

**Evaluation of the GTC's Teacher
Learning Academy (TLA): Impacts on
teachers, pupils and schools**

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

About this evaluation

Introduction and context

The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) was commissioned by the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) with additional support from the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) to evaluate the impacts of the GTC's Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) for teachers, their colleagues, pupils and schools. The evaluation is based on findings and evidence from evaluators' mapping of 30 TLA presentations, and case studies carried out in 18 schools (nine schools in Phase 1 of the work and nine schools in Phase 2 of the work).

Since the beginning of the decade, increasing emphasis has been placed on the role of CPD in enhancing teaching quality, including a range of investment and policy-based initiatives to promote teacher CPD. A plethora of evidence exists highlighting the positive impacts of continuing professional development for teachers' practice, for pupils' learning and for school improvement (e.g. Bolam and Weindling 2006; Cordingley *et al.*, 2003; Harland and Kinder, 1997; Hustler *et al.*, 2003; Moor *et al.*, 2005a).

This evaluation is set in the contexts of: the new imperatives on schools to evaluate and evidence the impact of professional development activity on school improvement outcomes; the revised professional standards and performance management arrangements for teachers; and recent evidence-based policy-developments around collaborative, reflective and individualised approaches to CPD.

The findings will be of interest not only to those involved with the TLA and within the policy advisory team of the GTC, but also to policy-makers at the TDA, as well as to other bodies with a stake in teachers' professional development (such as teacher unions, DCSF, UCET, etc).

The Teacher Learning Academy (TLA)

The GTC's Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) offers professional recognition of teachers' learning, development of practice, and improvement work. Six core dimensions are at the centre of the TLA's approach to teacher learning, reflecting what is known from the evidence about effective and impactful CPD. These are:

engaging with a knowledge base, coaching and mentoring, planning your learning, carrying out your plan, sharing your learning and influencing practice, and evaluating your learning and its impact.

The TLA is built upon the notion of impact. At Stage One of the TLA, the intention is for teachers' professional development to have an impact in their own classroom. At Stage Two of the TLA, teachers' work is expected to have an impact on other colleagues. In further Stages of the TLA (Stages Three and Four), impacts should be felt on the school, other schools and the wider professional community. Teachers approach their TLA participation as a learning journey for which they prepare and plan, record progress in a learning journal and review progress with the support of colleagues. The six core dimensions underpin the learning journey and encourage teachers to consider and evaluate their project and its implications for themselves, their colleagues, their pupils and their school.

Evaluation: aims, design and key issues

In recognition of the well-documented issues relating to evaluating and attributing the impacts of CPD activity, the GTC requested that the NFER develop and undertake the trial of the notion of an 'impact trail' in this evaluation of the TLA. This attempts to go beyond the simple 'black box' model of inputs and outputs and assumed attribution and causation.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- identify the impacts of teachers' involvement in the TLA on their professional knowledge and practice and on their pupils' learning, as well as on their colleagues and the wider school
- identify and explore the evidence to substantiate whether these impacts had occurred (in particular, to what extent the impacts can be substantiated beyond self-report)
- identify the factors contributing to those impacts
- examine the contribution/attribution of the TLA to the impacts
- develop a first draft of a toolkit for identifying a range of impacts and the evidence to support them.

The evaluation design involved evaluators' exploration and audit mapping of individual TLA presentations and in-depth case studies in 18 schools. A summary of the evaluation methodology is set out below.

- The evaluation team developed a Matrix of possible impacts resulting from TLA presentations and the types of evidence which could be used to demonstrate these impacts.
- The Matrix was then used to map the different types of impacts and evidence reported by teachers in a sample of 30 TLA presentations, and was refined and amended accordingly.
- Case-study schools were then selected for more detailed evaluation and were invited to take part. In each case-study school, evaluators focused on one TLA project.
- Each case-study school was assigned a ‘link evaluator’ who conducted either one or two visits to the school and maintained ongoing contact with the participating teacher. During the visit/s evaluators:
 - explored impacts, evidence, factors affecting impact, and the attribution of impacts, through semi-structured discussions with the teacher and the TLA/CPD leader in the school
 - carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with other senior colleagues, teaching colleagues, pupils and parents, as appropriate
 - collected a range of other evidence in relation to the identified impacts (e.g. documentation, before and after comparisons, assessments, examples of work, etc).
- After each visit, the evaluator-analysis for each case study involved the following:
 - a case-study template was completed, using all of the data collected about that case (i.e. multiple perspectives and incorporating all of the sources of evidence explored in that case study)
 - evaluators revised the impact-evidence Matrix (developed prior to the visit) for the case study, in the light of all the data collected about that case
 - data analysis involved codifying the impacts, evidence and factors into an ‘impact trail’ depicting the sequence and attribution of impacts (in Phase 1 of the work these trails were also validated with the TLA teachers themselves during the second visit)
 - additionally, in Phase 1 of the work, practitioners’ perceptions of the value of tools and guidance to support the evaluation of impacts from CPD activity were explored (this informed the development of a toolkit for teachers and CPD leaders)
 - additionally, in Phase 2, the evaluation involved a detailed exploration and probing of one or two types of evidence per case study.
- The analysis also involved the evaluators combining all of the matrix data into an overarching matrix (in order to explore, for example, which types of evidence substantiate which types of impact).

The 18 case studies included:

- eight Stage One, seven Stage Two, two Stage Three, and one Stage Four TLA projects
- seven primary schools, nine secondary schools and two special schools
- 14 female case-study teachers and four male case-study teachers
- a range of project foci including: nine focusing on teaching and learning in the classroom, three focusing on curriculum and resource development, and six focusing on management and leadership (three of these were specifically on coaching and mentoring for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students).

A range of time had elapsed since the completion/submission of projects and the first case-study visit, from five months to 27 months. This included:

- three TLA projects that had been completed less than six months prior to the case-study visit, nine where the time elapsed was between seven and 12 months, five where the time elapsed was between 13 and 24 months, and one which had been completed more than 24 months previously
- at Stage One, the average time elapsed was 12.5 months (range 6–23 months); at Stage Two, the average time elapsed was just under 12 months (range 5–27 months); at Stages Three and Four, the average time elapsed was 11 months (range 7–15 months).

All of the case-study schools were already supportive of, and actively engaged in, the TLA.

Impacts of TLA involvement: key findings

- The ‘impacts’ of TLA involvement have been explored and attributed through a methodology developed in this evaluation. This led to the finding that the TLA has had clear and direct impacts on the practice of teachers; on policies or strategies in school; and clear and direct impacts on pupils’ learning.
- The most commonly cited impacts of the TLA were impacts on teachers, followed by impacts on colleagues, schools and then pupils. Impacts on wider groups were cited less frequently. This is not surprising, given that most TLA activity is school- or classroom-based and encourages teacher learning and development. In addition, the case-study sample primarily included Stage One and Stage Two projects, where wider impacts beyond the school are not required.
- For teachers, improvements or developments in their teaching practice and an enhanced capacity to reflect on practice were cited and evidenced most often. Actual professional or career development, developments in knowledge and understanding, developments in teachers’ confidence and access to resources and materials were also frequently evident.
- For pupils, enhanced enjoyment, motivation and engagement in learning were cited and evidenced most often. Increased achievement, participation in new

learning opportunities and enhanced knowledge and understanding were also frequently evident.

- Impacts on colleagues closely mirrored impacts on the TLA teachers, although they were less frequently identified. For example, improvements or changes in teaching practice, new knowledge and understanding, and access to resources were identified most often.
- Impacts on schools included new approaches or structures for CPD, school development or improvement, heightened school status, improved coaching and mentoring skills and networks with other schools.
- The majority of impacts on other groups were on parents, other schools and other institutions (e.g. HEIs).
- The foci of the TLA projects did not affect the number or extent of impacts on teachers. However, impacts on pupils, schools and colleagues varied by foci. For example, impacts at the school level were more commonly found in projects focusing on leadership and management.
- The Stage of the TLA presentation did not affect impacts on teachers and colleagues. However, in line with the TLA's 'Sphere of Influence'¹, presentations at the higher Stages tended to have more impacts on the school and wider groups.
- Around one-third of impacts identified and evidenced in the case-study phase were unintended positive consequences of TLA participation. The majority of unintended impacts were on the TLA teachers themselves, particularly in relation to professional development. It appears that teachers do not anticipate that their projects will result in such wide-ranging impacts, particularly where not required by the verification criteria. These may nonetheless be the result of the TLA process, of how TLA recognition is used by teachers and their schools or of TLA projects being effective in producing 'spin-off' impacts that are not anticipated at the outset.
- Impacts on teachers and pupils tended to occur early in TLA projects. Impacts on colleagues occurred in later waves, and impacts for schools most often occurred after a teacher had submitted their project to the Academy.
- In most cases, the impacts of TLA projects were sustained, and are clearly evidenced by current practice or developments.
- The TLA core dimensions and requirements led directly to some of the impacts in the case studies. The requirements also extended the strength and breadth of impacts beyond those that would have been recognised had the project taken place outside of the TLA structure².
- The TLA requirements themselves are being reflected as impacts in the school, impacting positively on a reflective school culture, enhancing evaluation of professional development and encouraging peer-sharing approaches.

¹ The Sphere of Influence is part of the TLA terminology. It refers to the expected widening of influence as the Stages of the TLA ascend.

² The factors contributing to impacts are explored more fully in Section 4.

Evidence to demonstrate impacts: key findings

- The following twelve broad types of evidence (presented in order of frequency) supported the identification of the impacts detailed above:
 - TLA case-study teacher self-reports (i.e. in their TLA presentations, reflective journals, and in NFER interviews)
 - staff perceptions and feedback
 - teaching and learning resources (including lesson plans and schemes of work)
 - performance review reports
 - pupils' views
 - classroom observations
 - school policy and planning documents (including school improvement plans (SIP) and school CPD plans)
 - assessment records of pupils' learning and progress
 - events/activities
 - parents' views
 - examples of pupils' work
 - publications.
- Many different types of impact were evidenced by the case-study teachers' self-reports. 'Softer' and personal outcomes for teachers, such as their increased capacity to reflect on practice, and changes to their motivation, values and beliefs were *particularly* evidenced through such self-report.
- Encouragingly, independently gathered views from colleagues and line managers often corroborated teachers' self-reports (apart from the more personal outcomes for teachers noted above). They also highlighted further evidence of impact that case-study teachers were not always aware of:
 - colleagues provided a perspective on the development of their own attitudes and commitment to CPD, changes to their own skills and practice, and their increased capacity to reflect, not always seen by the TLA teacher
 - school leaders highlighted fresh perspectives on school improvement that the TLA teacher was not always aware of, and changes to the school's approach to CPD (sometimes also known by the TLA teacher).
- Interestingly, school policy and planning documents provided evidence of impact more frequently than assessment records of pupils' learning. School-level documents viewed by independent evaluators showed that the teachers' TLA work had, for example, influenced school CPD approaches (e.g. a new coaching and mentoring approach), school behaviour management policies, and a new culture of pupil involvement (e.g. developing school councils and the use of pupil podcasts). It may be important for school leaders to share school-level evidence with teaching staff as a way of encouraging a more collaborative approach to evaluating and evidencing impact.
- Assessment records of pupils' learning in the classroom provided evidence of impact on pupils' progress (for example, through before and after tests, and using Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches). Unsurprisingly, national assessment

data rarely provided evidence of impact that could be confidently attributed to the TLA work. Although such data could indicate longer-term impact, there would be constraints in attributing any positive trends to the TLA (or indeed, to any intervention) as national testing only takes place at certain time points, and many other variables (e.g. other initiatives, pupils' maturation etc.) will contribute to pupils' attainment. In any case, the time scales within which most of the case-study projects were operating did not coincide with national assessments on pupils.

- Teachers' more prevalent use of classroom-level assessment data (e.g. ongoing data on pupils' progress and AfL approaches) to examine impact over and above national assessment data is encouraging, as it means teachers are not opting for the 'black box' approach to assessing impact. It will be important for school leaders to be aware of classroom approaches to evidencing pupils' progress, given schools' imperative to evaluate school and pupil performance.
- Teaching and learning resources provided evidence of changes in practice, particularly where 'before and after' materials (e.g. lesson plans) could be explored. When viewed alongside an evaluator, resources also acted as a prompt for teachers, and indeed pupils, to further discuss impacts.

Factors affecting the impacts of the TLA: key findings

- Factors that facilitate impacts of TLA projects included: school-based support for the TLA, school-based support for the project focus, school CPD ethos, collegiality, opportunities for dissemination, the provision of time to carry out the project, write it up and disseminate learning, and the TLA teacher themselves (in terms of their role and motivations).
- All of the six TLA core dimensions were important in facilitating impacts, and were perceived to lead to more impacts than might otherwise have been achieved if the projects had been carried out as part of another form of CPD. And, even where the TLA project was carried out for some other form of CPD (e.g. in one case, Leading from the Middle), linking this to the TLA resulted in additional benefits and impacts. In particular, the emphasis of the TLA core dimension on 'evaluating the impact of a change activity' was noted for producing considerable additional impacts through teachers' self-evaluation and reflection.
- Inhibiting factors were identified less readily. Particular inhibiting factors related to: inadequate information and awareness of the TLA, competing school priorities, limitations of time, colleagues' varied receptiveness to change and new learning, the applicability of the project, and lack of opportunities to disseminate.
- The facilitating factors may usefully be borne in mind when planning TLA projects or launching the TLA in schools, especially if a wide range of impacts is desired. In particular, the spread and sustainability of impacts is facilitated by: school support for CPD and the TLA, emphasis on the core dimensions (or other similar structure), school support for the project focus (e.g. relevance to a personal or school improvement need or projects with school-wide focus), a positive school CPD ethos, the provision of time, and opportunities for collegiality and dissemination.

Sequencing, attributing and evidencing impact

Case study illustrations in the main report depict the sequencing, attribution and evidencing of impacts. The case studies show that the sphere of influence or spread of impacts is related to the TLA Stage (as reported in section 2 of this report). They also show that a range of different types of evidence are available in relation to each impact (in addition to self-report), providing opportunities for triangulation and corroboration of the evidence. Certain impacts, particularly affective outcomes for teachers, do not have much additional evidence beyond self-report – these impacts rely on the insights and reflections of the teacher themselves (as highlighted above). One of the case studies highlights particular evidence in relation to impacts on pupils (e.g. pupil podcasts), whilst another highlights distinctive evidence of impacts on schools (e.g. resources and materials being developed around TLA-style recognition for non-teaching staff, and school leadership documents being used for coaching and mentoring between staff).

Participants' views on the impact evaluation tools

During Phase 1 of the evaluation, teachers, school TLA/CPD leaders, headteachers, TLA verifiers and GTC TLA advisers gave their views on the impact evaluation tools being developed by NFER for the purposes of this study and beyond. The tools considered included: an impact-evidence matrix, flash cards of impacts, evidence sources and factors, and summaries of impact trails.

There were variable responses but the added value for teachers and schools in using such tools should be highlighted. The tools can be used to assist planning, to record impacts, to promote a sense of achievement, and to provide evidence of impact, which is important for a) individual teachers' performance management and career progression and b) school improvement and professional standards.

Conclusions

The following conclusions on the areas considered for this evaluation – impacts, evidence, factors and attribution – can be drawn.

Impacts

- This evaluation has identified a range of common impacts on teachers from their TLA professional development activity, for example increased confidence, motivation, development of skills and knowledge, and changes in practice. Unlike findings from other research on CPD (e.g. Harland and Kinder, 1997), this evaluation did not suggest that there was a hierarchy to these impacts, or that one type of impact must be gained before another type can occur. **The uniqueness of each individual TLA project means that there are many permutations of impact sequences and trails.**
- Teachers did not always anticipate that their projects would result in such wide ranging impacts as those found in this evaluation. Many of the **unanticipated impacts were on the teachers themselves** – particularly on their professional learning and skills regarding their **capacity to reflect on practice and self-evaluate, peer learning, and sharing** and disseminating that learning. Such professional development skills link closely with the skill areas required in the new performance standards for teachers, and with skills for collaborative approaches to CPD.
- Impacts continued to occur once the TLA project had been submitted for recognition. This was due to **continued work** following on from the teachers' learning in the TLA project, to embed and disseminate learning and practice.
- The **TLA approach to enquiry-based learning** makes a particular contribution to outcomes. It engenders certain kinds of impacts around **reflection and evaluation** – especially self-evaluation – and these impacts have allowed the individual teachers involved in the case studies to **develop in their careers**. For schools, the TLA process seems to have encouraged a particular **openness amongst staff to share their learning**, with impacts around increased peer learning and sharing within schools that are specifically attributed by staff to the TLA.
- The **TLA requirements** themselves were being reflected as **impacts** in the school, impacting positively on a reflective school culture, enhancing evaluation of professional development and encouraging peer-sharing approaches. Recent research shows that professional development approaches works best when the selected approach fits with an existing school culture and ethos (Lord *et al.*, 2008). Schools with a strong tradition of mentoring and coaching, or with a research or enquiry-led culture for CPD seem to particularly gain from TLA-style CPD.

Evidence

- Given the additional evidence of impact identified by evaluators through interviews with a range of staff and through exploring documentation, resources and assessments in detail, a clear conclusion overall from this evaluation, is that it *is* possible to **capture and evidence a full range of impacts arising from teachers' professional development activity.**
- However, staff at different levels in school are not fully aware of the impacts from an individual's professional development activity elsewhere in the school. For example, school leaders' views, and school policy and planning documents

viewed by independent evaluators, showed that the teachers' TLA work had influenced school CPD approaches, school behaviour management policies, and, in one school, a new culture of pupil involvement. However, **teachers were not always fully aware** of school-wide or school-level impacts.

- **Schools did not appear to have a systematic approach to evaluating CPD and its impact.** However, school and CPD leaders were particularly keen to have a system or tools that could be applied to all staff and for all types of CPD in order to record and monitor the impacts of CPD within their school.
- Teachers' more prevalent use of **classroom-level pupil assessment data** to examine impact, as an alternative to national assessment data, is encouraging, as it means teachers are not opting for the 'black box' approach to assessing impact.
- In this evaluation, the evidence to support impact was strengthened through independent evaluators being able to bring together previously separate views and to investigate documentary evidence in depth. **The evaluation task took time and required technical analyses.** It is not envisaged that such technical analyses would ever be required of teachers, given their busy working lives. However, some of the approaches used by teachers to evidence impact were **very robust, and, crucially, not especially onerous.** Examples include: simple before and after approaches to evaluating impact – ideally where the same questions/issues are evaluated with the same participant group before and after an intervention; asking for pupil feedback on post-it notes; using parent comment books as an ongoing source of parent feedback; and comparing current documentation with previous similar documentation to explore changes in practice.
- However, it is worth noting that a need for better use of '**before and after**' (pre- and post-) methodologies was highlighted by evaluators, and acknowledged by teachers and CPD leaders themselves.

Factors that enhance impact

- In order to ensure the potential for exploring impact and the evidence of impact of TLA projects, this evaluation was based on case studies with schools that were already supportive of, and actively engaged in, the TLA. The factors that facilitate the spread and sustainability of impacts include: **school-level support for CPD and the TLA**, school support for the **project focus**, the provision of time for the participating teacher, and opportunities for **peer learning and dissemination.**
- The **TLA core dimensions** helped to provide additional impacts from teachers' development work and were particularly associated with aiding their reflection and evaluation of their professional development activity.
- The evaluation shows that there is much scope for individual teacher's professional development work to impact on the wider school. **Topics focusing on teaching and learning in the classroom** can have equally far reaching **impacts within the school** as those that **focus on management issues.** (Interestingly though, projects focusing on management and leadership seemed to have considerably fewer impacts on pupils than those with a teaching and learning focus.)

Attribution

- This evaluation tested the notion of an ‘impact trail’ methodology in order for independent evaluators to identify, evidence and attribute impact. Undertaking TLA professional development frequently instigated an ‘impact trail’, indeed many impact trails, from an individual’s work. By investigating each avenue that presented itself, and by seeking out other evidence to support impacts, **the impact trail methodology has helped to move away from a simple ‘black box’ notion of evaluating impact.**
- Although it is hard to prove the absolute additionality of TLA CPD to impacts, as it would be for any form of CPD due to the range of other influences which can lead to positive outcomes in schools, many of the outcomes reported here would not have occurred in the absence of the TLA. The TLA, in particular, has enhanced outcomes around teachers’ reflectivity, their capacity to self-evaluate, and wider dissemination than would otherwise have occurred. The TLA approach to enquiry-based learning can also usefully combine with other forms of CPD and strengthen and increase the outcomes realised.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for teachers, for school and CPD leaders, for GTC TLA partners, for those involved in CPD programme design, and for policy-makers involved with teachers’ professional development are presented.

For teachers carrying out professional development activity

- Teachers should consider how they will evaluate the impact of their TLA projects at the planning stage, as required by the verification criteria. This should include a focus on evidence from sources other than just self-evaluation. They should consider the range of evidence they could collect to demonstrate impacts (e.g. before and after assessments, lesson plans, pupils’ views through discussion groups, conversations with colleagues).
- Teachers may wish to underpin their broader professional development activity with some of the key concepts of the TLA (e.g. by drawing on the TLA core dimensions, and particularly the reflection and evaluation of professional development activity), as these seem beneficial to supporting outcomes.
- Teachers should plan to re-visit their TLA projects some time after they have been written up in order to identify further impact. This will aid their own understanding of impact, and may provide evidence that can contribute to their performance management targets.
- Teachers should be pro-active in making links between the impact of professional development and performance management, in order to enhance their career progression. In these TLA projects, many of the teachers gained skills that link closely with the skill areas required in the new professional standards for teachers.
- Teachers should consider how to better gather school-wide evidence of impact, in order to enhance a whole school and collaborative approach to professional development evaluation (part of TDA’s current strategy for teachers’ CPD).

For school leaders and CPD leaders

- School and CPD leaders should support self-initiated, individualised CPD projects, such as those carried out for the TLA. The evaluation shows that there is much scope for individual teacher's professional development work to impact on pupils and the wider school.
- School leaders, line managers and classroom teachers should consider how to combine their different perspectives and sources of evidence in order to ensure that impacts in the classroom, in the department and at school level are recognised and their potential maximised. In particular:
 - School and CPD leaders should share school-level evidence with teaching staff as a way of encouraging a more collaborative approach to evaluating and evidencing impact.
 - School and CPD leaders need to be aware of and encourage classroom-based approaches to evidencing pupils' progress, given schools' imperative to evaluate school and pupil performance.
- CPD leaders may wish to use elements of the TLA process to underpin other professional development activity in the school. In doing so, however, they should be mindful of recent research findings which show that the introduction of new professional development approaches works best when the selected approach fits with an existing school culture and ethos.
- When planning enquiry-based learning through the TLA, especially where it is new to a school, CPD and school leaders should be aware of the factors that facilitate the spread and sustainability of impacts, in particular, a school ethos that is supportive of enquiry-led CPD.
- School TLA leaders/CPD leaders should encourage TLA participants' commitment to reviewing their projects and any further impacts some time after the project has been written up. This would help identify further impacts, and would aid schools' collaborative approach to evidencing impact (e.g. through learning conversations, consultations with staff, etc).

For GTC and other TLA partners

- TLA partners should promote the professional learning outcomes that teachers can gain from participating in the TLA. This might encourage greater participation in the TLA, as such outcomes link closely to the new professional standards for teachers.
- Indeed, TLA partners should highlight the full range of impacts that can occur (including wider school impacts) as a result of a TLA project when recruiting teachers to the TLA.
- TLA partners should also promote the contribution that the TLA process particularly can make to outcomes. These include impacts around reflection and evaluation – especially self-evaluation – and an openness amongst staff to share their learning.
- TLA partners should promote the practical approaches to evaluating and evidencing impact that were identified in this evaluation (e.g. pupil feedback notes, before and after questions, comparison of pre- and post- documentation, etc).
- TLA partners should publish guidance to encourage participants and schools to review their projects and any further impacts some time after writing them up for the TLA.

For policy-makers involved with teachers' professional development

- Policy-makers involved with other CPD programmes should consider the impact trail approach used in this evaluation to evidencing impact. This includes probing impacts at pupil, teacher and school levels, in the short, medium and long term.
- This evaluation suggests that reflective and enquiry-led forms of CPD like the TLA, well founded in terms of both its conceptual base and the management of its implementation, can and do have profound and lasting impact on teaching quality and pupil achievement. In developing strategies for CPD, the GTC and TDA should consider whether there is a need to resource a national strategic approach to enquiry-led CPD.