

10 professional development ideas for teachers

Education experts tell us their top tips for ensuring teachers get the most out of professional development sessions

Rachael Stevens, English teacher

Root training in real lessons: In a small straw poll I conducted in the last few weeks, the vast majority of teachers said that the most helpful sessions they've had were linked to hands-on classroom practice, peer-led observations in their own school or getting out into other establishments. At my school, we've been trying to follow this path for the last couple of years, by giving teachers the opportunity to attend workshops followed by real lessons to see if we can practice what we preach.

Track the success of sessions: It takes commitment, but it's important to track the long-term effects of continuing [professional development](#) (CPD) models in order to assess their worth. For so many years in [schools](#) professional development has been top-led and driven by initiatives that have fallen by the wayside in a short amount of time. The movement towards evidence-based practice in education can only be good. Linking professional development to practice is crucial, it needs to have direct effect on students' and teachers' development. It's a big ask for CPD co-ordinators and school leaders, but it should be a priority.

Be on Twitter: The number of articles, research papers, blogs and websites Twitter has put me in touch with in the last 20 months has been far more than I'd have ever come across in my day-to-day professional life. It's encouraged me to blog, which has helped me to reflect on my practice and clarify how I think about many aspects of [teaching](#). I love the fact it's so easy to converse with teachers from all areas and at all stages of their career. I'm increasingly finding that online networking is leading to mutual face-to-face CPD. I will have had six Twitter-initiated professional development experiences by the end of this year. It's been fascinating and empowering.

Jenny Lewis, on the senior leadership team at a primary school

Link training to the school's aims and personal beliefs: Effective and inspiring sessions must be part of the whole school's development so teachers can see the long term impact. Training should always link back to the school's aims and values, so people understand the why behind the what.

At my school, we try to constantly connect back to our own personal beliefs about what great teaching and learning should look like – sessions are about fundamental values as well as day to day practice. Many of our staff are engaged in their own research and professional reading is part and parcel of the way we keep ourselves informed. I feel it is an empowering way of moving forward.

Follow-up on how people found sessions: I know everyone hates filling in questionnaires, but they are really useful, including anonymous ones where people can be honest and up front. A quick feedback session at the beginning of subsequent training can work well and provide the basis for follow-up sessions.

Ross Morrison McGill, assistant headteacher

Allocate adequate time and pick delivery days carefully: The key to engaging professional development sessions is giving staff the time to take part in something meaningful for their own development and balancing this with school priorities.

This cannot be achieved in five inset days throughout the year. The schools with outstanding professional development models encourage tailored CPD pathways for the individual teacher and support members of staff throughout the year in dropdown sessions and after-school groups. Voluntary sessions work best after school hours and on Saturday mornings, whereas formal training tends to be best in the afternoons. Avoid Mondays.

Be creative when buying-in speakers: The best CPD providers and the most engaging are when you go searching for them yourself, or when you receive a recommendation. Last year, I brought in all of my school's guest speakers via Twitter. Before I made contact, I followed peoples' timeline for a while and reviewed their blog and online reviews. If they didn't fit the bill, I didn't get in touch and I wasn't left with junk-mail or empty-promises. Costs ranged from £300 for one hour to £2,000 for a full day with 150 staff. Every single penny was well-spent and staff left feeling inspired time and time again.

Thomas Starkey, contributor

Let teachers drive training: Would I be too obvious if I said that organised CPD sessions should be chosen and instigated by the teachers themselves? I believe that much of the disconnect teachers feel during development days is because they are told what it will be about by senior management. A more collaborative approach when planning sessions could be mutually beneficial. It's a question of ownership, a phrase that's heavily pushed in relation to the students where I am. Development by teachers for teachers may lead to greater investment and raise the chance of follow-up implementation.

Kate Oakley, senior early years practitioner

Survey staff needs: My staff are asked to fill out a training needs analysis form at least once a year and have plenty of opportunities to suggest continuing professional development (CPD) training, resource or visit ideas. This ensures that any resulting sessions are targeted, relevant and make the best use of limited time.

Susie Arnott, contributor

Take charge of your own training: Don't just wait for your school to provide you with CPD, go out looking for it. Loads of conferences, teachmeets, eTwinning and British Council events are advertised on Twitter. I've also been to excellent sessions organised by my union. Once you've been to a session, follow up with reading, trying things out in your classroom and joining subject groups. Professional development will be the most engaging when you follow your interests.

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