
Staff development and continuing professional educational: policy and practice in academic libraries



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INTRODUCTION

This article provides an account of a survey of staff development and training in academic libraries within the M25¹ (CPD25²), NoWAL³ and SALCTG⁴ consortia and Oxford University. The survey aimed to provide an overview of the current state of staff development and to ascertain how it is managed. CPD25 had been in existence for just over two years and the survey was an attempt to ensure that it had accurate information about the context in which it was operating.

The questionnaire design was intended to mirror an earlier survey conducted by Ian Smith of La Trobe University, Melbourne, in *Australian academic and research libraries*⁵. It is intended to benchmark the Australian results with this survey. More detailed responses to the survey and the methodology used can be found in the report on the CPD25 web pages⁶

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

A total of 74 library and information services replied to the online survey giving a response rate of 77%. Services varied in size from under 20 FTE staff to over 200 FTE staff.

ORGANISATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The survey found that staff development and training is largely strategically managed within a supportive organisational framework and it is accorded a high priority in strategic plans.

More than half of all services had a formal written statement on staff development demonstrating an explicit commitment to continuing development. The majority of services had planned development programmes using appraisal and annual review processes to inform training plans. Around one third of services used an informal approach to development. However, very few services regarded staff development as primarily the responsibility of individual members of staff.

Comments illustrating approaches to planning included:

'We don't have a written programme but we do have agreed priorities and practices.'

'We have a career review system where staff development priorities are set.'

'The plan and actions arising from it are reviewed in the department's annual quality report.'

COORDINATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In most cases staff development is coordinated by a designated member of staff or shared between local section heads and an overall designated member of staff. Around 15% of services assigned responsibility to a staff development committee. Staff development committees provide an ideal opportunity to engage a cross section of staff but surprisingly less than half of services surveyed had a dedicated staff development committee.

One service that did not have a staff development committee noted that:

'Staff development needs are identified by library managers and co-ordinated by senior staff meetings.'

Other approaches to staff development committees are exemplified by the following comments:

'The library Staff Development Committee has a major role to play in policy and planning.'

'There is an overall co-ordinator who is supported by a staff development advisory group.'

CHARACTERISTICS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Internal library trainers, external trainers and the institution's own staff development department were all used widely to deliver internal training programmes. A number of comments were made about strategies used to make time for internal training activities:

'Closed an hour every week in the summer vacation [and a] statement that each member of staff is entitled to a training hour every week for self training.'

'Staff development mornings three times a year for all staff provided by the library and other college staff.'

'Weekly training hour for all staff.'

'[The] university has two training days where we close for training.'

The standard range of development activities was undertaken. Less common activities included providing support for research projects and support for publication. Job exchanges within and between institutions were also relatively uncommon but comments suggested that this was an area of growth:

'We are about to begin staff exchanges with other libraries.'

'Exchange of experience seminars with staff in other libraries involved with similar roles.'

'We hope to look at exchanges with other organisations in the future.'

LEVELS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

In around 75% of services the intensity of staff development activity had increased over the last five years. A range of factors were cited to account for this increase:

'We recently had a change of leadership which has strengthened the role of staff development.'

'It is one of the strands in the strategic plan.'

'The library became an Investor in People.'

'Staff development activity has become very focussed, therefore the amount may have increased but the diversity has decreased.'

Low staff turnover was suggested as a cause of static or decreased level of staff development activity. Major restructuring processes also diverted staff from development activities.

INFLUENCES ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Many services reported that IT had made an impact on the focus and content of staff training programmes:

'ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) is increasingly used but not necessary for all staff. Increased need just to keep staff up to date with new developments, applications and resources.'

'E-resources and IT development will [be] a core part of our new training and development and programme. Blackboard is used and promoted within the department.'

Other influences on development programmes included change management, teaching and learning, and legal compliance. Change management in particular attracted a substantial number of comments reflecting current organisational volatility. Typical comments included:

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

'Convergence of the library and computing department into a single directorate.'

'Growing department has led to more team building activities.'

'Major staff restructuring.'

TEACHING AND LEARNING

'Increasing involvement with delivery of academic programmes [and] professional staff need to acquire [accredited] teaching skills.'

'Greater emphasis on information skills training due to VLEs.'

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

'Institutional priorities (e.g. distance delivery) and legal compliance, e.g., Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, have both generated additional training requirements.'

The achievement of external accreditation such as the Charter Mark and Investors in People (IiP) has also provided a driver for training programmes. Investors in People is of increasing importance in the drive to support staff and gain objective recognition. Around one third of services had already achieved IiP recognition, either as individual departments or through an institution-wide approach. A number of services were considering applying.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT

There was a consistent level of support in terms of finance and paid time off. Course fees for professional qualifications were often absorbed by the employer and managers were also flexible in allowing staff to move from full-time to part-time. Institutions were asked about the proportion of the staffing budget allocated to development. Many survey respondents did not reply to this question but of those who did the percentage of budget allocated lay between 0.2% to 2.0%. One can speculate that either the information was considered too sensitive to reveal or that the information was not readily available.

RECORDING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY AND ACCREDITATION

Formal accreditation of staff development activities was relatively uncommon although respondents from the NoWAL consortium referred to their accredited Certificate in Library & Information Practice programme.

Methods of recording and disseminating development activity included:

'An annual record of all attendance at staff training and development events'

is posted on the Library's intranet –other than that we've not been good at formally recognising participation.'

'Staff often report back on training courses by means of lunchtime briefings or articles in the Library Bulletin.'

'Staff are expected to keep training files, in which they record their own staff development activities.'

A majority of services provided a Route 'A' Chartered Institute of Library and Informational Professionals (CILIP) 'Chartership' programme. Institutions which did not have standard Route A training programmes offered individual programmes on an ad hoc basis:

'We do an individual Route A programme as and when needed. We do not always have staff in this position.'

'We use individual CILIP training programmes as these are matched to the individual and are more flexible than the standard programme.'

EVALUATION OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Assessing the impact of investment in training on individuals and on organisational goals is a complex and difficult process. Most services had some form of formal evaluation process in place. In general, assessment of training activity was by the completion of evaluation forms and a review of evaluation forms by the lead manager for staff development. The difficulty of obtaining systematic and reliable evaluation of development activity is highlighted by the following comment:

'Timing and type of evaluation varies – it's often hard to get meaningful feedback, but we try different ways.'

Much evaluation is fairly informal although sometimes it may involve written reports:

'Staff are asked to provide feedback informally. Also discussed at appraisal.'

'This is done in 1 to 1's throughout the year.'

'Informal feedback (email or verbal) requested on all outside activities.'

Two institutions referred to pre-event evaluation:

'We are about to introduce pre-event analysis of anticipated benefit for external events, both for participants and line managers.'

'A more formal and thorough pre-evaluation form is required for external courses where a cost is involved.'

One respondent mentioned formal links to library service objectives:

'I will contact a selection of staff who have undertaken staff development in order to evaluate how it has contributed to the Library's aims and individual's personal development.'

CONCLUSIONS

On a positive note, particularly in larger services, the survey found that staff development is:

- firmly located in a supportive organisational framework
- seen as a priority in strategic plans
- co-ordinated by a designated member of staff or committee
- supported by appraisals, portfolios and personal development plans
- underpinned by formal staff development policies.

Smaller services tended to use more informal approaches to staff development but they may wish to consider the applicability of some of the more formal structures indicated above as a means of demonstrating commitment and ensuring equity of access.

VLEs are being used to deliver staff training, although the full potential of this model has yet to be realised. The main influences on staff development programmes include:

- staff restructuring
- contributing to teaching and learning programmes
- legal compliance issues e.g. special educational needs, disability and freedom of information
- training consortia valued as being important source of cost effective training programmes.

Measuring performance:

- many services could not (or did not wish to) identify the proportion of the staffing budget

allocated to development although this is clearly an indicator of commitment

- there was a recognition that more objective and structured approaches were required to evaluate and measure the impact of staff development.

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