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Collaborative development of a Quality Assurance Framework for educator professional development

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Foreword

Driver Youth Trust's mission is to help young people who struggle with reading, writing and language. This group of learners consistently underperforms in literacy because of underlying difficulties that are not responsive to standard educational approaches, and may require targeted intervention, either in class or in a small group or individual setting.

We advocate for the use of evidence-based practice and pride ourselves on having a team of experts who have both current knowledge and experience of working in schools alongside teachers and teaching assistants in both primary and secondary settings.

Driver Youth Trust (DYT) has developed a professional development offer comprising resources, online, blended and face-to-face courses, consultancy and a collaborative professional online community. Together, these provide a whole school approach to providing teaching professionals with knowledge and practical strategies to assist in high-quality teaching which is inclusive for learners with literacy difficulties.

We have developed our approach around two key documents. Our [Literacy Difficulties Framework](#) acts as both a position statement and guidance on recommended practice. A Quality Assurance Framework, which demonstrates our commitment to developing and delivering high quality professional development, exceeds the standard of professional development stipulated by the Department for Education and ensures our processes and approach are clear and transparent to those looking to access DYT training. Ultimately we aim for both the Literacy Difficulties Framework and Quality Assurance Framework to provide a structure through which we and our school colleagues can have a positive impact on learners.

From the outset, it was clear to us that a Quality Assurance Framework developed in isolation would lack the authenticity and quality that we demand of ourselves. As such DYT approached Sheffield Institute of Education, and Dr Emily Perry in particular, to develop this in tandem. This report describes the process of development which led to the Quality Assurance Framework. DYT is grateful to SIOE and to Emily for their work on what will be an essential component of our commitment to making a difference for learners with literacy difficulties.

Chris Rossiter
CEO
Driver Youth Trust
March 2022



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Authors

This work was commissioned by Driver Youth Trust (DYT) and carried out by Sheffield Institute of Education, part of Sheffield Hallam University, in partnership with staff from DYT.

DYT is a national charity that works to ensure that all learners who have literacy difficulties get an education that is responsive to their needs. Our mission is achieved by:

- Working in partnership with teachers and educational professionals to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to identify and support learners with literacy difficulties and SEND.
- Campaigning on behalf of learners, teachers and schools so that they have the resources and support they need to succeed.

Sheffield Institute of Education is one of the UK's largest providers of initial teacher education. We aim to improve outcomes for children and young people, and enhance the experience of educational professionals, with a substantial portfolio of research, development and innovation centred on evaluating, understanding and delivering practitioner professional learning.

The authors of this report are: Emily Perry, of Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, and Richard Bryant, Kelly Challis, Daksha Patel and Chris Rossiter of DYT.

1. Introduction

Practitioner professional development plays an important role in the education system, contributing to improved practitioner expertise, positive career experiences and retention, and thereby to the educational outcomes of children and young people. In England, a wide range and large number of organisations offer professional development to education practitioners, including multi-academy trusts and schools, university, charitable trusts, subject associations, awarding organisations and private companies (Chedzey *et al.* 2021). School leaders, teachers and professional development providers recognise the potential value of quality assurance processes to the overall system of practitioner professional development as a way to support informed, confident decision-making about professional development and ultimately to drive up standards of professional development across the sector (Perry *et al.* 2021). However, the system is largely unregulated by government or other organisations and there are few systems of quality assurance, internal or external (Musset 2010, Perry *et al.* 2019). As a result, practitioners report that they find it hard to make judgements about the quality of professional development available (Chedzey *et al.* 2021).

In recent years a few initiatives have explored quality assurance measures for teacher professional development. These include the Department for Education's (2016) Standard for teachers' professional development, which sets out guidance to school leaders for successful professional development, and a pilot study, commissioned by Wellcome, which developed and trialled a system of quality assurance of professional development (Chedzey *et al.* 2021, Perry *et al.* 2021). Currently, the Department for Education is offering Senior Mental Health leads' training for schools and colleges; each of the programmes funded through this initiative has been quality assured by the Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health in Schools (Department for Education 2022).

In 2021, Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned by DYT to work in collaboration to develop and trial a quality assurance framework for DYT's professional development offer. The intention was to identify where and how DYT could quality assure its offer, drawing on learning and processes from similar initiatives, such as those described above, while building on and exemplifying DYT's existing approaches, strategies and developmental activities. The work signifies DYT's commitment to understanding and communicating the quality of its professional development, supporting the professional learning of educators who work with learners with literacy difficulties.

In this report, we describe the approach taken to the development and trialling of the quality assurance framework. The outcome of the process is a framework for quality assurance which includes:

- a flowchart offering an overview of the process;
- a set of quality criteria tailored to DYT's offer and compatible with other quality assurance measures and processes;
- a process by which organisational staff can carry out self-assessment of quality, leading to identification of areas for improvement and to evidence of quality which can be shared with stakeholders.

We reflect on our learning from this work, including how engagement in the self-assessment process led to consideration of how quality assurance aligns with organisational aims and strategies, and how these contribute to a coherent, organisation-wide approach to quality assurance. Next we identify some barriers to engagement in a quality assurance process such as the need to commit time to collating and reviewing evidence, and the challenges of identifying areas for improvement internally while externally communicating evidence of quality. We consider how these barriers can be overcome, for example by using a staggered approach to quality assurance in which different parts of the offer are reviewed at different times, and by seeing the process as one which can itself be improved through ongoing review.

We end by recommending that other professional development organisations consider similar approaches and share the outcomes of their quality assurance and review activities. In this way, these often internal processes become more transparent, so that we collectively gain a wider understanding of how professional development activities are designed and evaluated, and ultimately achieve higher standards of professional development for all education practitioners.

2. The approach

Our intention was to develop and trial a quality assurance framework which would:

- enable self-evaluation of DYT’s professional development offer against rigorous quality assurance criteria and support ongoing improvement;
- be appropriate for DYT’s professional development offer, including online and in-person activity;
- build on and identify DYT’s existing processes within their professional development ecosystem (resources, courses, community and consultancy), strategic development and stakeholder engagement;
- be compatible with other, external quality assurance processes;
- provide evidence of quality to share with stakeholders.

The approach taken was consultative and iterative, including four phases of drafting, trialling and refining (Table 1).

Phase 1	Development of a quality assurance flowchart
Phase 2	Development of a quality assurance process and quality criteria
Phase 3	Testing the quality assurance process
Phase 4	Finalisation of flowchart, process and quality criteria

Table 1. Development process

We drew on research evidence about professional development and from other quality assurance processes relating to educator professional development, and combined this with testing against DYT’s offer. Through collaborative workshops, discussions and feedback we explored the appropriateness and utility of the processes as they developed. In particular we considered balances between internal and external compatibility and communication, including:

- tailoring the framework to DYT’s organisational strategy, professional development offer and existing processes while maintaining compatibility with external measures and processes;
- gathering evidence of quality which can be shared with stakeholders, while identifying areas for improvement which might be used internally.

The quality assurance framework went through two rounds of testing. In each test, the quality assurance process was completed by DYT staff, focussing on one activity within the professional development portfolio. Each round of testing focused on two or three aspects of



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the framework, while also considering the effectiveness, suitability and utility of the process as a whole. After each test, the quality assurance framework was adapted and refined based on feedback.



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3. Outcomes

In this section we present the outcomes of the development process, describing each component of the quality assurance framework in turn, including:

- a flowchart;
- a set of quality criteria;
- a process for self-evaluation of quality.

3.1 Quality Assurance Flowchart

The quality assurance flowchart (Figure 1) describes a series of steps by which an organisation can assure the quality of its professional development and identify areas for improvement.

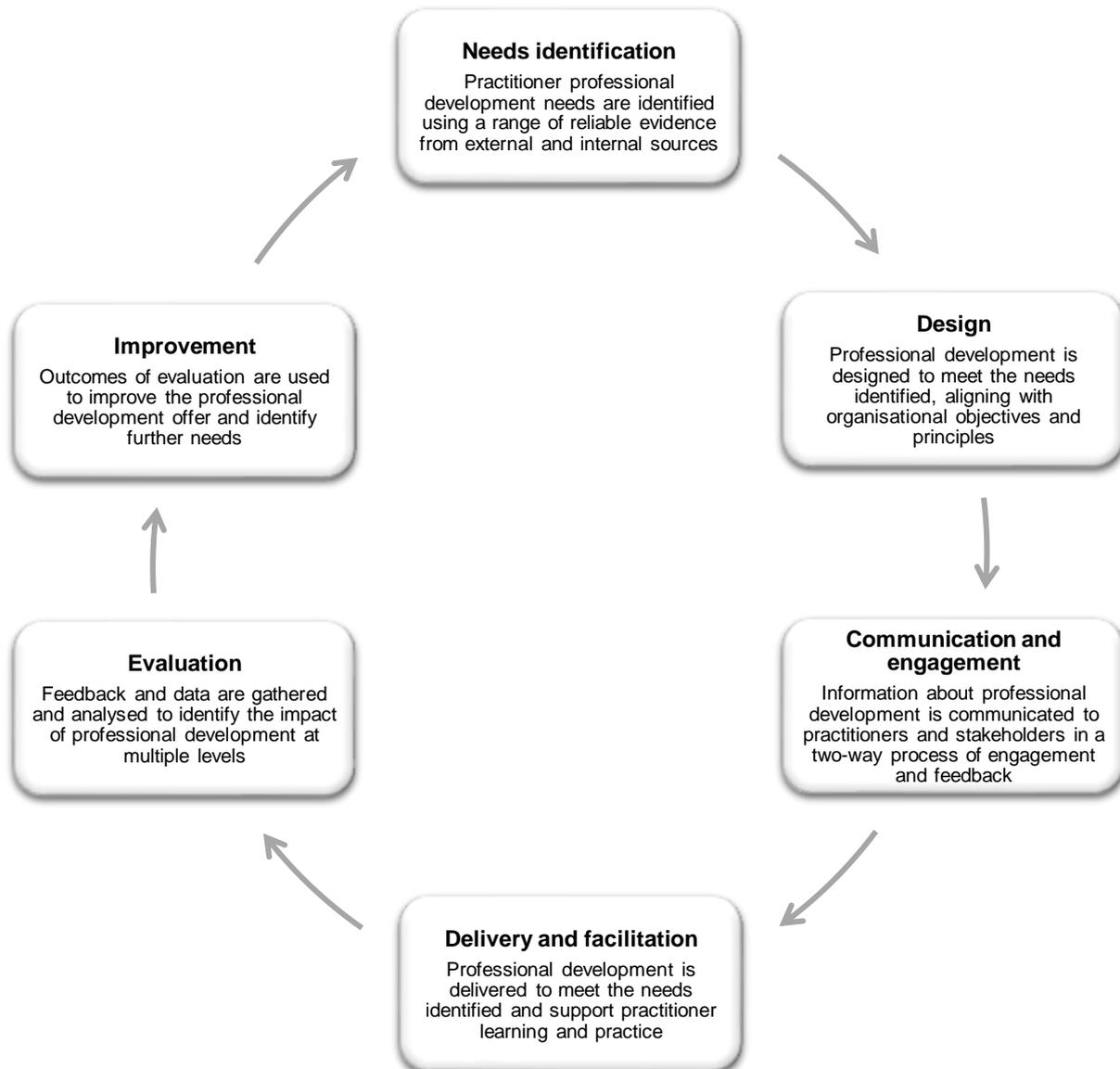


Figure 1. Quality assurance flowchart

Each step in the flowchart feeds into the next, forming an ongoing cycle of planning, development, reflection and improvement. The process as a whole contributes to the ongoing development of an organisation's professional development offer, supporting two-way communication with participants and stakeholders and identifying opportunities for improvement and/or future professional development activity.

Looking in more detail at each step of the cycle described in the flowchart, we start with needs identification, which involves drawing on a range of sources, both internal and external, to understand areas of professional development need within the system. Some professional development opportunities may arise as a result of policy changes or new evidence from research; others might be identified from internal evaluation of previous activity or other feedback from stakeholders. In DYT, the strategic aims of the organisation, focussed on supporting learners with literacy difficulties, underpin decisions about the professional development offer.

Moving to professional development design, decisions are made here about how the identified professional development needs can be met most effectively. These might include choosing online or in-person delivery, single activities or a series, whole school or individual approaches, and the content and pedagogical approaches used (Perry and Booth 2021). Some of these might be chosen by organisational leads, others by professional development designers and content authors. For DYT, strategic organisational objectives play an important role in shaping the design of professional development activities, for example in determining how each part of the offer contributes to an ongoing learning pathway.

Within communications and engagement, the organisation shares information about its professional development offer with, and gains feedback from, potential participants and other stakeholders, through written, web and other communications. This can be a two-way process, by which school leaders and practitioners are able to ask questions about the offer, including whether and how it can be tailored to their contexts. For DYT, stakeholder engagement and feedback forms an essential component of the professional development ecosystem (including resources, courses, community and consultancy), which supports peer review and understanding of how each part of the offer contributes to a continuous learning pathway. The Community provides a stakeholder engagement group for QA.

Delivery and facilitation involves practitioners taking part in the professional development activity, led by facilitators and online learning managers. Facilitators play an important role in the leadership of professional development which is often less well-examined than some other aspects of the flowchart, such as the processes of design and evaluation (Perry 2020). For DYT, online learning managers play a different, equally important, role in supporting participants to engage in professional development activities.

Evaluation involves the collation and analysis of data from a range of sources in order to understand the impact of the professional development activity at multiple system levels. These include data examining changes in participants' knowledge, skills and practice, their impact on their colleagues and organisations and the educational outcomes of the pupils they work with (Guskey 2000), and might include data collection in the short-, medium- and long-term.

In the final step of the cycle, improvement draws on findings from the evaluation process to identify areas for further development. These might be in relation to improving the current professional development offer or contribute understanding of the need for adapted and new professional development activities, thereby feeding back into the start of the cycle.

3.2 Quality Assurance Criteria

Building from the flowchart, we developed a set of quality assurance criteria (Table 2) which provide further details of what constitutes quality within each step described in the flowchart.

The criteria are based on evidence from research, other quality assurance processes and models of quality assurance,. This mapping supports internal and external credibility of the criteria and aids compatibility with potential new quality assurance measures developed by other organisations, such as those commissioning professional development. Specifically, the criteria were mapped against:

- the Department for Education's (2016) Standard for teachers' professional development;
- the pilot of a system of quality assurance of professional development (Chedzey *et al.* 2021);
- the quality assurance model of the Department for Education's Senior Mental Health leads' training for schools and colleges (Department for Education 2022);
- a recent evidence review, commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation, of teacher professional development (Sims *et al.* 2021).

Step	Quality criteria
<p>Needs identification</p> <p>Practitioner professional development needs are identified using a range of reliable evidence from external and internal sources</p>	<p>Professional development opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are identified through analysis of reliable data from a range of internal and external sources • offer meaningful opportunities for practitioners’ learning and development to lead to improved pupil outcomes • are aligned with organisational principles and strategies
<p>Design</p> <p>Professional development is designed to meet the needs identified, aligning with organisational objectives and principles</p>	<p>Professional development design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses appropriate, coherent, evidence-based choices of content, delivery model and pedagogies • enables equality of access for all participants • enables facilitators/learning managers to make underpinning evidence explicit to participants, take participants’ prior knowledge and contexts into account, challenge existing practice and model new practices • offers opportunities for participants to collaborate, implement new approaches and consider their impact • includes embedded evaluation
<p>Communication and engagement</p> <p>Information about professional development is communicated to practitioners and stakeholders in a two-way process of engagement and feedback</p>	<p>Communication about professional development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describes clear, evidence-based outcomes for practitioners and pupils • demonstrates how the professional development design leads to the intended outcomes • identifies a practitioner learning pathway with progression between learning opportunities • offers opportunities for practitioners to enquire, and receive further information, about content, outcomes, design and model • offers opportunities for tailored professional development where appropriate, without reducing quality

Step	Quality criteria
<p>Delivery and facilitation</p> <p>Professional development is delivered to meet the needs identified and support practitioner learning and practice</p>	<p>Delivery of professional development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is facilitated by trained, expert, credible facilitators • is flexible and adaptable to emerging participant needs <p>Facilitators and learning managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are knowledgeable about their role in and contribution to the organisation, including its strategic objectives • understand how the professional development they are involved in forms part of a wider practitioner learning pathway • are given opportunities to maintain and develop their expertise and to contribute to organisational strategy • represent the diversity of the educational workforce
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Feedback and data are gathered and analysed to identify the impact of professional development from multiple sources</p>	<p>Feedback and data are collected, from internal and external sources, and analysed to provide information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participant engagement • participant learning • impact on participants' practice • impact on participants' colleagues and pupil outcomes <p>Feedback and data are analysed with attention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value for money and time • moderating contexts and influences on impact
<p>Improvement</p> <p>Outcomes of evaluation are used to improve the professional development offer and identify further needs</p>	<p>The outcomes of analysis of evidence and data are used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support professional development designers, managers and facilitators to improve their practice • identify and make plans for improvement • identify further professional development opportunities • communicate with and influence the sector

Table 2. Quality Assurance Criteria

3.3 Quality Assurance Process

Finally, we brought together the flowchart and criteria into a quality assurance process intended to enable self-assessment of DYT's professional development offer. The process (Figure 2) is intended to offer flexible opportunities for self-assessment of quality, through a process applicable to single programmes and activities, including online and in-person learning, including:

- in-depth consideration of a single activity within the professional development offer;
- consideration of a particular step in the flowchart, sampling across multiple programmes.

Against each step of the flowchart, therefore, staff collate evidence mapped to the quality criteria, using this in order to identify and exemplify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement.

Aims

The aims of this quality assurance process are to:

- ensure that the professional development offered by DYT's is high quality
- provide evidence of the processes and systems used to ensure this quality against evidence-informed criteria
- support DYT in ongoing reflection, review and improvement

Process

Staff of DYT:

- review their professional development processes against the quality criteria, identifying and collating appropriate evidence against these, involving colleagues, partners and participants as appropriate
- complete the review template and improvement plan, identifying areas of effective practice, areas where evidence is lacking, and areas for improvement

Outcomes

By engaging in this quality assurance process, DYT will:

- collate and reflect on evidence relating to each of the quality criteria
- develop an improvement plan to further ensure the quality of professional development offered
- develop summaries and overviews (such as a flowchart describing internal processes) which can be used as evidence of the quality of professional development

Figure 2. Overview of the quality assurance self-assessment process

For each step in the flowchart, staff complete a review template and improvement plan (Figure 3). This is intended to prompt reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the offer and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Professional development programme/activity	
NEEDS IDENTIFICATION	
Who has completed the quality assurance of this step? Who has overall responsibility/oversight for this step?	
Quality marker	Practitioner professional development needs are identified using a range of reliable evidence from external and internal sources
Quality criteria	<p>Professional development opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are identified through analysis of reliable data from a range of internal and external sources offer meaningful opportunities for practitioners' learning and development to lead to improved pupil outcomes are aligned with organisational principles and strategies
Overall assessment of quality relating to this process	Fully met / partially met / not met
Summarise the evidence you have used to make your assessment of quality relating to this step	
Examples of effective practice which could be shared internally and/or externally	
What could improve the quality (or strengthen the evidence of quality) relating to this step?	
Next steps for improving quality relating to this step	

Figure 3. Self-assessment template for Delivery and Facilitation

The template offers points of reference where evidence might be found within the organisation and suggested sources of evidence (Table 3 shows these for *Needs Identification*, the first step in the flowchart).

Points of reference	Suggested sources of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners, stakeholders and partners • Research evidence • Policy, inspection and curriculum • Feedback and data • Organisational roles and responsibilities • Organisational strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of processes to collect, analyse and use evidence and information from a range of reliable internal and external sources • Theories of change/logic models showing how planned professional development activities lead to intended outcomes • Details of organisational roles and responsibilities • Organisational planning

Table 3. Suggested points of reference and sources of evidence for *Needs Identification*

Finally, the self-assessment template includes a summary sheet (Figure 4) which brings together the outcomes of the process. This is intended for sharing internally within the organisation and/or externally with stakeholders and potential participants.

Professional development programme/activity		
<i>What is the professional development activity being reviewed?</i>		
Brief overview of the programme/activity		
<i>Details of the professional development activity – e.g. intended outcomes, delivery model, etc</i>		
Purpose/focus of this quality assurance		
<i>Are you considering the whole programme or focussing on particular aspects, e.g. how it is evaluated?</i>		
SUMMARY		
Step	Quality marker	Overall assessment
Needs identification	Practitioner professional development needs are identified using a range of reliable evidence from external and internal sources	Fully met / partially met / not met
Design	Professional development is designed to meet the needs identified, aligning with organisational objectives and principles	Fully met / partially met / not met
Communication and engagement	Information about professional development is communicated to practitioners and stakeholders in a two-way process of engagement and feedback	Fully met / partially met / not met
Delivery and facilitation	Professional development is delivered to meet the needs identified and support practitioner learning and practice	Fully met / partially met / not met
Evaluation	Feedback and data are gathered and analysed to identify the impact of professional development from multiple sources	Fully met / partially met / not met
Improvement	Outcomes of evaluation are used to improve the professional development offer and identify further needs	Fully met / partially met / not met
Areas of strength in this professional development offer		
Examples of high-quality practice in this professional development offer		
Areas for further development relating to this professional development offer		
Next steps following this review		

Figure 4. Summary outcome of the self-assessment process

4. Reflections on our learning

In this section we reflect on what we learned from working through this collaborative, developmental activity and identify some next steps. As we engaged in this process, we learned that, for DYT, the steps described in the flowchart were largely in place within the organisation already, although not necessarily seen as, or contributing to, a holistic quality assurance strategy. Therefore, developing the flowchart and associated criteria led to consideration of the ways in which these processes and their internal quality assurance measures align with the organisation's overall strategy and aims, and how they form a coherent, organisation-wide approach to quality assurance.

Overall, engagement in this process led to:

- consideration of how individual processes of quality assurance add up to a coherent whole, and how these align with organisational aims and strategies;
- reflection on DYT's professional development offer and how to continue to shape this iteratively in relation to the current and emerging needs of the school workforce, such as by updating online content and engaging with other organisations in order to support and improve the professional development offer;
- a review of DYT's quality assurance processes, staff roles in relation to oversight of these, and identification of areas for further development in relation to quality assurance;
- reflective discussion about the quality and strength of the evidence available to DYT staff and how this could be enhanced, using organisation-wide approaches to quality assurance, for example considering how to collect and use feedback efficiently, with time made available to review this.

The process also led to consideration of how examples of quality and other outcomes from the process can be communicated internally with DYT staff and externally with participants and stakeholders. There is a potential tension here between the internal identification of areas for improvement and the external communication of evidence of quality. One possible solution is to focus on different aspects of the process at different times. For example, a self-assessment of an activity at one point in time might be used to ensure the quality of delivery and facilitation with the outcomes shared internally, leading to immediate improvements if needed. This might be followed at a different time by consideration of the evaluation and improvement steps, leading to identification of opportunities for new or follow-on professional development activities which are shared externally with stakeholders.

We encountered some further barriers to engaging in the self-assessment process. These broadly map onto previous experiences encountered in the development of similar processes (see, for example, Chedzey *et al.* 2021). Specifically, the barriers we identified include:

- the time required to engage in the processes of evidence-collation and reflection, and the location and format of different types of evidence;
- the complexity of roles across an organisation such as DYT, with a small number of staff working across multiple steps in the flowchart ;

- the challenges of scheduling self-assessment and communicating its outcomes, as described above;
- self-assessment of varying modes of professional development, such as offers designed for individuals compared to those designed for groups of staff, and in-person, facilitated learning compared with self-directed online activity.

To counter these, we also identified some enablers to participation, including:

- a staggered approach to self-assessment of quality, focussing on different steps in the flowchart at different times, or sampling across different parts of the offer to focus on particular steps within the quality assurance process;
- leadership of the process as one which supports open discussion, reflection and improvement rather than a process of measurement or a 'box-ticking' exercise;
- identification of key staff members to engage with the process, supported with time to collate and reflect on evidence;
- viewing the process as iterative, rather than a static series of steps to be followed, so that quality assurance itself becomes a process which can be further developed and improved.

We end this section by reflecting on DYT's next steps, following the outcomes of this development process. These include:

- creation of a library of evidence for DYT's online and in-person offers, including feedback from participants, which take the form of a summary report on each part of the professional development ecosystem (including resources, courses, community and consultancy) to be provided as evidence of quality;
- consolidation of DYT's online offer and a quality review of particular aspects of the offer, including analysis of feedback from participants, completing a full review cycle to enable prioritisation of future developments;
- increasing engagement with school and multi-academy trust leaders around the professional learning needs of their staff, benchmarking the DYT offer against this feedback as an additional quality assurance metric;
- twice-yearly review of the quality assurance process to reflect on its impact, outcomes and further development, including the identification of new or revised professional development activities.

5. Recommendations

Finally, we offer some recommendations for other organisations considering their own quality assurance processes and for the sector as a whole.

Many professional development organisations have similar quality assurance processes in place already but may not have used them to look across their whole offer to consider its alignment with organisational strategies and aims, or to identify staff roles relating to quality assurance. We hope, therefore, that organisational leads in professional development providers might usefully draw on the processes we describe here to further develop their own approaches to self-assessment and quality assurance across each aspect of their professional development offer.

We recommend that the processes described here, or those like them, are embedded in professional development providers' practice, with all staff offered opportunities to engage, in the collation and review of evidence, reflecting on outcomes and considering how these outcomes might be acted on internally and externally. As mentioned above, we learned that it is helpful to think of the process of quality assurance itself as one which can be improved, and we hope that other organisations will find this a useful way of thinking about it.

As we have described, we mapped the criteria used for quality assurance to some of those already designed in the system. These gave the process an internal credibility which supported engagement. We suggest that organisations adopt similar approaches, for similar reasons. In addition, we might then, as a sector, move towards coherence of approaches to and measures of quality.

Previous work suggests that the outcomes of quality assurance processes are useful for practitioners making choices about professional development (Chedzey *et al.* 2021). Therefore, we recommend that organisations engaging in processes such as those described in this report consider making their outcomes available to potential participants and stakeholders. In the long-term, sharing the outcomes of quality assurance will lead to greater transparency about how these processes take place, a wider understanding of how professional development activities are designed and evaluated, more informed decision-making by school leaders and teachers and ultimately higher standards of professional development for all education practitioners.

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