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# **School strategies for the professional development and support of early career teachers**

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## **Introduction**

This paper focuses on school strategies for professional development and support (PDS) in the first three years of teaching, and early career teachers' responses to those strategies. Survey and case study data from the longitudinal NQTQIS research programme is used to map the changing types of PDS provided to teachers over their first three years of teaching; and to discuss the ways in which school context influences early career teacher learning.

While there is a growing body of evidence in relation to induction, early career teacher development and teacher professional development more generally, (for example see Hobson et al. 2009; McNally 2006; Cordingley et al. 2003; Storey 2009; and Totterdell et al., 2008), there remain significant gaps in the field. As McCormick (2010) points out in a review of school CPD (continuous professional development) literature conducted for the State of the Nation study there are important limitations in the ways in which researchers see professional development. A significant proportion of research into teacher CPD is undertheorised, particularly in relation to CPD processes and how teacher learning takes place (McCormick, 2010). Furthermore, many evaluation studies struggle with the difficult problem of isolating outcomes of teacher CPD in school environments where at any one time multiple initiatives are in place all aimed at raising pupil attainment. So, while many evaluations provide reliable evidence on teachers' perceptions of, and immediate responses to, CPD activity they are unable to evidence impact on pupil outcomes. As Lawless and Pellegrino (2007; p576) conclude from a consideration of international CPD literature:

'Although the number of professional development opportunities for teachers has increased, our understanding about what constitutes quality professional development, what teachers learn from it, or its impact on student outcomes has not substantially increased [since 1999]'.

Turning to the narrower field of early career teacher PDS, the Developing Expertise of Beginning Teachers project (see for example Hagger et al., 2007) is beginning to illuminate how early career teachers learn. However, much of the literature, like the general CPD literature, is undertheorised. A further issue with the early career teacher PDS literature is that it relies very heavily on the perceptions of early career teachers, often omitting senior leaders' perceptions and studies at the unit of analysis of the school.

This paper aims to contribute to filling some of the gaps in the existing knowledge base. First, we present findings on senior leaders' perceptions of the school strategies for PDS and the types and amount of PDS provided in the first three years of teaching and compare these to early career teachers' perceptions of, and responses to, these opportunities. Secondly, we use workplace learning theory to begin to explore the main themes and links emerging from the research. More generally this paper also responds to a further issue

identified in the State of the Nation in CPD study, namely the lack of studies about what teachers and school leaders think about CPD (McCormick, 2010).

### **Findings: Professional development and support over the first three years of teaching**

In this section we draw on senior leaders' and early career teachers' perceptions to map the key changes in schools' strategies for induction, professional development and support, the ways in which this was organised and how it was responded to by early career teachers over the first three years of teaching. We draw on both our survey and case study data.

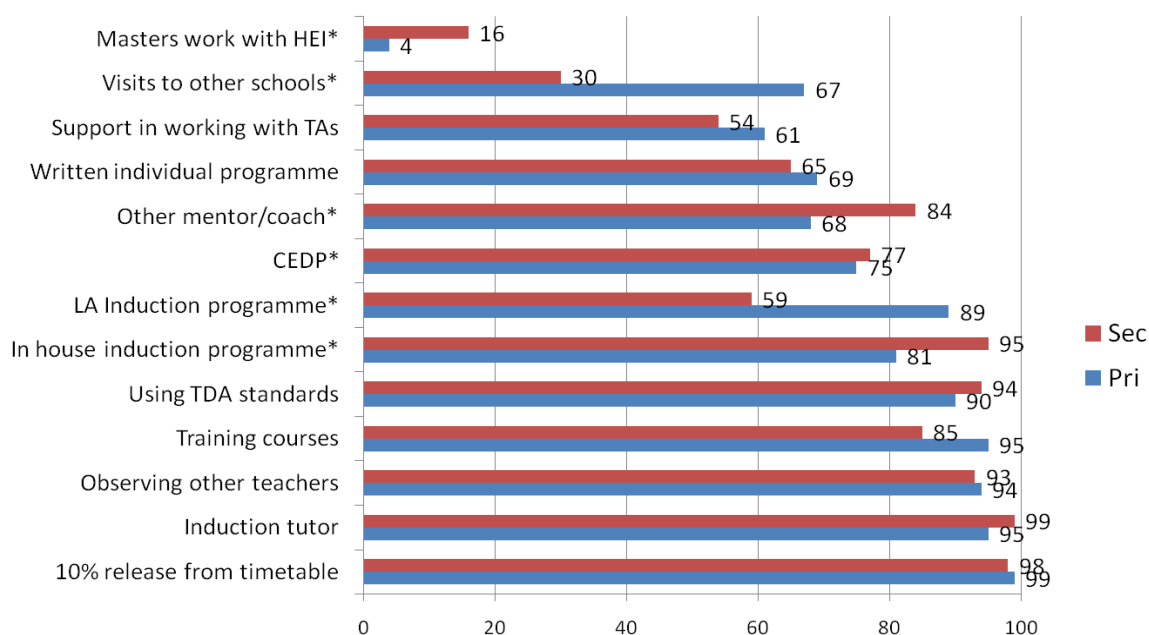
Differences between schools by type and free school meal quartile, as a proxy measure of deprivation of the school population, are presented where they were found to be statistically significant in our surveys.

#### ***Induction year***

Statutory regulations (DCSF, 2008) set out the requirements for all newly qualified teachers to be given a tailored programme of training and support, a reduced timetable and planning, preparation and assessment time. However, early studies of the implementation of these regulations identified a number of issues such as insufficient reduction in timetable, lack of training and support, and lack of consultation with newly qualified teachers (NQTs) about targets and standards (Bubb and Earley, 2006). Our surveys of the induction year indicated that the vast majority (96-97%) of senior leaders considered that they offered a standardised formal induction process for NQTs. As may be expected from the statutory guidance, senior leaders in our most recent survey, conducted in autumn 2010, reported that the most frequently available support to NQTs were 10% release from timetable (98%), provision of an induction tutor (96%), opportunities to observe other teachers (94%), training courses (92%) and use of TDA standards (91%). A more detailed illustration of the range and frequency of support offered is shown in figure 1. Overall, comparing our 2008 and 2010 surveys, we found that senior leaders reported a statistically significant decline in the use of the TDA standards, career entry development profile (CEDP), written individual programmes and the provision of support from a mentor or coach who was not the NQT's designated induction tutor.

As Figure 1 illustrates, we found in all our surveys of the induction year that senior leaders in primary schools claimed to provide more opportunities for NQTs to visit other schools and participate in local authority training programmes than secondary leaders. Conversely, secondary leaders more often said that they enabled NQTs to undertake masters' work, offered in-house induction programmes, provided support from other mentors and coaches and made use of the career entry development profile than primary leaders. Our case studies also revealed that, while it was fairly common practice for secondary schools to start the induction process in June or July before the NQT took up their post, this was the exception in primary schools. Greater use of local authority induction programmes were made by schools in more deprived areas.

Figure 1: Types of induction support offered to NQTs by school type (Senior leader responses - 2010 n=721)



\* = Statistically significant differences between primary and secondary senior leaders responses

While NQTs in our surveys broadly agreed with senior leaders about the relative availability of different types of induction support, they consistently perceived that less support was available than their senior leaders claimed was offered. NQTs also claimed that they spent less time on induction activities than their senior leaders thought they did - the majority of senior leaders (60%) thought that NQTs spent two to three hours per week on induction activities and 28% thought they spent one hour a week, the proportions for NQTs were 50% and 43% respectively.

Senior leaders considered that regular reviews and meetings, an open door policy, clear communication and opportunities to shadow were crucial to supporting NQT development. Around two-thirds of all senior leaders thought that local authority (LA) induction programmes were useful, citing benefits such as networking opportunities, supportive guidance and additional support and training in areas not covered by school-based programmes, including behaviour management and child protection. Senior leaders in primary schools were more positive about LA induction programmes than secondary leaders, mirroring the greater use of LA programmes by primary schools. NQTs' perceptions of LA induction aligned with those of their senior leaders. While the changing educational landscape in England may lead to different arrangements for the provision of induction programmes, it is worth noting here the concerns about LA induction programmes raised by senior leaders, as these will need to be addressed in any future induction provision. Senior leaders in our 2010 survey recommended changes in the content of programmes - in particular: paying more attention to behaviour management, child protection, special educational needs and working with support staff; organising more observations; differentiating programmes so they are tailored to individual NQT's needs; reducing associated paperwork; greater consultation and collaboration with schools to design and

deliver the training; and reviewing logistical issues such as timing and funding that impeded NQTs access.

Other issues concerning the induction year raised by some senior leaders included the importance of adhering to 10% release time and 10% PPA time, ensuring that non-contact time was used effectively, and having a budget that allowed them to offer the types of training and support needed by NQTs.

The majority of NQTs in our surveys and case studies were positive about the induction support they received, particularly citing the importance of relationships with and support from senior leaders, mentors and other staff, and the availability of information on school policies, practices and procedures. However, the small minority of NQTs who mentioned poor experiences during their NQT year also said that they were unlikely to stay at the school.

We found little change in the way induction was managed and quality assured between our 2008 and 2010 surveys. In most schools (93% - 2010 survey) one member of staff oversaw induction and governor involvement was low, occurring in only 13% of schools. Senior leaders claimed that monitoring and evaluation of NQT induction was undertaken in around three quarters of all schools. Differences between primary and secondary schools were evident with a higher proportion of secondary schools (98%) having a member of staff overseeing induction than primary schools (91%) and monitoring and evaluation of induction occurring less frequently in primary schools.

### ***The second year of teaching***

Our case studies illuminated changing PDS needs as teachers entered their second year of teaching. While teachers' PDS needs in the first year of teaching focused on classroom issues, both senior leaders and second year teachers more frequently identified second year PDS needs connected to wider responsibilities than classroom issues. However, it is important to note here that senior leaders more frequently identified that second year teachers had PDS needs related to classroom practice than did the teachers themselves. While needs relating to subject knowledge and pedagogy, classroom and behaviour management and further development of teaching strategies and techniques were the most frequently mentioned, none of these categories was mentioned in more than seven of our fifty case study schools, indicating practice-related needs are personalised rather than common to all second year teachers, or to any school type. However, there was a marked variation in the types of PDS needs connected to wider responsibilities identified by both senior leaders and second year teachers by school type. In primary and special schools, subject, cross-curricular and stage leadership were identified as the main areas for PD and support, which aligns with our finding that primary and special school second year teachers were expected to take up leadership responsibilities at the start of their second year of teaching. These teachers were expected to develop skills in areas such as liaising with colleagues, leading meetings and developing curriculum plans as well as developing understanding related to their particular area of co-ordination. In contrast, senior leaders in secondary schools emphasised the importance of PDS that enabled second year teachers to develop their understanding of the "bigger picture" – such as seeing their role in a wider context, understanding why decisions were made, and developing greater understanding of the school improvement plan, school results, Ofsted and the national picture. Both senior

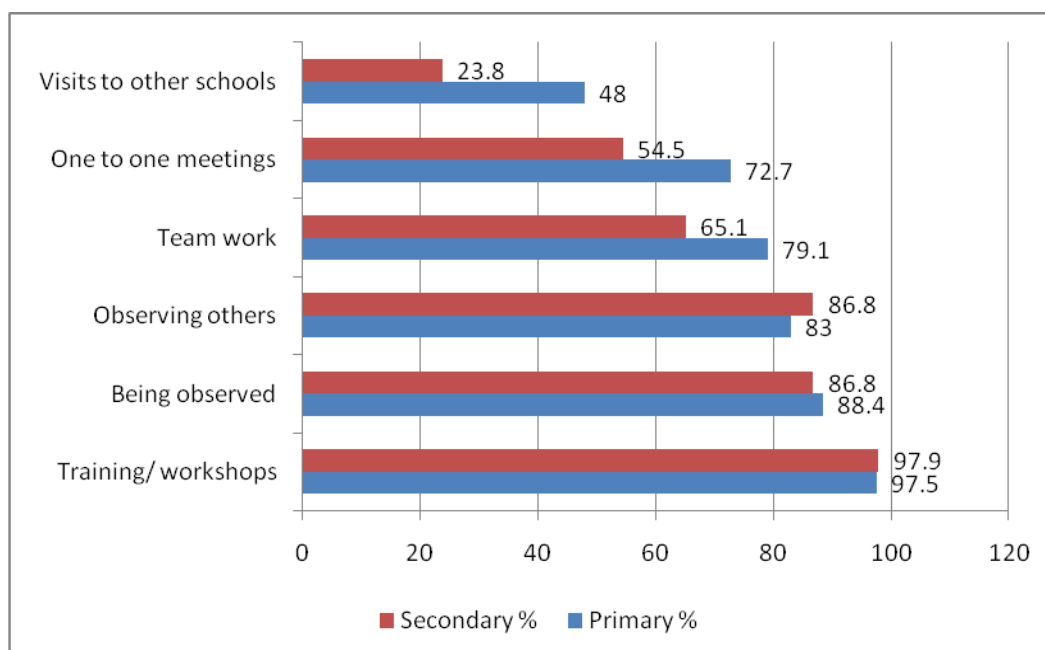
leaders and second year secondary teachers identified needs in relation to generic leadership and management development in preparation for future roles. This different orientation in secondary schools can be attributed to the predominant pattern of progression whereby second year teachers take on additional responsibilities within their departments, such as organising trips or coordinating a key stage, but are not given the broader responsibilities, such as subject leadership, that are expected of primary teachers.

As well as changing PDS needs, the second year of teaching marked a major transition in schools' PDS strategies and processes. The targeted structured support, formal mentorship, dedicated development activities and reduced timetable that had characterised the induction year had disappeared in the second year of teaching in all but a very few of our case study schools. In around half of the schools induction tutors continued to provide informal support, although in some cases this was because the second year teacher's induction mentor was also their line manager. This shift from formal mentorship to informal support mirrors the DCSF *Becoming a Teacher* survey of second year teachers (Tracey et al., 2008). Discrete training programmes for second year teachers were only provided in four of our case study schools, all of which were secondary schools. These focused on preparing teachers for career progression. These schools also provided high levels of other types of support and were high performing schools.

Second year teachers were integrated into the monitoring and support systems applied to all teachers and were expected to be proactive in identifying and taking up training opportunities. Our case studies found that formal support was provided through line management, performance management and associated observations, school-led professional development, and less frequently LA or external courses. Senior leaders placed a stronger emphasis on line management and performance management as support mechanisms than did second year teachers themselves. Figure 2 summarises senior leaders' survey responses in relation to the forms of PDS available in their school for second year teachers. Opportunities to participate in formal training or workshops were available in nearly all schools. These were supplemented in over three quarters of all schools by opportunities to be observed, and, in around half to three-quarters of all schools, opportunities for team work with experienced teachers. Less PDS was available in secondary schools than primary schools, particularly in relation to the availability of visits to other schools, opportunities for team working with experienced teachers and one to one meetings. More support was available in schools in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived areas.

Mirroring the induction year, we found that senior leaders in primary and special schools played a more direct role in the formal and informal support of second year teachers than in secondary schools, where departments were the main location for support and heads of departments played a key role in formal and informal support. Informal support from other staff was both an intentional strategy highlighted by senior leaders and a common and important aspect of the support experienced by second year teachers. Support in primary schools was more widely distributed than in secondary schools, occurring through second year teachers' day to day interactions with their immediate teams, senior leaders and others in key roles such as subject coordinators and key stage leaders. While informal support was also important to secondary teachers, it was usually confined to the teacher's department.

Figure 2: PD and support always and sometimes available to teachers in their second year of teaching by school type (Part 2 Survey - Senior leader responses n=807)



Senior leaders, mentors and second year teachers in our case studies had mixed views of the appropriateness of PDS. Broadly two views were evident - either that second year teachers need to immerse themselves in teaching and the current level and type of support was adequate, or that the transition from the high level of support in the induction year to a much lower level of support was too great and that more specific, but largely informal, support needs to be put in place.

Mirroring the *Becoming a Teacher* study (Tracey et al., 2008), overall our case study second year teachers were positive about the PDS they received, indeed more positive than their senior leaders. Second year teachers in our case studies fell into three groups. The two largest groups were those who felt that they did not need any additional support and those that identified areas where they would have liked additional support, but nevertheless were not dissatisfied with the overall support they received. This second group would have liked a continuation of more formal and structured support and mentoring - particularly through the transition at the beginning of year two. A third small group of second year teachers felt the PDS they received was inadequate.

### ***The third year of teaching***

The third year of teaching marked a more subtle change in PDS than the transition from the induction year to the second year of teaching. As in the second year of teaching, third year teachers in our case study schools were subject to the same PD and support strategies and processes as all other teachers. Only one of our case study schools had a dedicated programme for third year teachers and only a small minority of, mainly secondary, senior leaders identified third year teachers as a group with a distinct set of PDS needs which were primarily related to the development of leadership and management skills. Strategies for PDS in the case study schools were driven by a combination of individual and school related

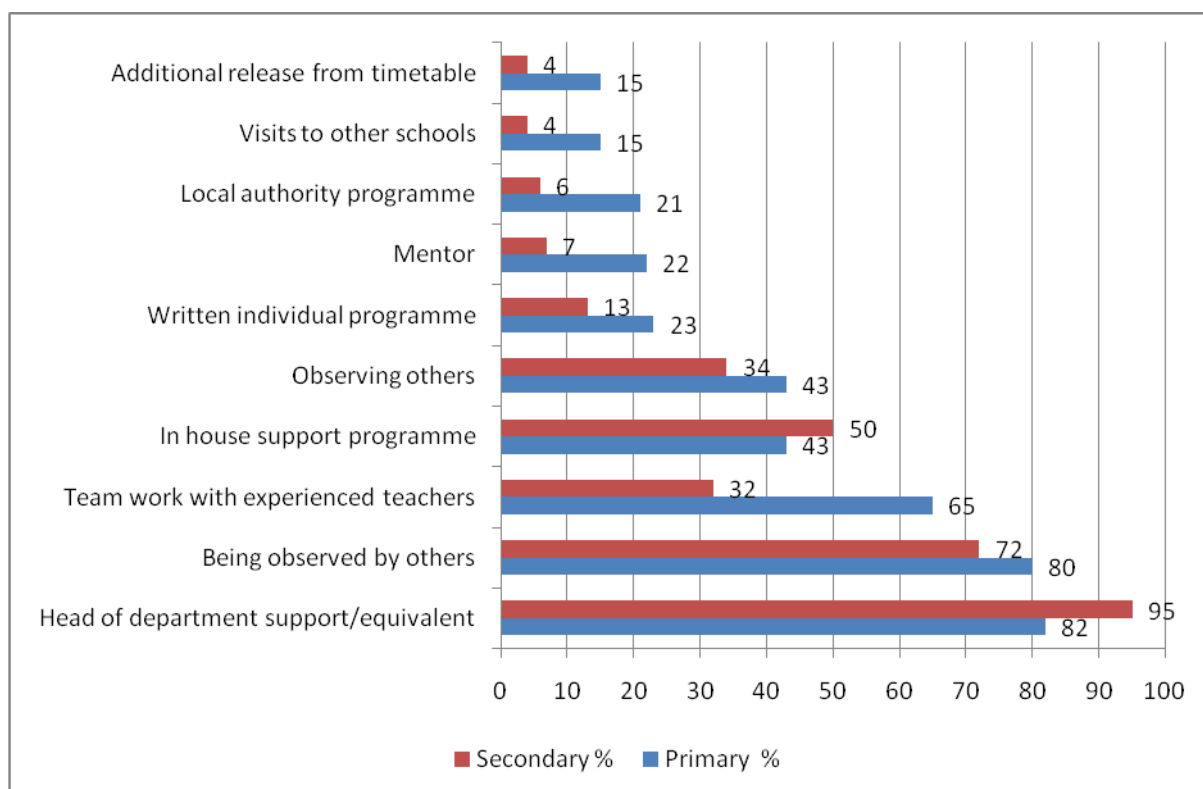
factors: performance management, school needs, national initiatives, individual needs, teachers' new roles and responsibilities and individual interests. Senior leaders rarely referred to a clearly defined PDS strategy, but explained how PDS strategies emerged from a balancing of these drivers and how strategies evolved and changed in response to changes in the drivers, for example the instigation of a new national initiative. The relative importance of the different drivers varied between schools. Responsibility for initiating PDS was generally shared between senior leaders, line managers and teachers. Mirroring the pattern in the first two years of teaching, senior leaders played a stronger role in initiating PDS in primary schools, and departments were more important in initiating PDS in secondary schools. PDS for all teachers, including third year teachers in our case study schools, particularly in-school training, was becoming more personalised. The need for greater personalisation was attributed to the need to meet individual performance management targets as well as a more general recognition that teachers have different strengths, areas for development and aspirations. Some schools had moved from a standard in-house training programme compulsory for all teachers to a more flexible approach that allowed teachers to engage in those aspects that were relevant to them. The increasing personalisation of PDS is important as it offers teachers greater self-direction and control over the construction of their professional knowledge, which has been shown to have a positive impact on both teacher and school development (Kwakman, 2003; Moor et al., 2005).

Senior leaders in our 2009 survey identified that the most frequently available type of support available to third year teachers was support from a head of department or equivalent (Figure 3). Being observed with the associated feedback, team work with experienced teachers and in-school programmes were also frequently provided. As in the second year of teaching, more support was provided in primary schools than secondary schools, and the differences in the types of support available in primary and secondary schools evident in the second year of teaching were repeated in the third year of teaching.

Again mirroring both the second year of teaching and the induction year, third year teachers in our part 4 survey perceived that less PDS was available to them than their senior leaders claimed was in place, although again they broadly agreed with their senior leaders on which types of support were more or less readily available. In our case study schools, third year teachers engaged more often in collaborative activity and networking within and beyond the school than they did in their induction or second year of teaching. More teachers, particularly in secondary schools, were participating in leadership programmes and masters' programmes in their third year than in their second year.



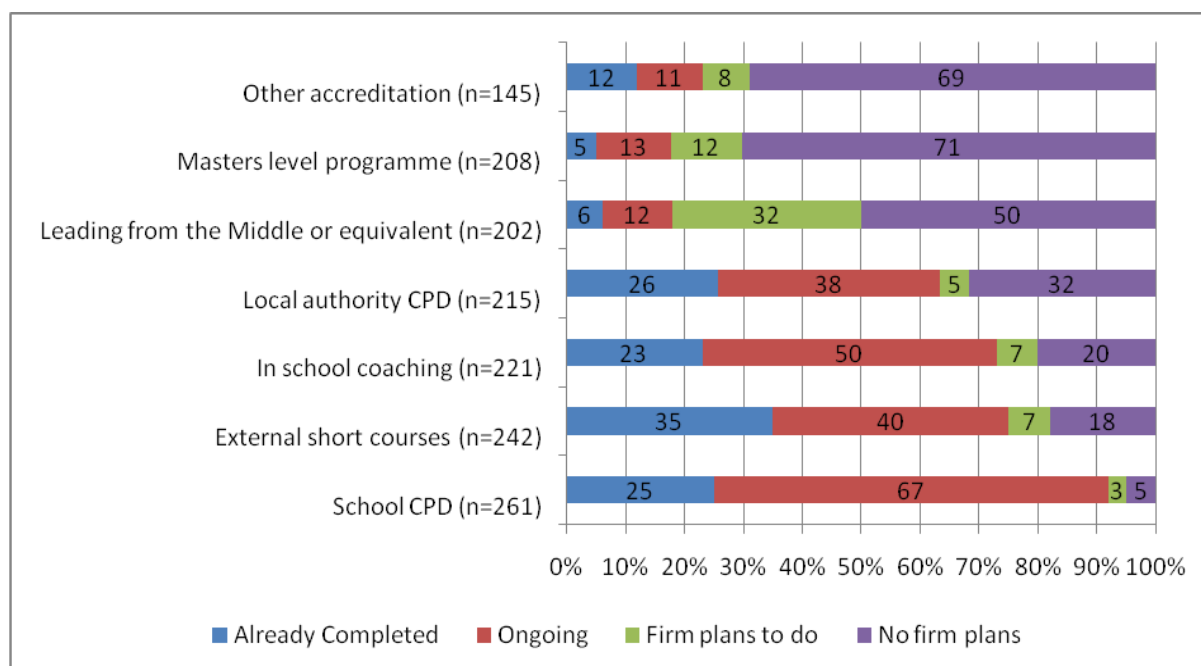
Figure 3 PDS always available to teachers in their third year of teaching by school type (2009 Part 4 Survey - Senior leader responses (n=431))



While our earlier (parts 1, 2 and 3) surveys had focused on the availability of PDS, in our 2009 (part 4) surveys of senior leaders and third year teachers we also focused on the uptake of PDS over the first three years of teaching. The findings on the uptake of PD opportunities from both senior leaders and third year teachers broadly matched our findings on the availability of PDS. As Figure 4 illustrates, most third year teachers had taken part in in-school professional development activities and nearly three quarters in external short courses and in-school coaching. The differences between primary schools and secondary schools in the types of PDS undertaken, with primary teachers engaging more with LA professional development and secondary teachers more heavily engaged in leadership and masters level courses, matched data on the availability of PD activities. Likewise, senior leaders claimed that uptake was higher than reported by early career teachers.

Third year teachers identified encouragement, suggestions and information from senior and middle leaders as the most important school-related factors that helped them take up support, often describing how a culture of support either within the school or an individual department had led them to engage with opportunities. The main barriers to uptake consistently identified by senior leaders, line managers and third year teachers were funding, cover and time. As in the second year of teaching, the majority of the third year teachers in our case studies were positive about the quality and usefulness of the PDS they had participated in and most did not perceive that one type of support was more useful than any other type: they valued both formal and informal support. Again senior leaders were more critical of the quality and usefulness of the support available, particularly LA and some other external courses, although both teachers and leaders valued support from LA consultants.

Figure 4 Uptake of PD activities over the first three years of teaching: (2009 Part 4 Survey - Third year teacher responses)



As in Robinson et al.'s, (2008)'s survey in relation CPD leadership generally, most leaders in our surveys claimed that they evaluated and monitored the impact of PDS. However, when we examined this in more depth in our third year teacher visits to case study schools we found that few had robust evaluation systems. This mirrors the findings of a number of reviews and studies that have collected field data at the school level (for example: Coldwell et al., 2008; Ofsted, 2006). Nonetheless, many third year teachers pointed to links between engagement in PDS activity and positive outcomes. The most frequently mentioned outcomes were changes in classroom practices and/or implementing new ideas and materials. There were also examples of changes in practice beyond the classroom and development in teachers' attitudes and attributes. About one third of the case study third year teachers made links between their engagement in PD and support and positive outcomes for their pupils.

In this section we have set out the main findings relating to PDS from our surveys and case studies. In the next section we draw the threads together by exploring the broader picture of PDS as it evolves over the first three years of teaching.

## Discussion

Over the last fifteen years or so there have been substantive advances in theorising workplace learning. Of particular relevance to this study is Billett's (2008) theoretical frame which conceptualises learning in the workplace as a process that is constructed from two relationally interdependent bases for participation. The first base is the opportunities or 'affordances' that the workplace offers for learning. These affordances take the form of activities or interactions and are shaped by culturally and historically derived workplace values, norms, practices and relationships (Billett, Barker and Hernon-Tinning, 2004). So, for example, a school with a strong culture of collaboration will offer early career teachers greater affordances for learning through activity with a diverse range of more experienced

teachers than a school where collaboration beyond an immediate team or department is not valued. The second base for participation in learning is the way in which individuals chose to engage with the workplace affordances offered to them. Agency, which determines how individuals perceive and chose to participate in workplace affordances, is socially constructed through personal histories (Billett, Barker and Herson-Tinning, 2004).

With the notable exception of the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme study of school workplace learning (see for example Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005) and Burn et al.'s (2010) more recent consideration of learning in the second year of teaching workplace learning theory has not been drawn on widely to theorise teachers' learning (McCormick, 2010). Nevertheless, this theoretically based work together with evidence from studies of both early career teacher learning and teacher learning more generally which are primarily empirical, indicate that access to, the quality of, and the impact of teacher learning is determined by both school level conditions and teacher-related factors (Burn, K. 2010; Earley, 2010; Hodkinson and Hodkinson. 2003). School level conditions comprise both the immediate conditions such as culture, structure, processes, and characteristics of the pupils, and wider factors in the environment of the school such as the characteristics of the school catchment and local and national policy and regulation. Teacher-related factors include their motivations, prior experiences, knowledge and understanding, personality and personal circumstances. These factors affect the ways in which teachers' perceive and engage in PDS opportunities and in turn are shaped and changed by such engagement. In our case studies the interrelationship between school and individual factors was crucial in determining early career teachers' access to PDS, the learning that took place and ultimately the outcomes for themselves, the school as an organisation and the pupils. This paper, however, focuses primarily on school factors, especially those associated with school policy and practice and the ways in which these either created or restricted affordances for learning.

As the preceding section has shown, school strategies for PDS offered in the first three years of teaching changed in character each year. The most substantive change took place at the end of the first year of teaching when the highly structured induction programme of observations, reviews and professional development planning overseen by an induction tutor/mentor and supported by a dedicated programme of in-school and/or LA professional development sessions came to an end. These affordances for learning were replaced in the second year of teaching by the PDS processes that applied to all teachers – line management, performance management, in-school professional development and informal support being the main mechanisms deployed. The focus of PDS in the second year of teaching moved beyond classroom issues to encompass support for actual or future leadership responsibilities. The third year of teaching marked a more subtle change in schools' PDS strategies as third year teachers increasingly engaged in collaborative activity and networking, within and beyond the school, to support their development.

While it may be tempting to conceptualise school strategies and early career teachers' engagement with these as progressing along a simple continuum, it appears from our data that some aspects of school PDS strategies and individual teachers' responses to them remained consistent over the three years. We found consistent differences between primary and secondary schools' PDS strategies and processes. Primary schools offered more PDS opportunities overall, made more use of LA support and offered early career teachers more opportunities to visit other schools. There was also a contrast between the more informal approaches to PDS in primary schools and the more formal support mechanisms in

secondary schools. Early career teachers in primary and special schools received more direct support from senior leaders and colleagues across the school, whereas support tended to be delivered at a departmental level in secondary schools. Our case studies appear to indicate that the monitoring and evaluation of impact of PDS across the first three years of teaching is not robust in either primary or secondary schools.

As the approaches to understanding workplace learning referred to above would suggest, it is also important to recognise that individual early career teachers had differing motivations, aspirations, prior experiences and developmental needs and varied in the ways, and extent to which, they chose to engage with the PDS opportunities available to them. For example, individual teachers in our case studies displayed different attitudes to engagement in PDS that could broadly be described as active or passive; and, viewed from a longitudinal perspective, aspirations to leadership were not an important individual characteristic in the induction year but became a stronger influence in the second and third years;. In some of our case study schools teachers who proactively sought out PDS accessed more opportunities than teachers who did not. It was also particularly striking that in each of the first three years early career teachers perceived that less PDS was available to them than their senior leaders claimed was in place. While it was beyond the scope of this study to generate data on the reasons for this disparity, there were some indications in the case studies that part of the variation may be due to early career teachers holding a fairly limited view of what constitutes PDS, considering it to be mainly course attendance. Other reasons may include PDS strategies set by senior leaders not being fully implemented and a lack of communication of what support is available to early career teachers. However, while early career teachers perceived less PDS was available than their senior leaders, we also consistently found that early career teachers were more positive about the quality and usefulness of the PDS they received than were their senior leaders.

## **Conclusion**

School strategies for professional development and support, and how these are implemented, are key variables, influencing how teachers experience the early stages of their careers. As such, they represent key aspects of the 'affordances' that are provided for teacher learning and have considerable potential to impact both on teacher satisfaction, teaching quality and hence on both pupil outcomes and consequent teacher careers. Our data shows that, in general, these factors change over the first three years of a teacher's career. So for example, while adherence to statutory requirements for induction was a key shaper of PDS in the first year of teaching, it ceased to have any importance in the second and third years. Perhaps more significantly, professional development and support in the first three years of teaching progresses from highly structured support in the induction year to the strategies and processes applied to all staff in the second and third years. However, we also found important differences associated with school context, especially between primary and secondary schools. It is also important to understand that school factors are only part of the picture. The ways in which early career teachers perceive and engage with workplace affordances for PDS, and the outcomes of such engagement is highly influenced by the interrelationship between the individual factors and school context. The rich data from our case studies on individual factors and the ways in which they interrelate with school factors will be reported elsewhere.

**Further information** : For project reports, multimedia items and additional information about the NQTQIS project visit the project web-site at <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/nqtstudy/index.html>

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