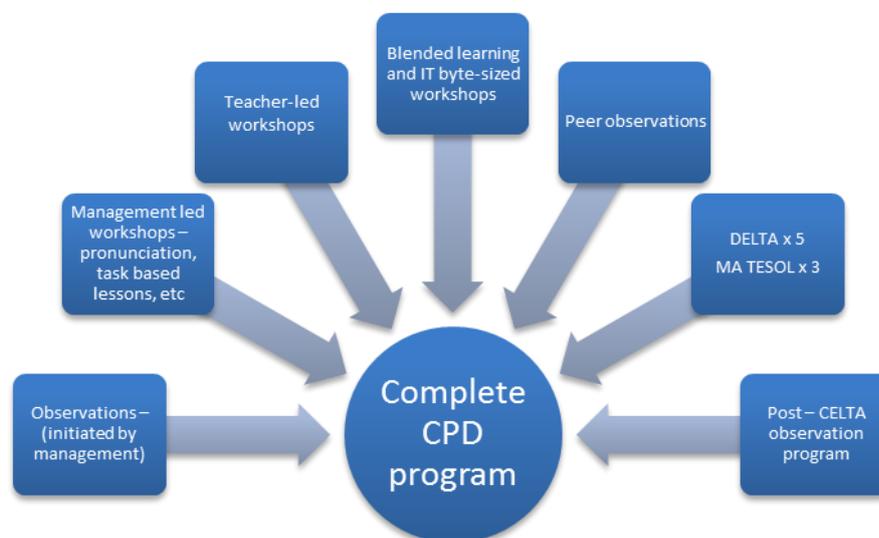


Diagram 1: Elements of Curtin English CPD program

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



## **Future plans**

In 2015, the specific focus will depend on the feedback that is yet to be collected on this year's program. However, the objective will remain the same – teachers learning from one another within the framework of a learning organisation that is committed to developing teachers.

## **Final comment**

In three years, Curtin English has developed into a community of teachers who are engaged with each other, and the wider ELT community, in developing and growing as teaching professionals. This has had an impact on the students:

*'You have a wonderful team [of teachers] who are very committed and willing to provide professional support. I couldn't think of a better word to express my gratitude, especially to my teachers who have been instrumental [in helping me learn] for the last 17 weeks. THANK YOU! I am proud of you all.'* (Student comment in a private email to the Program Coordinator, 2014).

The real success of the CPD program is the goodwill and collaboration that has developed within the teaching team and CE as a whole and the willingness of the participants to contribute to their own and each other's learning.

*If you'd like to know more about CE's approach to setting up a positive PD culture you can contact Sheree at [Sheree.Millen@curtin.edu.au](mailto:Sheree.Millen@curtin.edu.au).*

## Case study 2: Personal learning networks

*Nicki Blake, Director of Studies, Kaplan International Perth, WA*

The informal nature of personal learning networks (PLNs) means that it's possible not to realise that you are actually part of one until someone points it out to you. As with most teachers, I'd been involved in discussions about teaching grammar points over lunch, or given advice to colleagues about how to manage students in the classroom while we waited for the kettle to boil. I'd also met people at conferences and exchanged business cards, then later emailed them if I needed information and it seemed that they had more knowledge than I did. Therefore, when I first heard the term 'PLN' my initial thought was 'It would be useful to belong to a PLN' and my second thought was 'Wait a minute...I already have a PLN'.

Being part of a PLN means that you deliberately foster connections with people so that some kind of learning will happen through those connections. The learning occurs through the sharing of expertise, experience, and reflective practice.

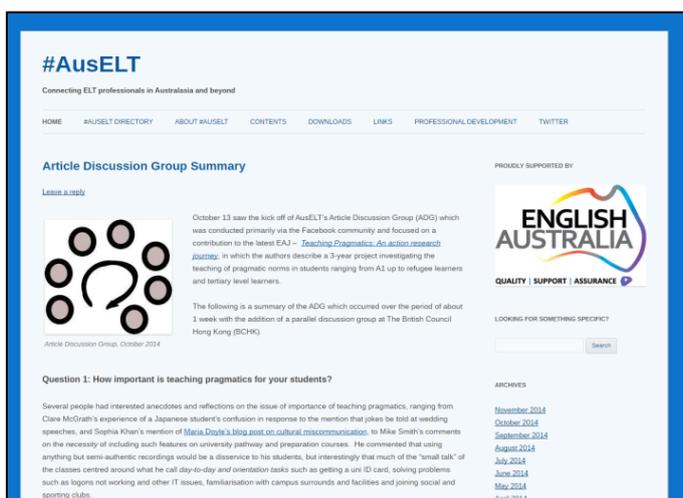
### Face-to-face vs Web 2.0

Developing personal connections and learning from each other face-to-face is a great way to increase your knowledge or to acquire new skills, but meeting in person (through workshops and conferences, for example) is not always possible. Some of us work in smaller or isolated communities and this is where Web 2.0 affordances really help with the growth of a PLN.

Personally, I started with LinkedIn. This made it possible for me to stay in touch with people whom I had met while on conference, which was beneficial because not only could I contact them whenever I needed information or assistance, but it also meant that I had access to their LinkedIn updates which often included links to industry-relevant news and developments. I could see what the experts deemed important and worthy of recommendation.

Twitter was the next step. I created a Twitter account to 'follow' leaders and experts in education, but this then led me to the #AusELT group where educators and education managers were discussing national and local ELICOS issues. Having participated in some of their monthly hashtag chats, I then joined the Facebook group which is another channel for the sharing of knowledge.

Beyond making it easier to connect with people, Web 2.0 means that there is a vast repository of accessible knowledge available. Edu-blogs and wikis, websites and other social media – all can be used to develop your learning. It is, however, through the people in your PLN that you can find out which of these sources are the most current, the most reliable, and the most relevant to your personal learning needs.



*The #AusELT blog at <http://auselt.com>*

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## The advantages of PLNs

1. The learning is self-determined – you decide what you need to know and then you decide the best way to gain that knowledge. If you are not sure of the best way to attain your learning goals, the people in your network are there to help you.
2. You learn in your own time and you connect into your network when you want to. (I have a long commute on public transport each day so this is often the time when I am interacting with my network online or reading industry news or articles.)
3. You learn where you want – you are not limited by your location. You could be on the bus. You could be at home.
4. The learning is current. You can be receiving information that is being shared as it happens, often in real time. Someone introduces a ground-breaking methodology at a conference in the USA? An audience member will ‘Tweet’ the information and you can access it through your phone as you sit on the bus on your way to work.
5. There’s an opportunity for mentoring. Sometimes, it’s you who is the expert, and it can be very satisfying to share your expertise with people who really want to learn from you.
6. The sense of interconnectedness is also very satisfying. You’re reaching beyond your own immediate space and time to others. There’s an awareness of truly global knowledge sharing and you will marvel at the idea of how far you, one person, can reach and influence.
7. You can use international time zones to your advantage. Sharing that happens via Twitter and webinars is often accessible to you when you are at leisure to engage with it.
8. And it’s fun! The informality of the PLN often means that the interchanges can be quite light-hearted. There isn’t the same level of seriousness as might be expected in a more formal situation such as a seminar or conference presentation. Some of the funniest (and therefore the most memorable) learning experiences I’ve had have been through my PLN where there are so many clever, like-minded people contributing ideas and suggestions in amusing ways.

## And the PLN negatives?

1. The time zones can also be a disadvantage. There’ll always be a few webinars or twitter chats that fall outside a reasonable time for you – either because they are happening in the middle of the night or while you are at work. I did once get up at 4am to participate in an online chat about conferences though...
2. You can develop an awareness of missing out on great events that are happening internationally. I’ve experienced incredible conference envy reading edu-blogs or Twitter feeds about presentations or workshops that I would have loved to have been part of.

Fear of missing out (known as FOMO) also can make you feel that you need to be online all the time. The truth is that you can’t be learning all the time and often you need to take a break or you will be overwhelmed by the volume of information that your PLN provides. ‘Taking a social media break’ may sound silly, but it is a very real and very necessary solution to information overload.

## Finding your place in your PLN.

In the beginning, it’s okay not to participate actively (known as ‘lurking’). In fact it is recommended, especially if you are joining online communities, because you can then get a feel for the tone of the community, understand how it operates, and become familiar with any rules or regulations, before you start to interact.

Some people are really only comfortable lurking, but to get the most out of your PLN, participation is key. Start by ‘liking’, ‘favouriting’ or ‘retweeting’ other peoples’ contributions. Next, try adding a

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

relevant link to a conversation, or answering a question, and eventually, begin to ask your own questions or introduce topics which you would like to discuss.

Some social media channels will suit you better than others. I love Twitter but its 140 character limit and fast-pace are not for everyone. Most people are familiar with and understand the workings of Facebook, so that can be a good place to start. If you're not so keen on engaging with people straight away, try following an edu-blogger, or even writing your own blog for people to read and comment on.

You might like to have a separate social media channel that you use professionally. I have two Twitter accounts –one is solely to connect with my PLN (the other is for friends, and that's the one that has pictures of what I had for dinner or fluffy animal memes). Some people create a Facebook profile specifically for connecting with colleagues and associates, but I prefer LinkedIn for this purpose because this is what it was designed for.

Always take the chance to turn an online connection into a face-to-face meeting. Social media should always be exactly that – social. The best professional meetings I've had have been the ones where I have met a person who has hitherto only been known to me through sharing online. It is worth noting at this point that it can seem that there's a lot going on online and, if you aren't very technical, you might feel that you are missing out, but face-to-face interaction (whether formal or informal) is still one of the best ways to acquire and share knowledge, so don't forget that your PLN includes people you know in person, it's not all about being online.

PLNs are for everyone – however experienced, whatever your role – because there is always something new to learn, something you could learn more about, some knowledge that you have that another person will find useful.

## **The benefits of my PLN for me**

- I've gone from being a lurker to a participant to an administrator/mentor/initiator/writer/community leader. I'm also more aware of learning situations now that I understand how PLNs function. Sure, I was learning before I had a PLN, but it was accidental and incidental, rather than intentional and focused.
- I've become more determined to be active in extending my PLN and in curating useful information for the people I interact with.
- I'm more confident about the depth of my knowledge and therefore more ready to share.
- I'm also more confident to ask questions, knowing that I can get answers from experts.

And when someone asks me a question, I don't panic. I may not have all the answers, but, through my PLN, there's a very good chance that I know the people who do.

*Please contact Nicki at [Nicki.Blake@kaplan.com](mailto:Nicki.Blake@kaplan.com) if you would like to know more about how to get yourself or your staff started with a PLN.*

## Case study 3: Teacher observation

*Stephen Heap, TESOL Director of Studies, Institute of Continuing and TESOL Education the University of Queensland (ICTE-UQ)*

### Context

ICTE-UQ is an institute within the University of Queensland, located on its St Lucia campus in Brisbane in modern, purpose-built premises. The Institute's TESOL operations began in 1981 as Queensland's first federal government accredited ELICOS course for the provision of English language training to a small handful of international students. Over the past 33 years ICTE-UQ has grown and diversified to the point where it has a student population numbering between 400-850, from 30-40 different countries, with the largest cohorts currently from East Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Courses offered include General English, English for Academic Purposes, Business English, a Bridging English program for entry to UQ degree programs, concurrent support programs for UQ students, and a range of customised programs in teacher education, as well as teacher training programs. ICTE-UQ is an IELTS test centre and also offers the TKT and OET tests.

For the past 20 years the Institute has had two Directors of Studies responsible for ensuring quality in such areas as teacher recruitment, professional development, performance management and curriculum development. Each Director of Studies is responsible for particular course offerings and is supported by two Assistant Directors of Studies. Where a course level has two or more classes a convenor (who is remunerated) is appointed to act as a reference point for other teachers, assisting in the maintenance of quality in teaching programs and resources. Roughly 50% of ELICOS teachers at ICTE-UQ are on continuing appointments with 50% employed on a casual basis with varied teaching hours. Approximately one third of the teachers have been at ICTE-UQ for ten years or more and form the core of a stable, professional and collegial staff, the majority of whom have a relevant Master's degree or are working towards a higher degree in TESOL or applied linguistics. A number of teachers are accredited teacher trainers (for the CELTA and SIT TESOL Cert.) and others regularly teach methodology classes to groups of overseas teachers in Brisbane or on secondment overseas.

### Teacher observation

#### *Initial observations*

All new teachers, whether employed on a continuing or casual basis, are observed for one lesson by a DOS or ADOS during the first 5 weeks of their appointment. The purpose of this initial observation, together with a pre- and post-observation discussion, is for the observer to gain an understanding of the teacher's ability to effect learning and to be able to praise aspects of their teaching or provide suggestions to further enhance such a lesson in future. The lesson type and timing are negotiated and there is a pre-observation discussion in which lesson objectives, content and staging are discussed. The teacher may provide a full lesson plan, but a statement of lesson aims and language/skill objectives expressed in terms of expected behavioural outcomes is normally sufficient. After the observation there is a follow-up discussion and a written report is forwarded to the teacher and kept on file.

For teachers in a continuing appointment there is a probationary period of six months. Assuming the teacher has successfully met the probationary requirements there would normally be no further observation until such time as there was felt to be a need, either by the teacher him/herself or by the DOS (see below for reasons why this may be necessary). It is very rare for a teacher to request an observation from a supervisor, but occasionally a teacher may arrange a peer observation or request the DOS to set one up. Some years ago we tried to put in place a peer observation program, but even when the impetus came from two teachers it never really worked. This was due largely to the

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

logistics involved and teacher availability. Apart from the probationary period, the observation policy is the same for casual teachers.

## *Additional observations*

Additional teacher observations have changed from being an integral part of performance management contributing to the annual performance review and teacher assessment (at UQ this is termed 'Recognition and Development') to being an opportunity for professional growth through reflection on teaching practice. The decoupling of lesson observations from the performance review has put the emphasis on reflective practice whereby the observer's aim is to facilitate the teacher's reflection. The observer collects data from the lesson in order to guide the teacher as he/she considers their own teaching performance.

## **Rationale for limited observation**

Our changed approach happened about five years ago after consultation with UQ's HR department, when we realised two things. Firstly, it seemed unfair to judge a teacher's classroom performance on the basis of an annual one hour observation, a lesson which may be significantly different from the other 420 or so lessons taught during the year. This is not to say that an observer cannot gain insights into the teacher's knowledge and skills, but the fact remains that what is being observed is affected by the observer's presence in the classroom.

Another reason to change our approach to observation was that we felt it was appropriate to demonstrate trust in a professional teacher who has been appointed on the basis of their appropriate qualifications, relevant experience, referee reports and interview performance, particularly if they get good feedback from students and are clearly and successfully engaged in professional growth and development through other means.

A very practical reason for limiting observation to where the need is, is the time required for the process of initial discussion; observing; preparation of a report; and feedback and discussion. This can be unfeasible for supervisors with many demands on their time and with a large group of staff to oversee. For 4-5 years before we changed our approach, when observations were a formal component of staff appraisals, we carried out observations in alternate years, i.e. half the staff one year, and the other half the next. We are now looking at a supervisor-observed lesson every 5 years, as part of a range of professional development activities.

## **When formal observation is necessary**

From time to time situations do arise when a supervisor needs to observe a lesson, taking a more directive approach to help a teacher improve their practice. These may be because of negative student feedback (a fairly rare occurrence at ICTE-UQ!), whether in person or through our quarterly student surveys. The survey in its current form focuses on overall satisfaction, and asks students about their experience of the various services provided and of the course content and resources. It does not explicitly ask for comments on teachers although students can and often do make comments on teachers they have greatly appreciated and sometimes on those they have felt could have performed better. Where negative comments are repeated by more than a single student, a conversation between teacher and DOS is held and, depending on the outcome of that conversation, a lesson observation may be arranged. But the goal of such an observation, once again, is to encourage reflective practice in order to see the teacher's skills develop. From the students' point of view the observation demonstrates the seriousness given to their opinions and perceptions.

We are currently in the process of developing a more systematic approach to student evaluation of teacher performance, in line with the requirements for all UQ teaching/lecturing staff. We believe that students themselves are able to provide useful insights into a teacher's ability to effect learning.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## The appropriate observer

Where the purpose of the observation is solely for professional development and has been requested by the teacher, perhaps because something new is being tried or a new course is being taught, the observer may be the supervisor OR an experienced peer. If the supervisor is observing, he/she has to make the cultural shift of relinquishing the role of expert and judge of a teacher's performance to that of an experienced colleague whose role is to share ideas, encourage good performance and facilitate reflection. But because the supervisor-as-observer role is one in which the observation may still be seen to be a judgement on performance, the peer option is one we promote amongst staff despite the logistical complexity of relieving a teacher so they can carry out an observation. The DOSes and ADOSes, however, can be called on to do this, but again it is a rare occurrence.

Where the purpose is to respond to negative student feedback, a DOS or ADOS will conduct the observation. The feedback for this may need to be directive, but ideally it will focus on facilitating reflection in order to effect a positive change in teaching practice, language knowledge, manner or any other practical area that has given cause for concern. Prior to the observation, the observer will talk with the teacher about specific areas that have received negative feedback and discuss possible strategies to address the area(s) of concern. The observer will ask that these areas be considered in the observed lesson and beyond.

## Other kinds of observation

Teachers at ICTE-UQ are frequently observed by trainees on our various teacher training programs and by visiting staff from our partner organisations overseas. This kind of observation is part of the teachers' position descriptions and over the years has become an accepted aspect of a teacher's professional responsibility. Opportunities are also created from time to time for teachers to team-teach by combining two classes and sharing the teaching. If a teacher is taking on teaching duties in an area new to them, perhaps on an ESP or methodology course, they may take on the role of assistant teacher/observer for one or more lessons taught by a teacher experienced in that type of teaching. We have found such approaches to be professionally very beneficial for both the observer and the observed.

Finally, we believe that it is necessary, as managers, for us to reflect regularly on what is provided for a teacher's professional development, how performance is monitored most effectively and the part observation plays in this. Importantly, we must be prepared to change the way we do these things if that is what is needed to maintain best practice in quality teaching and learning.

*For more information about this approach to teacher observation, please contact Steve at [s.heap@icte.uq.edu.au](mailto:s.heap@icte.uq.edu.au).*

## Case study 4: Putting input into practice

Lynda Beagle, Deputy Director, RMIT English Worldwide, VIC

‘To know and not to do is not yet to know.’ (Buddhist proverb)

Ongoing professional development is essential in the English language teaching profession, especially given the fact that many teachers start their careers after completing a short pre-service course such as CELTA, which provides the foundations of good practice that then need to be consolidated. This case study describes a model for professional development which follows a cycle of input, planning time, trialling of ideas in a classroom context and group reflection.

The model was inspired by the notion that if PD workshops are an investment of time, money and energy, there has to be a response to, and hopefully an uptake of, ideas presented in order to get value from the investment. I felt that many people attend presentations and workshops but do not try out new ideas because of insufficient time and general busy-ness, and therefore continue to do what is familiar and automatic, losing valuable opportunities for professional change and growth.

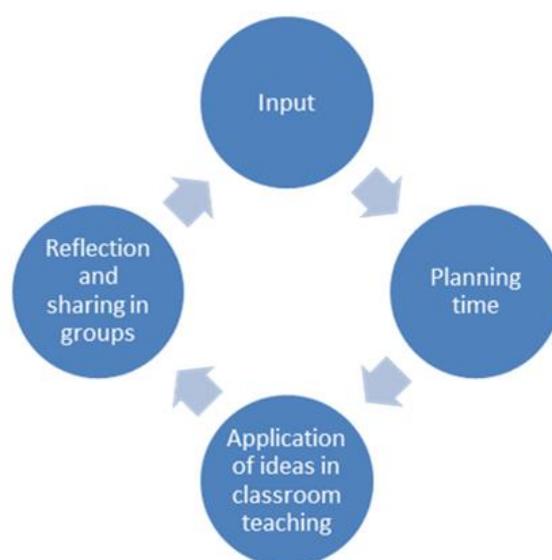
### Context

This model was used at a large language centre which employs teachers with a variety of experience and a mix of salaried and casual teachers. Our program is structured so we have approximately three hours available for professional development every five weeks, at the end of each teaching module. Salaried teachers must attend; casual teachers are invited to attend these sessions and are paid non-teaching rates if they wish to do so, and about 50% of casual teachers attend on a regular basis.

### The professional development cycle

The model was developed when the centre was doing a number of workshops related to the use of technology in the classroom, such as interactive whiteboards, Google Docs and our in-house e-course. The teachers planning the workshops suggested that having only input that presented new technologies was insufficient and that we needed to follow the session with dedicated time for teachers to consolidate their learning with hands-on practice and the opportunity to think about how to incorporate the ideas into their classroom teaching. We implemented this idea and it seemed to be successful in building confidence and encouraging use of the new technologies.

We extended this idea to other sessions, such as a presentation on awareness of connected speech and its impact on developing listening skills. After the workshop, teachers looked at the level they were teaching in the following module and considered how they could apply the ideas and even drafted some lesson plans. They then aimed to apply the ideas / awareness in the next five weeks of classroom teaching.



*The RMIT PD cycle*

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## The professional development cycle explained

### 1. *Input*

The PD cycle began with input in the form of presentations or workshops, most of which were delivered by salaried teachers at our centre. Typically, suggestions for what was to be covered came from teachers and included areas that:

- they identified as a need;
- they had a particular interest in;
- related very specifically to the centre's curriculum;
- were inspired by points noted in classroom observations, ie reminders of best practice in classroom teaching.

### 2. *Consolidation and planning*

Time was scheduled, in our case immediately after the input session, for teachers to think about the ideas or activities that had been presented and to consider how to integrate them into their own lessons during the next five week teaching module. In the case of new technologies, such as interactive whiteboards, the teachers were able to spend the time practising using these, and getting support from their colleagues if necessary. Teachers could choose to work individually or in groups, as they wished. This was particularly useful when working with new technologies as it built confidence and allowed teachers with all levels of ability to practise and experiment.

### 3. *Application of ideas to classroom teaching*

The explicit expectation was that teachers would focus on the aspect covered in the input session for the next five weeks, and aim to use the particular technology or ideas. As most of the teachers were doing this, there was the potential to collaborate, problem solve together and share ideas during the module.

### 4. *Reflection*

Reflection in the ELT context has been promoted by academics such as Jack Richards (1994) and Tom Farrell (2008), who suggest that reflection on teaching experiences is a useful activity to facilitate development in classroom teaching.

In our centre, I thought the scheduling of time for teachers to reflect in groups would encourage people to focus on the application of the ideas they had been exposed to. Accordingly, I allocated thirty minutes at the beginning of our PD time, with teachers in small groups sharing their experiences, their successes and their challenges in implementing the ideas/ skills covered in the input session 5 weeks previously. If they had not implemented anything, we talked about the possible reason for this. Initially I was going to restrict this to people who had been at the previous session but I found that even if people had not been present, there was something to be gained in their participation. For example, those who had been present might explain what had been covered and how they had applied the ideas. Those who had not been present were able to ask useful questions or to talk about their own experiences vis-a-vis the ideas in question.

The reflection slot appeared very successful in terms of the exchange of ideas and the inspiration of others. An additional gain was the relationship building aspect and the sense of collaboration that was engendered among the staff.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

## Response from staff

Our centre has provided regular professional development sessions at the end of each module for a number of years. The introduction of the planning and reflection slots was a new model so mid-year, I conducted a survey of the teachers to find out how they viewed the structure of the PD program. I was only able to survey the salaried teachers and had 20 responses. Without exception, everyone liked this model. They found it useful to have time after the session to think and plan. They found the reflection useful, particularly for the sharing of ideas. The main comment was that they would like more time for this.



*Teachers at RMIT reflect on their experiences.*

## Adapting the model

Our centre has a schedule that enables us to structure PD in the way I have described, i.e. 3 hours available every five weeks for professional development. I am aware that this is not a possibility for many centres, but the strength of the model I am proposing is that it is very simple and can be adapted to suit a variety of contexts, accommodating different needs and available time.

It is important to follow the cycle in the order described. However, the time provided for the different slots and the intervals between each are not fixed. Obviously, not too much time should lapse between the input and the planning slots, but it could be the next day or the next week. It is essential that teachers do commit to implementing the focus of the workshop/input session and, at some clearly identified point, there is the opportunity for group reflection and discussion. Ideally, this is face-to-face but it could be via a blog or online group.

Input sessions do not have to be delivered live by an experienced teacher. Various media can be used to provide new ideas, for example, YouTube videos of experts in the field or articles from professional journals.

## Next steps

This model of professional development, based on a cycle of input, planning, implementation and reflection, is one means by which teachers can facilitate the application of new ideas in their classroom teaching. In 2015 we will continue to use this model at our centre but we are planning to extend the model to include peer observations during the modules. The rationale is that teachers can observe each other implementing the new ideas, which will provide further opportunity for teacher reflection and discussion.

## References

Farrell, Thomas S. C. (2008). *Reflective practice in the professional development of teachers of adult English language learners*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from <http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/reflectivepractice.html>

Richards, J.C., and Lockhard, C. (1994). *Reflective Teaching*. New York: CUP.

Stansbury, Meris. (2012). *Seven standards for effective professional development*. Retrieved from <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/02/18/seven-standards-for-effective-professional-development/>

Please contact Lynda at [lynda.beagle@rmit.edu.au](mailto:lynda.beagle@rmit.edu.au) if you would like to know more about this approach.

## Case study 5: Organising 'PD Days'

*Nick Kirk, Education Manager, Ability English Sydney, NSW*

Ability English is part of the MEGT Group. It is a medium-to-large ELICOS institution with a student cohort of close to a thousand in the summer months across our Melbourne and Sydney Campuses. Ability runs a relatively wide range of courses within eight distinct programs, and also offers evening classes. The school has a friendly and professional dynamic personified by its teachers, and retention of the staff of 20-25 teachers is high. The school provides a number of initiatives which contribute to staff professional development, the most notable of which are our twice-yearly PD Days, attended by all teaching staff. The school is closed to students on these days, which have been running at Ability for six years now.

### The genesis of the idea

Two features common to our industry were largely responsible for the birth of the Ability PD Day. Firstly, the casualization of the workforce in ESL teaching means that unfortunately many staff regard teaching as a 'job' rather than a 'career'. While some are quite happy with this arrangement, others feel restricted by it. Secondly, our school has a very flat hierarchical structure with a large number of teachers managed by a small number of senior staff. This limits traditional opportunities for career advancement via the method of 'climbing the ladder' which you would find in similarly-sized companies in other industries (not that all teachers aspire to be managers, of course!).

Work on establishing a professional development program at Ability was set in motion by my predecessors Ruby Biscuit and Charlotte Petitprez, so much of the credit for what now exists must go to them. Ruby and Charlotte were inspired by the skill and dedication of the teaching staff around them, and determined that avenues of development should be provided so that staff had a sense of career progression. This investment in staff coupled with an effort to provide a sense of job security to engaged teachers has contributed significantly to excellent staff retention and generally high staff morale, as well as being an attractive selling point in attracting new staff.

### The initial set-up

**1. Structure:** The first bridge that needed to be crossed was how best to present or share information and new ideas at Ability. Staff have access to a wide range of opportunities to develop their skills eg peer observations, projects and conferences, but we wanted to build a positive collaborative culture in the school and also keep teachers up-to-date with the school's business operations and introduce new ways of teaching. Attempting to tag workshops onto the end of a teaching day was ruled out as staff would see it as 'extra' work and engagement would be limited. Eventually, it was decided by managers (and endorsed by staff) that a whole day every six months should be devoted to presentations and workshops for teachers, with staff paid a regular wage for attending the 9-5 event. Dates for these events were set away from public holidays to limit impact on students with short enrolments.

**Outcomes:** Staff obviously appreciate being paid to focus exclusively on new information and ideas for their professional growth, and the change in routine tends to bring some enthusiasm to the event. It also provides staff with a chance to connect with each other outside the normally fast-paced staffroom environment.

**2. Student concerns:** The next question was how to handle student concerns about losing a study day. The first step was to include the dates of any PD Days in student Letters of Offer so that students (and agents) would be aware that tuition would not be provided on that day and sign an agreement indicating this. All calendars and weekly bulletins had the date clearly flagged, and discussions were held in teachers' meetings on addressing student concerns raised in class.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

*Outcomes:* The vast majority of students do not raise an issue with the additional day(s) off. Teachers are normally able to minimise any stress by pointing out that teacher development is an essential part of keeping standards high at the school. In the very rare instances where students have remained unsatisfied they have been invited to discuss their grievance with the Director, who ensures that their concerns are answered.

3. *Content:* Teachers are surveyed at staff meetings on what they would most like to see, and their feedback is built into the schedule. Our initial PD Days featured a mix of sessions by managers, teachers and external guest speakers. Staff members who had attended conferences in the preceding months were asked to share some of what they had witnessed.

*Outcomes:* External speakers were initially popular, but finding a good one at an affordable rate proved to be a challenge. Arranging a 'PD exchange' with other schools, eg arranged between English Australia member colleges, is a cheaper and often more effective alternative and will generally be more relevant to teachers. The most popular sessions with teachers are always the practical ones. While they will endure a certain amount of theory over the course of a day of input, what teachers most want is something they can take back to their classroom and use immediately.

4. *Evaluation process:* Staff were asked to fill out a brief survey on each session they attended. This feedback was reviewed by the Director and provided to presenters for their own information. Also, discussions were raised in later staff meetings as to whether any teachers had implemented ideas they had observed at PD Day and what the outcomes were.

*Outcomes:* Staff appeared comfortable being honest in these surveys and the information gathered allowed us to tweak arrangements for subsequent PD days. Teachers in the meeting expressed their happiness at being able to add more 'tricks' and skills to their repertoire. Revisiting the subject at a later staff meeting was important as it quickly validated the importance of PD day and increased teacher buy-in.

## **The timeframe**

Although I am always on the look-out for potential presentations and workshops for an upcoming PD Day, focus really turns to the event itself about a month to six weeks in advance. This timeframe allows me to put together the day by devoting a couple of hours a week to it so it does not interfere too much with my normal duties. Much of the work is done by individual staff who agree to deliver a session, so I would not say it is a huge burden on the Academic Manager. There is no committee as such for the event at Ability but I consult with teaching staff, my assistant and my manager to identify session ideas and ensure the plan is on target to meet our needs. The final couple of weeks may require additional preparation time depending on what I have decided to contribute myself and I also need to ensure that staff who have agreed to do sessions are on schedule with their preparation.

## **Some pointers**

*Keep your eyes and ears open!*

Filling out a PD Day with engaging and productive sessions twice a year is not an easy task, but it is achievable. The key is to keep a working list of possible ideas as they appear to you throughout the year so that when the time comes to finalise the agenda for the day you have a number of options that can be developed into rewarding sessions. Surveying staff well in advance will assist this.

*Eliciting teacher contributions*

Generally speaking, teachers in a positive staffroom culture love to share their knowledge. And while some may have confidence issues in presenting to their peers, it's amazing how far a bit of praise and encouragement will go. We conduct class surveys every six weeks, and if a teacher gets consistently

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

excellent feedback from students I will normally call them into the office to thank them and then suggest they might share what is working so well for them at our next PD Day. In my experience, if you ask for volunteers at a staff meeting then few (if any) will come forward, but if you single people out for their talents and ask them to share, it's very rare they will refuse to contribute. Also, any staff enrolled in formal studies may well have something useful to share with their peers. And finally, presenting at a PD day is great for teachers to add to their CV.

## *Look close to home*

Teachers generally work very much in isolation, so there may be a wealth of knowledge and some fantastic creativity happening in every room of your institution each day that you and other teachers may not be aware of. Holding a PD Day can simply be a chance for teachers to share that with each other. Having outsiders bring their knowledge is a great thing, but don't overlook the wealth of talent under your nose. And it's not as if teachers need to put together an hour's worth of material; the most popular session at our last PD Day was one in which a number of teachers each presented a single useful idea/resource in just 5 minutes.



*An Ability teacher contributes to the PD Day*

## *Have 'optional' sessions*

At Ability we normally manage to run an hour or two of concurrent (or 'optional') sessions for each PD Day. By running these sessions, it is possible to provide your staff with a sense of choice and control over what they can access. These need not be available throughout the day (for one thing, organising that would increase the workload tremendously!), but I would strongly recommend that you try to include a least an hour where teachers can choose between two or three sessions. This will increase their excitement and investment in the day and reduce any sense of being 'spoon-fed', which could result in some resistance.

## *End the day with something more 'physical'*

No, not a run around the block. But by 3pm at our PD Days, the attention span of our teaching staff begins flag and it's better to engage in a physical activity rather than trying to squeeze two more hours of the latest industry updates or teaching theories into their heads. This activity could be as simple as tidying the staffroom/classrooms, reorganising the course folders, bookshelves etc., or taking a trip to an ESL bookshop to get a handle on the latest resources. While not conventional PD, these activities are great for group bonding and do help build pride in their school together with a sense of professionalism.

## **A final thought**

Ability does have some advantages which help facilitate successful PD Days and these might not apply to all contexts. The size of the school and scope of the courses offered means there is always a lot for teachers to share. There is no traditional GE/Academic divide at the school as we have a range of courses occupying the middle ground which teachers transition through, so most of what teachers share is relevant to their peers. Having multiple campuses further expands our options in terms of workshop offerings, and the generally progressive attitude of staff (perhaps in part a consequence rather than simply a cause of successful PD Days) is essential in ensuring engagement in the day itself.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



Having said all that, I am hopeful that much of the information I have provided here will be relevant to your school or can at least be adapted to suit your context and your needs. While there is work involved in setting up and running PD Days, the payoff for staff and the institution itself is undeniably worth the effort.

*If you would like more information about how to set up and run a PD Day at your college, please contact Nick at [nick.kirk@ability.com.au](mailto:nick.kirk@ability.com.au).*

## Appendix A: Reflective practice

*Phil Chappell, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University*

The concept of reflective thinking has been influenced quite appreciably by John Dewey (e.g. Dewey, 1933), who suggests that there are two essential sub-processes at work when one is thinking reflectively: 1) a feeling of doubt or lack of understanding about some aspect of activity in which you are involved, followed by 2) a deliberate act to investigate in order to relieve the doubt and achieve greater understanding of that aspect of the activity. It is important to think of reflective practice as a process where these two sub-processes come out of one's daily activity over time. After one or two lessons, a teacher may be aware of a feeling of doubt or lack of understanding about their ability to (for example) effectively teach question intonation in spoken conversation. There is then a process of 1) deliberately setting out to alleviate that doubt by questioning one's current beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and knowledge about the topic and learning more about how intonation in questions conveys different meanings, and then 2) planning to implement something new with her or his students. This process of critical reflection may be carried out over one or two days, or (more likely) over a longer period, depending on the time it takes to clearly identify the issue, to consider one's existing attitudes, beliefs and knowledge, and then to investigate options to improve one's understanding. Some procedures for carrying this out are listed below.

Reflective practice in language teaching is a thinking and problem-solving process that can be learned through supportive guiding and questioning from more experienced 'others' and it is a good idea to develop the practice of reflective teaching collaboratively, with a peer, a more experienced teacher, an academic manager or some other qualified person (see list of procedures below).

Farrell (2007, p. 10) suggests that reflective language teaching involves teachers asking themselves the following questions.

1. What am I doing in the classroom (method)?
2. Why am I doing this (reason)?
3. What is the result (result)?
4. Will I change anything based on the information gathered from answering the first two questions (justification)?

This is certainly an excellent list for teachers to have pinned in a prominent place as a reminder to step away from the everyday technicalities of teaching and reflect on deeper concerns.

In terms of procedures for carrying out reflective practice, there is a range of options open for the teacher. Once again, Farrell (2007) suggests that teachers can carry out the following:

- conduct an action research project to bring about change;
- write accounts of experiences in a teaching journal;
- join other teachers in 'teacher development groups' to discuss issues;
- engage in classroom observations (individual, pairs, groups);
- form critical friendships in team teaching or peer coaching arrangements;
- use concept- or mind-mapping to focus reflection.

Useful resources for reflective teaching in second language teaching follow.

### **Books**

Farrell, T. S. C. (2013). *Reflective teaching*. Virginia, VA: TESOL International Association

Farrell, T. S. C. (2007). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. New York: Continuum

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2011). *Practice teaching: A reflective approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press

## **Websites**

Reflective Inquiry <http://www.reflectiveinquiry.ca>

Reflective teaching: exploring our own classroom practice

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/reflective-teaching-exploring-our-own-classroom-practice>

## Appendix B: Maximising conference attendance

The annual English Australia Conference is the only national conference aimed solely at ELICOS providers and is one of the key ways that English Australia is able to facilitate higher levels of professional practice in ELICOS.

Although the conference represents excellent value for money in terms of professional development and opportunities to meet and talk to others in the field, sending one or more staff members can be a significant investment for a business. However that investment need not be in just those people who attend the conference. There are many and varied ways in which the skills, knowledge, insights and contacts gained over the 2-3 days of the English Australia Conference can be shared in short- and long-term ways with others at the college.

These suggestions were compiled in 2011 from contributions from staff from English Australia member colleges and supplemented by desk research. Many of these suggestions can be applied to other ELICOS-related conferences.

### **Before the conference**

Good preparation and planning before the conference starts can help make the most of the opportunities.

#### *Managers:*

- Allocate sufficient money in your annual PD budget for conference registration, travel and accommodation for a number of staff commensurate with operations/need.
- 'Coach' staff who are going for the first time to help them make the most of their experience.
- Make sure staff know what their entitlements are. Outline to staff what they can do for meals etc and what the expectations are as to expenses and if they need to keep receipts for reimbursement.

#### *Delegates:*

- If more than one person from your college is going, look at the program as a group and try to send a representative to the sessions relevant to your college and then information-share afterwards.
- Make sure you have enough business cards to give to people you meet. If you don't have any of your own, ask your manager for generic cards you can write your name on.
- Even if they can't make it to a pre-conference event or the English Australia annual general meeting, staff from English Australia member colleges should consider arriving in time for the Welcome event the night before the conference starts – it's a great opportunity to meet and talk to board members and the English Australia secretariat staff as well as staff from other member colleges around Australia.

### **During the conference**

- Make notes – not only content from presentations, but also observations, anything that sparks your interest, any ideas you come up with.
- Go to sessions outside your area of operation/expertise eg if you're in marketing, go to a teachers' workshop or if you're a teacher, go to a session on college management. You'll learn about other aspects of ELICOS that may help you in your current or future position.
- Introduce yourself to speakers. If you are also interested in their topic share your interest, challenge them on issues you disagree with, or just thank them for their presentation – a lot of time and effort goes into preparing a paper or workshop and it's great when this is recognised by the people it was prepared for.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS

- A lot of good stuff happens outside the programmed sessions. Make the most of the refreshment breaks and the social events and get talking to people. Go to as many social events as you can, especially if you don't know anyone. Make a comment to the person sitting next to you in a session – they are likely to share an interest in the topic. Talk to people in the lunch queues. You will find out a) you're not the only one with the issues and challenges you face, b) there are some good solutions to the issues and challenges you face, c) you're doing things better than you thought, d) there are loads of useful resources, approaches, strategies etc around. As you go to more conferences you'll get to know more people – and they'll get to know you!
- Go to the English Australia booth and meet/talk to the Membership & Communications Officer, the Profiling & Promotions Officer, the Professional Support & Development Officer and/or the Executive Director. Let them know how things are going with you and if there's any way English Australia can support your work or your college (member college staff only!). Pick up some information flyers.
- Go around the exhibitors' stands. They're all in the business of providing services or products designed to support ELICOS. Try things out, ask questions. Many have interesting giveaways or draws with good prizes – make sure you put in your business card if this is the case.
- Don't think you have to attend a session in EVERY timeslot. It might be more useful for you to take time out to talk to exhibitors, meet with other delegates, or just take a walk outside to reflect on everything you've seen or heard.
- Complete the evaluation form, being honest with your praise or your criticism and give us any great ideas you have. The conference organisers take careful note of this feedback and use it to make decisions for future events.

## After the conference

Professional development opportunities:

- Take time to reflect on what you got out of the conference, and how you can apply what you learnt to your current role. Draft a plan for implementing any ideas, and talk to your manager about this as soon as possible.
- Outline main points of a contentious presentation as the basis for staff discussion on a relevant issue.
- Do some more research on relevant conference topics and present this to staff.
- Allocate key topics to staff to research and present at a meeting where you can discuss the findings. Brainstorm further solutions to problems/challenges identified during the conference.
- There are often presentations on surveys carried out in ELICOS colleges. Carry these out with your own staff or students and compare outcomes.
- Use the conference PowerPoint PDFs from the English Australia website as the basis for PD sessions (although this may not always be feasible and will depend on the level of expertise of the presenter).
- Contact an interesting presenter and arrange for them to come to your college or share expenses with other English Australia member colleges to do this locally (the English Australia Secretariat may be able to help you with contact details).

Prepare a summary of the notes you made during the conference to share and discuss with others at your organisation.

Go through all the business cards you got and add them to your 'Contacts' list along with a note of why the people worth keeping in touch with. Send anyone useful an email – and make sure you follow up if you promised to do something.

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



## What can you take away?

- An impression of the general 'state of the union'. What are speakers saying about the present and future of ELICOS and international education? What's 'hot'? What do you need to be thinking about for the future? What do you need to include in next year's budget/let your manager know about/add to your PD plan?
- The key messages of the plenary speakers. What kinds of questions were they asked?
- The ELICOS 'big picture'. What's the latest from government departments eg Department of Education, DIPB (immigration) and regulatory bodies?
- Information about government organisations, peak bodies and associations eg NEAS, Austrade. What can they do for you/your college?
- Information about the latest products, resources and services to support ELICOS delivery.
- If you are new to ELICOS or don't have much information about the context of ELICOS there will be topics or issues you didn't understand that you can ask your colleagues or your manager to explain.
- And don't forget that PDFs of all presentations at the English Australia Conference are made available on the English Australia website, [www.englishaustralia.com.au](http://www.englishaustralia.com.au), following the conference, if the presenter has given permission.

## What CAN'T you take away?

- Speaker expertise! This is a national conference and you can expect high level presentations from people with considerable knowledge, skills and/or experience. It will be almost impossible to re-create a presentation you attended, although you will be able to outline the main points and what you got out of it and prepare some talking points for your colleagues to discuss.
- The stimulation, professional development and professional exchange of actually being there...

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



## Acknowledgements

This Guide comprises practices submitted by staff at English Australia member institutions, some of which chose to remain anonymous. English Australia would like to recognise the contribution of the following member colleges who participated in the online survey, and thank staff from colleges marked with \*, who offered their time and expertise in discussion with the project writer.

ABILITY English\*, NSW

ABILITY English\*, VIC

Academia International, VIC

Academy of English, NSW

Australian Institute of Professional Education, NSW

Australian Pacific College, NSW

Bradford College\*, SA

Curtin English\*, WA

Education and Training International\*, WA

Embassy English, QLD

English Language Centre, University of New England Armidale\*, NSW

ILSC Brisbane, QLD

Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education, The University of Queensland\*, QLD

Kaplan International English\*, WA

Kingsway Institute\*, NSW

Macquarie University English Language Centre\*, NSW

Monash University English Language Centre\*, VIC

Murdoch Institute of Technology\*, WA

Navitas English, NSW

Performance English\*, NSW

QUT International College, QLD

RMIT English Worldwide\*, VIC

SELC Australia\*, NSW

Southbank Institute of Technology Language Centre\*, QLD

Swinburne University English Language Centre\*, VIC

The University of Sydney Centre for English Teaching\*, NSW

Think Education, NSW

University of Tasmania English Language Centre\*, TAS

UOW College, NSW

UWA Centre for English Language Teaching\*, WA

# Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS



## **Contact English Australia**

For more information please contact the English Australia Secretariat [easec@englishaustralia.com.au](mailto:easec@englishaustralia.com.au)

Phone: (02) 9264 4700

English Australia  
Level 3, 162 Goulburn Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

PO Box 1437  
Darlinghurst NSW 1300 AUSTRALIA