

## **Continuous professional development and career progression in mid-career teachers**

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# Continuous professional development and career progression in mid-career teachers

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Recent data suggests that, despite some signs of progress, teacher recruitment and retention are likely to remain issues over the next few years (Worth, 2020; DfE, 2020a). While teacher retention improved slightly in 2018/19, recruitment for the secondary sector remains below target, particularly affecting subjects such as physics, maths, modern foreign languages and chemistry (DfE, 2020a). As Worth (2020) outlines, retaining more teachers means that fewer teachers need to enter the profession to ensure sufficient supply, which in turn would mean that recruitment targets could be met more easily and supply pressures would be eased. In other words, if we want to address the current teacher shortage, we need to ensure that expert teachers are supported adequately and sufficiently, so that they remain in the profession. ›

› A strong focus of the Department for Education (DfE) in England has recently been to support early career teachers – for example, through the development of a two-year package to support the professional development of new teachers (DfE, 2020b). Supporting early career teachers is essential, especially as the retention rate for newly qualified teachers (NQT) from their first into their second and from their second into their third year continues to fall (Worth, 2020). However, it is equally important to ensure that teachers at later stages of their career (i.e. beyond the first five years) receive sufficient support.

The DfE has recently published plans to reform and expand current NPQs (National Professional Qualifications) (DfE, 2020c), which include reforms of existing NPQs in senior leadership, headship and executive leadership, as well as the replacement of the current middle leadership qualification with three new programmes in supporting the training and development of others, developing teachers with responsibilities for teaching and learning (including subject leads) and developing teachers with responsibilities for behaviour and culture (DfE, 2020c). Despite this welcome initiative, it remains the case that the needs of teachers at the middle and later stages of their career typically receive less attention (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Kirkpatrick and Johnson, 2014) – a gap that needs to be addressed if we want to ensure that mid-career teachers (defined for the purposes of this study as those with five to 15 years of experience) have access to professional qualifications and development opportunities that actually meet their needs.

Both personal and professional needs of mid-career teachers are likely to differ from those of their colleagues just joining the profession. On a personal level, they are likely to have additional caring responsibilities, which might make it difficult to balance work and family

life. Professionally, they are likely to be at a point in their career when they feel confident with the basics of classroom management and teaching and ready to move on to more specialised training.

As research shows that high-quality teacher professional development is a crucial factor in retaining teachers, especially in their early and mid-careers (Coldwell, 2017), a collaborative project between Sheffield Hallam University, the Education Policy Institute and the Chartered College of Teaching aimed to understand the professional development needs of mid-career teachers and how they might relate to job satisfaction and teacher retention. The project used a mixed-methods design, combining a review of the literature, an analysis of the OECD TALIS 2018 data (OECD, 2019), school case studies, an online survey and focus groups with members of the

Chartered College of Teaching (Booth et al., 2020).

The literature review covered peer-reviewed literature on retention and the professional development needs of mid-career teachers from the past five years, as well as additional suggestions from team members about relevant literature and snowballing of references. Grey literature (i.e. conference proceedings or PhD theses) was also covered.

The primary data collection built on findings from the literature review to further explore emerging themes. Members of the Chartered College of Teaching were invited to complete a survey and participate in online focus groups, the findings of which were combined with a secondary analysis of the 2018 OECD TALIS data on mid-career teachers' job satisfaction and CPD. The survey was completed by 88 teachers (61

per cent secondary, 14 per cent primary, 10 per cent all-through, two per cent sixth form and junior schools, no Early Years), eight of whom participated in the focus groups. Case studies from three multi-academy trusts further complemented the results.

The literature review revealed that 'mid-career teachers' are difficult to define, since the term may be applied to the number of years that they have taught, their professional role or the experiences or skills that they have acquired. Any assumption of linear career stages is often criticised for not taking the changing demands of the system, the iterative, cyclic nature of learning and skill development, or outward movement into account. However, there appears to be some agreement that teachers move through stages of *exploration* (easy or painful beginnings), *stabilisation* (finding commitment, integration and autonomy), *experimentation* (new challenges and responsibilities) and *serenity* (a professional plateau), even though not necessarily in a linear fashion (Day, 2006). Mid-career teachers are likely to find themselves somewhere between stabilisation and experimentation, which is likely to influence the type of support that they find most useful at this time of their career.

Despite the difficulty in defining mid-career teachers, a number of key characteristics appear to emerge as teachers transition from the early stages of their career. These include an increased interest in experimentation in their practice, more responsibility in school, the management of changes

in professional roles and identity, and increasing tension between work and personal life. It should be noted that these characteristics are not exclusive to mid-career teachers but are more likely to occur in this group, according to the literature review that was conducted as part of this study. Even though teachers at the mid stages of their careers appear to share some common characteristics, they can still differ in terms of their motivation and commitment to the profession. For example, Day (2012) found that teachers' motivation and commitment could increase, stagnate or decrease, depending on how well they were able to cope with the competing demands of this career phase.

As mentioned already, for the purposes of this study, we defined mid-career teachers as those with five to 15 years of experience but allowed participants in the primary data collection to self-select based on their own perception of their career stage, leading to a range from five to 29 and an average of 14 years of experience, and emphasising the difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between different career stages.

### Mid-career teachers' job satisfaction and career progression

The TALIS data shows that teachers' satisfaction with the profession broadly decreases with experience. However, there are some interesting similarities in teachers' satisfaction with their work environment, which suggest that specific aspects of the work environment are more important for job satisfaction than experience alone, including access to high-quality CPD (see Cordingley et al., 2015 for a review of features of high-quality CPD) and a supportive leadership team (Sims and Jerrim, 2020).

This is further supported by findings from the survey that was conducted as part of this study. While participants

overall had relatively high levels of job satisfaction (66 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their jobs), nearly a quarter indicated that they were not satisfied and a third were less satisfied now than they had been at the start of their career. These findings indicate that job satisfaction was not so much linked to experience but rather to factors of the work environment.

A similarly heterogeneous picture emerged from teachers' views on their career progression. Respondents were split equally (yes/no/not sure) when asked how satisfied they were about their career progression to date, and while half of the participants felt that they had sufficient career opportunities in the sector as a whole, only a quarter felt that their school offered sufficient development opportunities. This raises questions about how teachers can progress or develop within their own schools and suggests that career development may be restricted by teachers' ability to move to another school or region. The incompatibility of CPD and leadership positions with personal commitments was highlighted in particular by female participants in these focus groups.

Focus group discussions added an interesting perspective to the topic of career progression, as it became clear that some teachers do not necessarily want to 'progress' – at least, not in a sense of the word where 'progress' equals a move into leadership and out of the classroom. They highlighted the need for expertise in teaching to be recognised and rewarded accordingly and criticised the mis-match in leadership vs. main pay scales when research shows that teachers are the single most important in-school factor for student achievement.

### Mid-career teachers and CPD

The TALIS data also shows that mid-career teachers participate in marginally less CPD than early career teachers and that



- › they report significantly greater barriers to engaging in CPD, which is in line with the competing demands of their work and personal lives that we discussed earlier.

Access to high-quality CPD was an additional barrier in this group. It was indicated by 42 per cent of respondents that they did not have access to high-quality CPD, and focus group discussions indicated some regional differences, with teachers in London and the South-East perceiving that more high-quality CPD opportunities were available.

A lack of relevant CPD opportunities was noted by 40 per cent of participants. As hypothesised above, mid-career teachers are likely to feel confident with the basics of classroom management and teaching practice and may thus require more specialised CPD opportunities that allow them to further develop their expertise. This would be supported by findings from our survey, which showed that participants had very high levels of self-efficacy (i.e. a measure of how confident teachers feel with daily school and classroom demands). For example, 95 per cent of participants felt that they could calm a disruptive student, formulate good questions and provide alternative explanations. This indicates that CPD on basic classroom and behaviour management does not meet their needs and emphasises the need for more CPD that takes teachers' career stages and personal commitments into account.

Participants also indicated that they found some forms of CPD more beneficial than others. While they indicated a low need for whole-school CPD, they highlighted the need for personalised, subject-specific and non-leadership CPD and the continued need for mentoring and coaching.

This is supported by TALIS data, which shows that mid-career teachers tend to judge the CPD that they engage in to be less effective than colleagues in earlier stages of their careers, suggesting that the reason for this might be a lack of focus on the specific needs of those in this stage of their career.

Finally, most participants felt strongly that there is a need for CPD that is aimed at developing expert teachers rather than just leadership skills, as not all teachers want to or can move up to leadership positions, and that they would appreciate more autonomy in choosing CPD that is relevant to them.

In conclusion, results from this project indicate that mid-career teachers are likely to require distinct CPD tailored to their career stage; that access to high-quality CPD differs between regions and schools; that commitments in teachers' personal lives can present barriers to CPD and career progression; and that mid-career teachers would appreciate higher levels of autonomy in choosing their CPD (although further studies are needed to confirm these preliminary findings).

A few practical solutions may address the issues that emerged from this study. Programmes like the Chartered Teacher Programme that allow teachers to develop and be recognised for their classroom

expertise appear to meet the need for more recognition of expert classroom practice and provide an alternative to leadership pathways, but current pay scales should be reconsidered so that they reflect the importance of expert classroom-based teachers. The Chartered College's new Certificate in Evidence-Informed Education and courses by the Teacher Development Trust provide less time-intensive alternatives and also represent high-quality CPD opportunities that can support teachers in their practice and recognise them for their expertise. Journal clubs may be a good alternative approach to whole-school CPD and provide teachers with the necessary flexibility yet agency to make CPD more relevant to their own professional development. Finally, online CPD might be a way to address the current regional differences in access to high-quality CPD, and an asynchronous delivery would address the need for more flexible models that allow mid-career teachers to combine their work and professional lives. **i**

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