



Developing new Learning Developers: survey results and roadmap

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Presentation abstract

Did you know that only 7.7% of new Learning Developers are taught how to conduct a one-to-one tutorial, and only 38.5% are taught how to lead a workshop? (all data according to our survey: Coulson and Crofts, 2023). Despite this, nearly half (45.6%) of new Learning Developers have had the opportunity to complete a Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Teaching in Higher Education, which is not tailored for such an expert role.

Kate and Matt met at the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) conference in 2023 (ALDCon23) in Portsmouth and discussed how new community members develop their expertise. Matt is a new Learning Developer, and Kate has worked in Learning Development for over a decade; they recognised that there was a gap in the ALDinHE Continued Professional Development (CPD) provision and agreed to find out if this was true. This presentation outlined the results of a survey they designed and shared with the ALDinHE community in November 2023. This online survey asked new and established Learning Developers about their experiences of CPD, including what was useful, what they experienced and what would have benefitted them.

The survey showed a clear gap in CPD provision for Learning Developers. Kate and Matt are now in the process of designing a CPD framework that not only meets the needs of new Learning Developers but also enhances the skills and knowledge of more experienced colleagues. Participants had the opportunity to contribute their own

experiences of CPD to the group to enhance further the quantitative data collected in the survey. As part of this session and beyond, Kate and Matt are keen to include community members in the design process, including being critical friends, designing and contributing resources, and teaching development sessions within the framework.

Keywords: Learning Development; CPD; professional development; new Learner Developers; CPD framework.

Community response

The presenters provoked lots of discussion about gaps in CPD for Learning Developers arising from a survey they conducted with a variety of stakeholders in the Learning Development community. They also shared a CPD Framework, which they are in the process of developing for new Learning Developers based on this information. The survey yielded some surprising results indicating that online learning was the preferred mode of delivery for CPD. This led to some interesting debates about why this might be the case, with two attendees stating that practicalities may have informed this preference:

I agree this is likely just easier to fit into our day jobs. I definitely prefer face-to-face but would probably be able to engage more online.

As much as I would love to do this in person, with the time and costs required for travel, it just would not happen.

Another attendee added to this, suggesting that other factors may have influenced the motivation to opt for online learning for CPD, highlighting an important question for debate:

Is it just that we have become used to the convenience of online, since the pandemic? Is it really more engaging?

The survey drew out findings from Learning Developers and what CPD was needed at the early stages of their careers. Interestingly, an attendee suggested that being less experienced may also have shaped preferences towards online CPD provision by stating:

Sticking my neck out here, I would say that those who lack confidence to 'have a go' are less experienced, are more likely to want to 'hide' online...

These discussions provided some interesting and varied perspectives about learner preferences, pragmatics and a change in working patterns since the COVID-19 pandemic, which potentially informed survey results.

One of the presenters posed an interesting question about how attendees themselves had developed the skills and knowledge to be Learning Developers. This led to some engaging discussions and sharing of experiences among two group members regarding their own CPD journey:

In my case, over the two LD positions I have had, it was largely provided by my managers and colleagues, and even then was one-to-one observations with feedback training.

I did a PG Cert in higher education which was very useful in learning some new theory etc, but also useful in learning to articulate what I already practiced in the correct language.

It was evident in the discussions that there were a variety of ways that attendees had developed their skills and knowledge with some recognition that subject-focused teaching was different to Learning Development work and they had to make efforts to translate what they learned in their PG Cert for this purpose. There was also some reflection on other areas of training they would have welcomed to prepare for more complex aspects of the role:

How do you step up into heading an LD team - beyond generic management and leadership stuff, but the decisions you need to take, the implications of your 'service' model, how you manage the policy and committee landscape stuff? I would have loved that.

As part of the session, the presenters shared their ALDinHE CPD Framework Proposal from May 2024 (ALDinHE, 2024, see Figure 1 for a summary). The new framework was

shared and welcomed as an important quality assurance mechanism for new Learning Developers and its mapping to Advance HE recognition was applauded.

Figure 1 - ALDinHE CPD Proposal



The potential to further develop this beyond skills for new Learner Developers was highlighted:

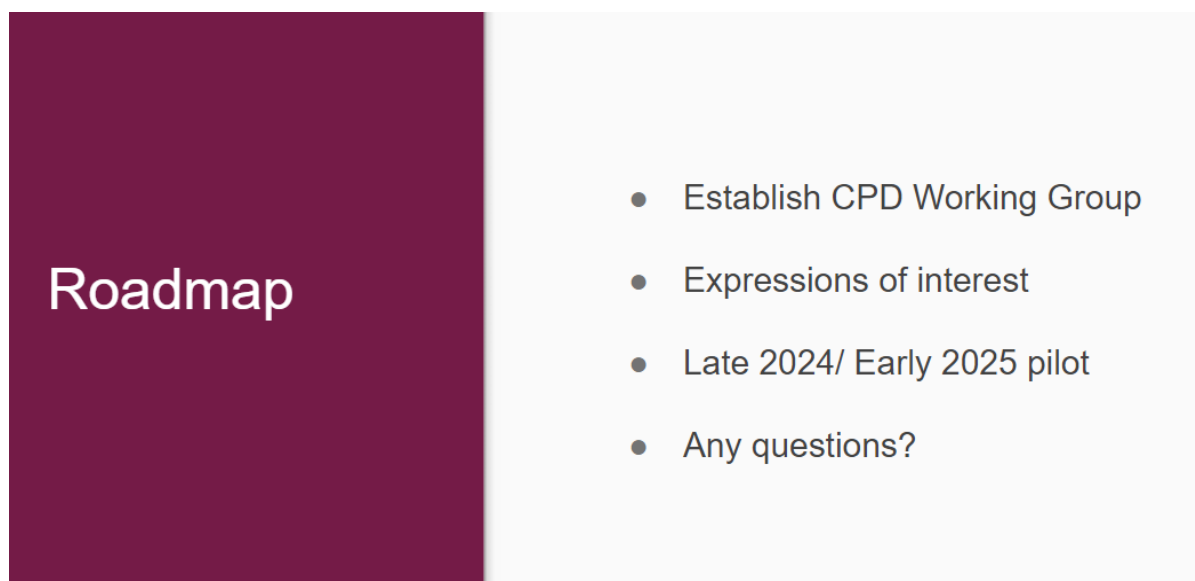
It is a great framework! Once it is tried and tested, up and running, might we extend it to other skills, such as liaising with and influencing subject lecturers?

The presenters were open to feedback and discussed potential train-the-trainer approaches as a valuable way to learn the skills and knowledge to be a Learner Developer.

Next steps and additional questions

The session ended with the presenters setting out their next steps – a call for action to encourage feedback on the new Framework with plans to launch this in the New Year 2025 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Roadmap



Authors' reflection

This session was created intentionally as a forum for the ALDinHE Steering Group (SG) to actively “report back” and share the work of the SG and the direction in which we want ALDinHE, as a community, to travel. Ensuring that the community is part of our work, is well informed, understands our rationale and that it reflects the needs of the community is paramount. This session started that work in a more deliberate way and it went well. The delegates were well engaged, asked probing and thoughtful questions and wanted to support the project and work with us on the pilot and the roll-out.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for CPD within the community; since this session we have been approached by many colleagues about the content of the CPD framework, when it will be rolled out and if they can support and contribute towards it. It is a great reminder that the ALDinHE community really cares about ensuring all members have what they need to be effective within their roles. This is heartening.

References

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience.

The authors and contributors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

Author details

Kate Coulson is an Associate Dean at BPP University with a background in learning and teaching and has worked in the University sector for 20 years. She is a National Teaching Fellow and Associate Professor. She has worked on national and international projects with Advance HE, the QAA and JISC, related to digital skills, assessment and feedback, student belonging and many more. Her role at BPP focuses on Learning, Teaching, Assessment, and the Student Experience across the institution. Generative Artificial Intelligence and how we embed it into the curriculum and assessment is currently one of her biggest challenges and her research interests include the impact of teaching upon student progression and retention, as well as student resilience, critical thinking, and gamification. Kate has published widely and presented at national and international conferences and is Deputy Chair of the Association for Learning Developers in Higher Education (ALDinHE).

Matt Crofts is an academic and library specialist at the University of Hull, specialising in postgraduate students. Matt was awarded his doctorate at the University of Hull for his research on the importance of tyranny to the Gothic mode, utilising a range of Gothic novels and historical eras. Matt's previous publications include chapters on historical figures in MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman in Neo-Victorian Biofictions* (2020), an article in the special 'Alternative Dickens' issue of *Victoriographies* (2018), and a chapter on

Dracula and Castlevania in *The Routledge Companion to Global Literary Adaptation in the Twenty-First Century* (published by Routledge, 2023).

Sam Thomas is a Senior Academic Skills Tutor at Arden University. Prior to this, she worked at the University of Northampton as a Learning Development Tutor and Mentor Manager for six years. She is a Fellow of Advance HE, an ALDinHE Certified Practitioner and an active member of ALDinHE. She focuses on providing support and services to those with additional needs, including improving the accessibility of online resources, and supporting the needs of non-traditional and distance learners.

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