

Case study

Technology and CPD

www.ifl.ac.uk 0844 815 3202 enquiries@ifl.ac.uk

Institute for Learning First Floor 49-51 East Road London N1 6AH

Thinking creatively to get the best from REfLECT

Anne Samson is the operations manager for the Westminster Partnership CETT in London, and an IfL CETT Connection. She has been thinking about ways to reduce the duplicate recording of continuing professional development (CPD) after an event to satisfy the requirements of different organisations and audiences. Outlining a typical scenario, Anne explains why she was keen to find a solution that would save time without sacrificing the quality of information provided.

When I attend a seminar, I am usually asked to fill out an evaluation form afterwards, so that the organiser has evidence of my attendance, can monitor the effectiveness of provision and prove value for money. I also need to log my attendance for my employer, and record my reflections as part of the Institute for Learning's CPD declaration requirement.

This typical scenario has a number of implications for me as an attendee and for the organiser or facilitator. For a start, I am naturally reflective, but because of the pressures of the job, have difficulty in finding the time to record my reflections as often as I would like.

Secondly, I may have some immediate views about the session, but need time to determine how the session will affect my practice.

In some cases, there are so many good ideas around and people I would like to keep in touch with or bounce ideas off, but I know I won't get around to emailing them or remembering all the ideas.



Finally, the evaluation process after a session can be very tedious. It usually follows a standard format of either a tick-box exercise asking me to rate the effectiveness or usefulness of the session, the standard of the food and the administration; or a series of questions like “What were your expectations at the start of the session? Were they met? What will you do differently in future?”

It occurred to me that it would be far better to have an end-of-session evaluation or feedback format that could be shared with everyone, in collated form, and could be used to stimulate further thinking and form the basis for other recording purposes.

REfLECT, the online tool that the Institute for Learning (IfL) offers members to help us manage our CPD, seemed to hold the answer, because:

- It allows me to share with colleagues to the extent I want, and for as long as I want.
- Colleagues can comment or add later thoughts to stimulate further discussion or share other ideas.
- I can create a community or group that allows members to share with each other if they wish.
- My colleagues can download the file (or asset) I send them and use it for their chosen purpose.
- I can use the initial document for my CPD record and add further reflections as I so choose.
- Handouts can be circulated with the feedback to those who attended, and to those who were unable to attend but wanted copies of documentation.

The first attempt to share information involved attaching a Word document to an asset and circulating it. As you cannot add or amend the CPD hours on a file asset, however, recipients would need to create another asset to record their CPD hours.



This led to further investigation. ‘Blogs’ were a possibility, but it can be difficult to track comments across a range of topics. Blogs covering more than one topic would therefore be frustrating for time-pressured teacher educators.

The same limitation applies to the **thought** and **activity** assets, which are used for sharing feedback from single topic sessions.

For multiple topics, as found at conferences and colloquia, the best option seems to be the **webfolio**, which allows information to be categorised for easier access. Text and sound files, and links to websites, can be attached.

I have been working with IfL to investigate other areas for development, including:

- The best way to share reports with people such as line managers, who are not IfL members and do not have access to REfLECT. Although the system generates passwords for non-members who are included on the list, they may not be familiar with the system and what is being sent to them with the message “An asset has been shared with you”. Whilst it is appropriate for some non-members to know the system, for others it is less so, and so it may be better, in the short term, to send separate emails or hard copies. The webfolio package allows this to be done with little extra work.

- Phrasing end-of-session questions in a way that encourages the most effective reflection, to cover as many purposes as possible. Explaining the purpose of the feedback or evaluation to participants has helped improve the quality of reflection, but many people still write 'good' or 'v good', for example, without further explanation. This was particularly evident in the quality of feedback from trainee teachers on a joint university-CETT induction. Following a class exercise on reflection, subsequent feedback sheets showed a marked improvement in the quality of the comments. Even where people had not attended a session, they explained why. It is important to ensure sufficient time for people to reflect at the end of a session so that it is not rushed.
- Immediate capturing of information into REfLECT. Participants currently handwrite their feedback, which needs to be typed into the system. This is quite time-consuming for the person collating the information, and seems an unnecessary duplication of work. REfLECT Mobile may well be an option if participants have the facility and are comfortable about texting.

While no system is perfect, REfLECT offers the best solution as it is freely available to all members and is the preferred recording system for CPD and Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS).

Experimenting with the system and engaging teacher educators and trainee teachers shows others what can be done, and how REfLECT can be used not only as a central depository but also to support teaching and learning.

Where technical issues arise, the REfLECT and CPD teams at IfL are on hand to offer support and liaise with the designers so that the system evolves to better meet the sector's needs.

IfL CETT Connections

Volunteer Connections are IfL members in provider organisations who can play a pivotal role in supporting peers and colleagues in the effective use of REfLECT as part of their CPD.

Their counterparts in Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETTs), IfL CETT Connections, support IfL members and IfL Volunteer Connections in 10 regions across England, delivering workshops and supporting seminars on CPD, Professional Formation, reflective practice, impact assessment and the use of REfLECT.

IfL and Becta working together

One of IfL's strategies for continuing professional development (CPD) is to promote the use of technology to support professional development.

We encourage members to develop their knowledge and skills as reflective practitioners through planning, recording and assessing the impact of learning using REfLECT.

We are working in partnership with Becta on a research project to help boost our members' skills in using REfLECT and new technologies to support their professional development. This case study is one of six produced as part of the project.

See www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd/ifl-and-becta-supporting-the-workforce-project for more information.

REFLECT

IfL members are given a free and flexible online tool, developed by teachers for teachers, to help them manage their CPD.

REFLECT provides a personalised learning space where members can reflect on their professional practice and record the many and varied CPD activities undertaken to enhance their teaching. Members can choose to keep all records private if they wish, or can selectively share them with peers, mentors and managers. CPD activity records can be linked quickly and easily to an annual CPD record for submission to IfL if desired.

When records or assets are shared, the user may give others permission to view, comment, copy or collaborate. Permission to share may be time-limited, or rescinded at any time. Comments may be added to shared assets in the form of a professional conversation.

REFLECT can be set up so that entries automatically populate the CPD record. As more entries are added throughout the year, the system will automatically recalculate the number of hours' CPD completed.

REFLECT also gives IfL members a number of easy-to-use utilities that can be used to support teaching and learning, such as a simple blogging tool, web page builder and the facility to create multiple e-portfolios. It complements a provider's virtual learning environment (VLE), and individual members may use REFLECT however they choose, at any time and from any computer with internet access.

REFLECT Mobile gives members access to a very simple version of REFLECT via the browser on any mobile device, allowing them to manage their professional development on the move.



This is one of six case studies produced by the Institute for Learning (IfL) and Becta in March 2010 to help identify the barriers and challenges that members face in capturing CPD.

Institute for Learning
First Floor
49-51 East Road
London N1 6AH

www.ifl.ac.uk
0844 815 3202
enquiries@ifl.ac.uk