

# Thank you for the days?

**How schools use their non-contact days**

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Karen Halsey  
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>		<b>iii</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>		<b>iv</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE:</b>	<b>The study</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PART ONE</b>		<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO:</b>	<b>Planning and organisation of NCDs</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE:</b>	<b>Format and design</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR:</b>	<b>Content and focuses</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>PART TWO</b>		<b>89</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE:</b>	<b>The intrinsic merit of NCDs</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX:</b>	<b>The extrinsic worth of NCDs</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN:</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>		<b>145</b>



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## ABBREVIATIONS

CDT	Craft, design and technology
CPD	Continuing professional development
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GEST	Grants for Education, Support and Training
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
HODs	Heads of Department
INSET	In-service education and training of teachers
ICT	Information and communications technology
IT	Information technology
ITT	Initial teacher training
KS	Key stage
LEA	Local education authority
LMS	Local management of schools
MLD	Moderate learning difficulties
NCDs	Non-contact days
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NQTs	Newly qualified teachers
NTAs	Non-teaching assistants
PE	Physical education
PSE	Personal and social education
SDPs	School Development Plans
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCOs	SEN Coordinators
SLD	Severe learning difficulties
SMT	Senior management team
TTA	Teacher Training Agency

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) describes how schools are using their non-contact days (NCDs) and examines perceptions of their benefits and effects. It builds on previous research which has raised such issues as the initial negative attitudes towards them, the uses to which the days are put, inappropriate timing, variable quality of professional development provided through them, lack of evaluation, little long-term planning, a focus on institutional rather than individual needs and limited outcomes and impact (Campbell, 1989; Best, 1990; Cowan and Wright, 1990; Bell, 1991; Douglas, 1991; Kinder *et al.*, 1991; Harland *et al.*, 1993; Kerry 1993; Newton and Newton, 1994). The lack of more recent research into NCDs, along with the fact that schools have now had over ten years of experience in organising them, gives added significance to the timing of the study reported here.

The study, which was commissioned by the Local Government Association's Educational Research Programme, collected information on more than 300 NCDs in 66 schools, including primary, middle, secondary and special schools. The evidence was gathered through interviews with a range of staff in schools. Two main phases of fieldwork were undertaken: Phase One consisted of case studies in seven schools and included observations of NCDs, as well as interviews (conducted during the three terms of the academic year 1997 to 1998); Phase Two involved half-day visits to 59 schools, during which two teachers and a headteacher or senior manager with responsibility for professional development were normally interviewed (carried out during the latter part of the summer term of 1998).

The report is divided into two parts: the first, which contains three chapters, considers the organisation and design of the days, while the second, made up of two chapters, examines their perceived benefits and effects.

## 2. THE PLANNING AND ORGANISATION OF NCDs

The key points to emerge from the evidence on the planning and organisation of NCDs (see Chapter Two) are summarised below.

- While the headteacher performed the role of INSET coordinator in about half of the primary schools studied, it was delegated to deputies and other staff in the remaining half. In secondary and middle schools, headteachers seldom retained the role, with most assigning it to deputies or senior teachers.
- Acting as session presenter, influential decision-maker and/or organiser, if not the formal INSET coordinator, many heads saw NCDs as a crucial management and communication tool.

- Before taking up the post, the majority of INSET coordinators had expressed a particular interest in CPD issues and for most the role encompassed the organisation of NCDs.
- Training for INSET coordinators is limited and often takes the form of learning on the job. Less than a third of coordinators had participated in courses that either concentrated on or included topics relating to the management of CPD. However, many of those who had not received training for the role were not seeking it. This lack of demand for further training suggests that either teachers feel readily equipped to coordinate training days, which they liken to a lesson, or there is perhaps a restricted view of the nature and processes of INSET, with an underestimation of the complexity of the tasks involved in effecting school and classroom improvement through CPD.
- Planners faced the challenge of selecting a limited number of topics from a diverse spectrum of needs: individual, school, LEA and Government initiatives. To promote collective ownership and increase the probability that NCDs were well received, most interviewees considered effective consultation to be essential. A large proportion of the schools reported some form of internal consultation – although the extent and methods differed – from individual staff interviews to informal discussions in the staff room. Ultimately, the type of planning and decision-making processes associated with NCDs varied according to the school’s management culture and the particular features of the training day – in-house, externally provided, departmental focus, administration or whole-school issues. However, different tendencies were evident in different schools: in some, the headteacher took on a dominant role; whereas in others, the coordinator led the way. In secondary schools, planning often progressed through committees.
- While it appeared that NCDs were planned over the timescale of a year, there was little evidence of planning for follow-up activities between days.
- Common planning problems centred on the engagement of outside speakers, satisfying a diverse range of CPD needs, tensions between the internal agenda and external directives, and insufficient funding to support the days.
- The research found evidence to corroborate coordinators’ concerns about the limited funding available to facilitate NCDs: on average only 15 per cent of schools’ INSET monies were allocated to NCDs. Questions were raised about the reasons why schools devoted such a low proportion to this end and about the risk of failing to maximise the benefits of the substantial release time resources afforded by NCDs through a lack of investment in their organisation and delivery.
- Although evaluation was reported in most schools, there was less evidence of longer-term inquiries into the effects of NCDs or of the results of evaluations being systematically applied to the planning process.

### **3. FORMAT AND DESIGN**

Chapter Three looks at questions relating to the design and structure of NCDs. The main findings are outlined below.

- There was general agreement that, over recent years, NCDs had become more rigorously planned, more structured, more focused and more relevant. Due to a raft of new initiatives, demands for documentation, policy statements and OFSTED inspections, more topics were competing for attention. NCDs were more likely to be perceived as an integral part of the school's strategic planning, accompanied by a decrease in the amount of time available for individual preparation and planning and an increase in the time spent on whole-school issues.
- Nearly all the schools used the terms 'training days' or 'INSET days' to describe NCDs. The prevailing nomenclature in schools suggests that the days were primarily associated with the CPD of teachers.
- Most schools still take their NCDs as single one-off days, although two aggregated days or twilight sessions were also fairly common.
- The main factors affecting the timing of NCDs were considered to be OFSTED inspections, synchronisation with planning and preparation, and limiting the disruption for staff, pupils and parents. It was evident that factors outside of the school's own control may dictate the timing of NCDs, rather than the school's own needs and preferences. There was relatively little evidence that the focuses of the days or the need to follow up and support ongoing developments determined the timing of the days.
- Most NCDs were held in school, although evaluations indicated that teachers welcomed the opportunity to train in different environments (e.g. hotels, teachers' centres) and saw these as valuable experiences. Some maintained that an off-site venue raised the status of the days.
- It can be difficult to secure the involvement in NCDs of part-time staff, of which there were often many in special schools.
- Discussion in small groups, listening to a presenter, and question-and-answer sessions with a presenter accounted for two-thirds of the activities observed during NCDs. Secondary school NCDs often had a limited and fairly predictable format, with a common design being a whole-staff session followed by small group discussions and then whole-staff group feedback. There appeared to be a greater diversity of methods of presentation and more practical activity incorporated into the days in primary schools, though the range of format still contained little variety. Overall, the data supports

- findings (Kinder *et al.*, 1991) that different INSET cultures exist in the primary and secondary sectors. Primary school INSET was more practically based and directly related to classroom practice, whereas secondary school INSET was dominated by subject-specific input and tended to take more the form of collaborative discussion. The lack of opportunities for secondary school teachers to engage in individual practical activity may mean that direct impact on classroom practice is more difficult to achieve.

#### **4. CONTENT AND FOCUSES**

Chapter Four documents the use of NCDs in the 66 schools involved in this study. Some key points to emerge were the differences in emphasis in the use of NCDs across the school sectors, an emphasis on information-giving, and the tension between meeting school needs within the context of national priorities:

- Secondary schools focused on departmental and school-level issues, whereas a focus on subjects across the curriculum was striking in primary schools. Special schools stood out for their emphasis on the pupil – they used NCDs to address special needs, behaviour, and modification of the curriculum to attempt to meet the needs of pupils, within the National Curriculum context.
- Many NCDs focused on information-giving or administrative matters (such as reorientation at the beginning of the school year), rather than addressing the professional development needs of staff. The days were used in many schools to give staff information about school-level issues, OFSTED and external initiatives.
- Three forms of differentiation by content were identified (i.e. department or team decide focus; different activities are available for staff to choose; groups or individuals are given different tasks) and attempts at continuity in the provision of NCDs were illustrated, though generally, continuity and differentiation by relevance of content did not appear to be seen as key design factors which influenced the choice of content or focus for NCDs.
- The main determinants of the focuses for NCDs were found to be the OFSTED process, the SDP, the specific school context, Government-imposed initiatives and ideas from staff. Within the context of devolvement and school improvement, schools have an increasing range of statutory responsibilities such as budget control, setting targets, and long-term planning and development through the writing of SDPs. However, at the same time, the national context, and the Government's own targets set other and occasionally conflicting priorities for schools. Schools are thus in the position of having to make decisions about the use of their five NCDs, and the tension between implementing their own priorities within a context of national-level priorities is evident. This was particularly clear in primary schools, where there is a requirement that NCDs are used to train teachers in the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy.

- Crucially, there was evidence of two main levels of tension: between school needs and national or regional initiatives and, within the school, between ‘school-level’ needs and the needs of departments or individual staff. With regard to the latter, while the number of NCDs spent on departmental issues in secondary schools signals attempts to provide time for departments, the meeting of individual needs was much less evident. With regard to the former tension, many senior managers were exasperated by the imposition of external requirements for training, partly because they perceived them to disrupt the school’s own established priorities, and partly because they resented being prevented from organising their staff development for themselves. Several pointed to a contradiction between the espoused policies of local management of schools and Government-imposed initiatives, in addition to the demands for career entry profiles for NQTs, appraisal and target setting.

## **5. THE INTRINSIC MERIT OF NCDs**

Chapter Five discusses the intrinsic merit of NCDs, focusing upon staff attitudes towards the days themselves, the benefits gained from the experience and the features of a successful provision. A number of key points emerged.

- An improvement in staff attitudes towards NCDs was apparent, and attributed to schools’ better use of NCDs and a more positive attitude towards training days among teachers new to the profession. There was some indication, however, that staff attitudes were somewhat temperamental or conditional, and that a certain amount of tacit ‘bargaining’ went on in schools in order to improve the palatability of NCDs for staff.
- Diversity in the perceived role of NCDs was evident: for example, whether they were for personal preparation, CPD, or the formulation of policy documents. The lack of explicit clarification regarding the purpose of the days was suggested as a reason for this. Significantly, it was apparent that when the school and staff members were at variance over the purpose of NCDs, it had a negative effect on staff views of the provision they received. Some INSET coordinators reported widespread apathy, resistance and even deliberate hostility to NCDs.
- Interviewees identified a diverse range of benefits that they associated with the experience of NCDs (e.g. guaranteed CPD for all; outside speakers; meeting staff from other schools; working in different environments; time for reflection; opportunity to consider school-level issues; time for staff to interact and work together; and a change from normal duties). The wide-ranging perceptions of merit might be both beneficial and detrimental to staff attitudes. On the one hand, the many perceived benefits could give sufficient scope for most individuals to find elements to value in the days. However, on the other hand, this diversity might render it difficult for schools to establish consensus on what the days were for, and as highlighted above, when in cases where school and staff were at odds over the purpose of NCDs, it impacted negatively on individuals’ views of the days.

- The identified features of successful provision concerned all aspects of the day: advanced and effective planning (e.g. clear aims, staff consultation, linking with the SDP), format (e.g. appropriate timing, structure of the day, varied activities, meeting in teams, good well-briefed speakers, sufficient handouts), content (e.g. practical and theoretical relevance, differentiation), evaluation and practicalities (e.g. good facilities and domestic arrangements), culminating in a sense of achievement. However, an analysis of the NCDs which interviewees nominated as the most and least successful they experienced in 1997–1998 found some variation within and across schools, suggesting how difficult it could be to design an NCD to suit all staff. Given that the experience of the day was found to profoundly affect staff attitudes, this has implications for their perceptions of both the merit and worth of NCDs.

## **6. THE EXTRINSIC WORTH OF NCDs: EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES**

Chapter Six examines teachers' views on the extrinsic 'worth' of the activities undertaken during NCDs, especially with regard to any impact they may have on classroom and management practices. The key findings are summarised below.

- Senior managers, especially those in secondary schools, tended to perceive the effects and effectiveness of NCDs in terms of increased whole-school cohesion, ethos and collaboration, with 'institutional outcomes' as the important impact, particularly those concerned with the development of formalised, written policies.
- Senior managers were less likely to refer explicitly to outcomes related to developments in classroom practices; though when they did, NCDs which were perceived to have had the most conspicuous effect on the classroom tended to be those relating directly to classroom management and teaching and learning styles.
- Both teachers and managers, across all types of schools, drew attention to the superior effectiveness of cumulative training over single one-off experiences. Conversely, at schools where the importance of consolidation and sustained training went unrecognised, NCDs were frequently seen to have little long-term effect. Responses from several teachers confirmed that it can be counter-productive to arouse new awareness, but subsequently deny them the opportunity to assimilate and develop an idea and put it into practice.
- Compared with senior managers, teaching staff were less interested in whole-school outcomes and tended to assign more importance to direct improvements in practice, both within individual classrooms and also within departments. However, as for senior managers, most teachers maintained that direct relevance to teaching and learning was the most important requirement of NCDs, if they were to have an impact on practice. In secondary schools, practical relevance was often associated with time to work in separate departments.



- There was evidence that the quality and range of outcomes can be enhanced for staff who take leading roles in the preparation and presentation of in-house NCDs.
- Perceptions of the effects of NCDs, along with notions of ‘relevance’, varied considerably across all types of schools, and within individual schools.
- NCDs arising from OFSTED inspections were felt to have been very effective in bringing about the changes required for OFSTED in their respective schools (e.g. often ‘informational outcomes’ and/or ‘new awareness’); but the extent to which the impact of these NCDs permeated everyday classroom practice was less easy to determine.
- Tensions frequently arose in meeting the needs and priorities of senior managers, departments and individual teachers. While senior managers often sought institutional outcomes through emphasis on a whole-school approach, their staff frequently preferred to meet as departments in order to advance their own curriculum agenda. Many individual teachers also expressed acute concern relating to specific professional needs of their own, and several were resigned to looking elsewhere to meet these needs. In particular, numerous teachers expressed a strong desire for more time to immerse themselves thoroughly in developments within their own curriculum area in order to extend their subject-oriented ‘knowledge and skills’.
- Features of NCDs which were perceived (to varying degrees) to have limited chances of impacting on practice included: NCDs that focused only on lower-order outcomes (e.g. most frequently, ‘information outcomes’), those ‘hijacked’ by an external agenda, days lacking personal relevance, inappropriately scheduled days and one-off days without planned provision for consolidation, development and review. The last was considered to be a frequent and serious drawback.
- Conversely, NCDs with an increased probability of impacting on practice were deemed to have the following characteristics: a focus on higher-order outcomes, sustained support and CPD, relevance to practice and the learning of pupils, the flexibility to respond to individual and school needs, prior consultation with staff, formats that enhance self-esteem and morale, the involvement of teachers in the organisation and delivery of days, adequate funding to support the days and high-quality speakers.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

While the study has highlighted certain approaches pertaining to the use and organisation of the days which were perceived to improve their chances of impacting on practice, it was found that certain characteristics of NCDs may restrict their capacity to bring about major changes in professional practice. Such characteristics may include the limited resources to support the days and the fact that all staff have to be released on the same day, thus making differentiation according to particular needs

very difficult to achieve. Ironically, the absence of any contact with pupils on ‘non-contact’ days may also be another structural limitation: a number of studies have shown that it is support and training ‘on the job’, namely in the classroom interface between teachers and pupils, that is an essential, yet frequently overlooked, feature of high-quality and effective CPD. In view of these structural limitations, the report concludes by asking whether some of the massive amount of teacher release resources currently tied up in NCDs could not be more successfully deployed in alternative forms of INSET provision (e.g. dissemination/support networks, shadowing, distance learning, vacation courses or short teacher secondments coupled with on-the-job feedback and support)?

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

'Two million days lost' – this challenging assertion by Cowan and Wright (1990) exemplifies the serious questions that have long been raised about the use and value of schools' non-contact days. The ambiguity surrounding their designated purpose, staff resistance to their imposition, the considerable resource implications involved and criticisms of the quality of provision all underline the case for research to address such questions as:

- how are the days being used, in terms of both format and content?
- what merit do teachers see in the five days?
- whose needs do they meet?
- what impact do they have on policy and practice in schools, especially on improving the quality of teaching and learning?

With such questions in mind, the present study sets out to extend the previous research on non-contact days.

### 1.2 BACKGROUND

Non-contact days came into being as a result of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987, which specified that a full-time teacher:

*... shall be available for work for 195 days in any year, of which 190 days shall be days on which he may be required to teach pupils in addition to carrying out other duties; ... (GB. DES, 1987).*

The five non-teaching days became known originally as 'Baker Days' after the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker. Terms used since then have included 'INSET Days', 'Training Days', 'Professional Training Days', 'Professional Development Days' and 'Staff Development Days'. The problem with terms such as these is that they assume that the days are intended for the purpose of providing opportunities for professional development. Indeed, the days do provide such opportunities, but they may also, as Newton and Newton (1994) note, be used quite legitimately for a whole range of different activities, from administration through to staff appraisal. Nothing in the legislation actually specifies that they should be used for the purpose of professional development. Occasionally, the Government identifies certain priority areas for NCDs, which LEAs, as employers, are then encouraged to promote in schools. For the purposes of this report, in order to avoid making any assumptions about their usage, the days will be referred to by the more neutral term 'non-contact days' (NCDs).

The immediate reaction of many teachers to the introduction of the five NCDs, which teachers are now contractually obliged to attend (Campbell, 1989; Gough and James, 1990), was to view them as five 'lost' days from their annual leave entitlement (Best, 1990; Douglas, 1991). Best (1990) comments that some teachers perceived the days as opportunities for 'experts' from outside the school to come in and '*... give their grannies lessons in egg-sucking*' (p. 36). Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) refer to this approach as a '*top down*' model, which then runs the risk of failing to engage staff and thus engendering resistance. However, some teachers adopted a more positive stance, regarding them as important opportunities to invest resources in school-focused training activities, which were often genuinely needs-driven (Best, 1990; Needham, 1991). At the same time, it must be noted that Government imperatives often placed pressures on schools, which led to the emphasis of such days being focused on institutional, rather than on individual needs (Newton and Newton, 1994).

Typically, NCDs tended to be, and often still are, timetabled for the beginning of term, the end of term, or during a half-term holiday, in order to minimise possible tensions between school and home. However, as Kerry (1993) points out, it is questionable whether this timing is the most effective for teachers, in terms of their levels of fatigue and their receptivity to fresh ideas. Furthermore, there is evidence that the quality of the in-service training delivered on these days has been extremely variable (Cowan and Wright, 1990; Bell, 1991; Kinder *et al.*, 1991; Kerry, 1993; Newton and Newton, 1994).

Whilst acknowledging such benefits as more effective staff cooperation, improved strategies for all school systems, the establishment of school appraisal schemes, time and opportunity to exchange ideas, and increased staff awareness, Cowan and Wright (1990) also highlighted a number of concerns. They reported the following problems as being frequently highlighted by respondents in their survey:

1. *School-focused INSET frequently fails to match the needs of the school as a whole.*
2. *Schools fail to ensure that individual needs are met.*
3. *Baker Days are not usually evaluated by staff to ensure both an avoidance of mistakes next time and continuing commitment from staff to any plans or policies formulated.*
4. *Baker Days frequently occur at times which are inappropriate or unhelpful to immediate follow-up.*
5. *Schools have failed to prepare long-term plans for INSET: the themes of Baker Days often occur in isolation and without regard for previous or subsequent activities (Cowan and Wright, 1990, p. 117).*

Kinder *et al.* (1991) voiced similar concerns and noted in case studies of two primary and two secondary schools that NCDs tended to focus on what the authors term '*lower-order INSET outcomes*', such as information-giving, rather than '*higher-order*' outcomes, such as the development of new knowledge and skills. Equally, Campbell

(1989), in a study of 12 NCDs in five schools, found the activities staff were engaged in on the days fell into four categories: '*administration, acquisition of skills, action research and deliberative reflection*' (Campbell, 1989, p. 4). The latter category, which included information-giving, emerged as the most common. In the HMI survey focusing on the LEA Training Grants scheme (GB.DES, 1991), the quality of some NCDs was found to be '*mixed*', follow-up of activities was found to be rare, and the need for closer monitoring of the activities taking place was highlighted.

Kerry (1993) also reported problems with the organisational aspects of NCDs, commenting that it is common for one day to be timetabled at the beginning of the autumn term. This day was widely regarded by the respondents (primary headteachers) in his survey as the least productive and one where there was a danger that it '*... could degenerate into activities as banal as cupboard cleaning*' (p. 27). Other problems raised in this survey focused on the quality of some outside speakers; the fact that new Government initiatives often required changes to planned programmes; the fact that primary schools were not particularly suitable venues for adult training activities; and also on issues relating to the focus and content of the days. Harland *et al.* (1993), in their study of the organisation of LEA and school-managed INSET, including NCDs, raised questions about devolved budgets and the subsequent empowering of school managers, noting that training in the design of effective continuing professional development (CPD) activities was a key need. Furthermore, the study highlighted the existence of teachers' unmet training needs and the problems for schools in effectively identifying those needs.

Despite the concerns raised in his survey, Kerry (1993) went on to conclude that since Cowan and Wright's (1990) study, schools had begun to make more effective use of NCDs. He attributed this, in part, to the experience gained in the intervening period, but also to three '*critical events*' – the introduction through the 1988 Education Reform Act of School Development Plans (SDPs), the continuing devolution of funding for in-service training into the control of schools, and '*... the pace of change which the Government has imposed on schools*' (p. 29). However, he considered that some of the concerns raised by Cowan and Wright (*op. cit.*) did still exist, in particular that the experience of NCDs did not always meet individual needs, and that they were not usually evaluated effectively.

Given the fact that schools have now had several years' experience of implementing such days, the present study sets out to examine the issues highlighted above. It seeks information about more than 300 NCDs in 66 schools, including primary, middle, secondary and special schools. The information was garnered through interviews with a range of staff to obtain multi-perspective accounts of the use of these days, together with perceptions of their effectiveness. The study is particularly timely, given that the issue of raising standards and school improvement is currently high on the Government's agenda, and that the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has identified teachers' professional development as a national priority.

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

In order to facilitate the collection of views on the use and value of NCDs in schools, two main phases of fieldwork were undertaken:

- Phase One: case studies in seven schools during the academic year 1997 to 1998; and
- Phase Two: condensed fieldwork visits to interview staff in 59 schools at the end of that academic year.

A qualitative approach was adopted in order to provide greater validity, through the triangulation of accounts collected through interviews with a variety of school staff, and through observations of a number of NCDs. The fieldwork for Phase One was conducted during the three terms of the academic year 1997 to 1998, and for Phase Two during the latter part of the summer term of 1998.

### **Phase One: the case studies**

The case-study element of the research was conducted in three primary schools, one middle school and three secondary schools in three different LEAs (one small unitary, one medium-sized metropolitan and one large county authority). These schools were approached on the recommendation of their LEA, because it was felt that they illustrated successful, or interesting practices in the organisation and use of NCDs.

- School A, a primary school in a large county authority, had 330 pupils on roll aged between four and 11, plus a 65-place nursery catering for children between the ages of three and five. The staff numbered approximately 35: 18 teachers plus support staff. The school, one of the largest in its LEA, was in a social priority area. Pupils came from two different areas of the town, one more affluent and middle-class, the other older and less prosperous.
- School B, a primary school in a small unitary authority, had 231 pupils on roll aged between four and 11. The school was staffed by nine teachers and five non-teaching assistants (NTAs), and was situated in a medium-sized seaside town.
- School C, a first school in a medium-sized metropolitan authority, had 318 pupils on roll, aged between four and nine, plus a 40-place nursery and a staff of 12. The school was in an area where there was little movement in the housing market and few social problems. It was a popular, oversubscribed school.
- School D, a middle school in a metropolitan authority, had 400 pupils on roll, aged between nine and 13, and catered for children from a whole range of social backgrounds.
- School E, a secondary school in a large county authority, had 505 pupils on roll aged between 11 and 16 and some 32 members of staff. However, the pupil figure was described as '*moveable*', because 45 per cent came from army backgrounds and so did not tend to remain at the school for long periods of time. Another 40 per cent came from a fairly deprived council estate in the

area, while the rest of the school population came from a variety of backgrounds, mainly rural, although there were now pupils attending from several surrounding commuter villages. The age profile of the staff had changed quite dramatically over the past five years, so that there was now quite a range of age and experience.

- School F, a large secondary school in a small unitary authority, was an 11–18 split-site school with 1,547 pupils on roll from a wide and varied area. It had an intake of 291 per year, slightly skewed towards below-average ability, with a fairly established staff of 92 fte. The school, situated in a medium-sized seaside town, was a popular choice with parents and had been oversubscribed for the last few years.

School G, a secondary school in a metropolitan authority, catered for pupils from the age of 13 to 18 and had, at the time of the study, 408 pupils on roll, with approximately 40 members of staff. It had been on special measures, but was now no longer in this category. Its pupils came from diverse areas, some from a large council estate on the outskirts of the town, the rest, of which 22 per cent were from ethnic minority backgrounds, from the inner-city areas. The pupil intake was heavily skewed towards the less academic.

### ***The case-study fieldwork***

The fieldwork was carried out by three researchers who visited each of the schools between November 1997 and July 1998. On an initial visit to the school, retrospective accounts of the NCDs which had been organised at the start of the academic year were gathered from the headteacher and the INSET coordinator of each institution (in one of the schools, the headteacher was also the INSET coordinator).

Subsequent NCDs in the schools were then attended by the researchers in order to observe the types of activities on offer. Researchers attended for the full day as non-participant observers, making notes on the sessions they observed. These varied from whole-staff sessions to departmental or key stage sessions to, in some cases, teachers working individually in their own classrooms.

The researchers attended all the whole-staff sessions and visited as many of the others as possible, in order to ensure that a full range of subject/key stage areas was observed. Each of the observed NCDs was followed by a further visit from the researcher a short time afterwards, to interview the INSET coordinator, together with up to four members of staff (including heads of department/subject coordinators and a range of teachers), about their experiences of the day. This approach allowed a rapport to develop between the researchers and the staff of the schools, and thus, it was felt, reduced the risk of negative reactions to the observational techniques being used.

Detailed information about 35 NCDs (five days in each of the seven schools) was gathered in this phase of the research. Initial interviews were conducted with the headteachers and INSET coordinators in all seven of the case-study schools. Ten subsequent interviews with INSET coordinators were then carried out, together with

three other senior manager interviews. A total of 34 teachers were interviewed in connection with the observed NCDs, 28 of these once and three twice. In all, 12 NCDs were observed by the researchers during the case-study phase of the project.

### **Phase Two: visits to 59 schools**

The sample for the second phase of the research comprised 30 secondary schools, 20 primary, three middle and six special schools. It must be stressed that the schools were self-selecting rather than nominated by their LEAs as examples of good practice. Given this fact, it would seem probable that many of these schools felt confident about their use of NCDs and were therefore likely to represent better practice. Letters were sent out to three random samples of schools, inviting them to take part in the study. A response rate of 51 per cent was achieved with 70 schools agreeing to take part. Fifty-nine of these in 35 different LEAs then formed the sample for the second data collection method. The LEAs involved in this phase of the study were predominantly medium in size. The types of LEAs involved were as follows:

- Inner London 1
- Outer London 1
- Metropolitan 13
- Unitary 13
- County 4
- Wales 3

Seven of the 30 secondary schools in the sample catered for pupils from a mixed socio-economic area, ranging from fairly disadvantaged housing to some quite affluent. Six schools were situated in areas of socio-economic deprivation, with high levels of unemployment and poor-quality housing. Five of the schools were in rural areas and two in inner-city locations. Interviewees in six of the schools indicated that they were in areas where a selection system was in operation. Thus, according to the senior managers interviewed, the top 20 per cent of pupils were being '*creamed off*' by the local grammar school, and they were being left with the small number of pupils who did not take the 11-plus, together with the larger number who had failed it. Staff felt that this was a big issue, which could then have implications for staff development. Three of the schools were selective themselves. Interviewees in one other school identified its intake as being of higher than average ability. Staff in three of the schools indicated that the issue of special educational needs (SEN) was a significant one for the school. Two schools were single-sex, one a girls' grammar school and one a boys' secondary school.

In 11 of the secondary schools in the sample, the staff was established with little turnover (although one or two noted the beginnings of change), while in five, a significant change in the staff profile of the school in the last couple of years was reported. Interviewees in nine of the schools referred to a good balance of staff in terms of both age and experience.

Of the 20 primary schools in the sample, ten were situated in quite diverse areas, with a mix of housing, ranging from families on income support through to those from



professional backgrounds. Two of the primary schools were in urban areas, two in what staff termed '*advantaged*' areas, and two in rural areas. Four of the schools reported a significant SEN problem. In nine of the primary schools, the staff was mixed, with a good balance of age and experience. In four schools, recent changes had altered the staff profile quite significantly; and in another four, the composition was currently undergoing a change. In three, the staff was experienced with little turnover.

Two of the three middle schools in the sample were in rural areas with a spread of pupils from varying backgrounds. Both catered for the full spectrum of ability, though in one, it was slightly skewed towards the upper end. In one, the staff was stable and long-serving, whereas the staff profile in the other had changed in the past year as younger staff had joined the school. The remaining middle school, also with a stable, well-established staff, reported a changing pupil intake. They were finding an increase in the numbers of underachieving boys, and more instances of children with behavioural problems moving into the area, both of which had implications for staff development.

Typically, the six special schools in the sample catered for pupils from a very wide area, with pupils sometimes having to travel quite a long way by bus. Three of them were designated schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), two for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and one for profoundly deaf pupils, most of whom used sign language. In two of the schools, the staff was experienced and long-serving, while in another two, there had been a major turnover of staff in the last few years. Senior managers in two schools noted that, in general, they would have more support staff than was normal in mainstream schools. One headteacher commented on the difficulty of recruiting new staff with experience of SLD, now that special needs no longer featured as part of initial teacher training (ITT) programmes.

### ***The fieldwork in the 59 schools***

The equivalent of half a day's fieldwork was conducted in each school and typically included interviews with a senior manager (often the headteacher) and/or the INSET coordinator and two members of the teaching staff. The interviews were structured to gather information on the organisation and implementation of NCDs in the school, together with staff opinion on their effects and value. With one or two exceptions, the interviews were all recorded and were then analysed in the form of transcripts.

The number of staff interviewed comprised:

- 59 INSET coordinators;
- 27 senior managers; and
- 108 teachers (including heads of department or faculty, subject and/or key stage coordinators and nine newly qualified teachers – NQTs).

The number of years spent teaching varied from less than five to over 20 years, with the vast majority having spent between one and ten years at their present school. A wide range of subject responsibilities was evident in the sample.

In this phase of the research, information about 296 NCDs was gathered (five in each of the 59 schools, plus a sixth day in one school which devoted a day's holiday to National Literacy Hour training).

Finally, it should be stressed that the number of schools in the study was too small to be considered representative in any strict statistical sense. Equally, the schools themselves were self-selecting rather than being nominated as examples of good practice. As previously acknowledged, their confidence in putting themselves forward for the study is likely to have resulted in the sample being skewed towards schools which are more effective in the organisation and implementation of NCDs. At the same time, the use of visits, observations and interviews, as opposed to questionnaires being sent out to schools, allowed for the gathering of in-depth and multi-perspective accounts of the events and activities which took place during the NCDs.

#### **1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The report draws on both the case-study data and the data from the interviews conducted during the half-day visits to the 59 schools. It is divided into two parts: the first, containing Chapters Two to Four, considers the organisation and design of the days; while the second, made up of Chapters Five and Six, examines their perceived benefits and effects.

##### **Part One**

Chapter Two focuses on the planning and organisation involved in NCDs. It looks first at the backgrounds of those responsible for organising the days. It then describes the training they received and whether there was felt to be any need for further training. Alongside this, the chapter examines the consultation processes involved in the planning of the days, together with the funding issues which underpin them. Finally, the chapter discusses the role of the headteacher and the evaluation that follows NCDs.

Chapter Three begins by considering the history and development of NCDs, including the different nomenclature given to them. It then examines the format of NCDs, in particular the factors which influence the timing of the days, how they are taken, where they are held, which staff are involved and the ways in which different activities are presented.

Chapter Four focuses on the content of NCDs. It looks at what the days are used for, presenting an audit of the focus of the days held in all 66 of the project schools. It then moves on to examine the factors which influence the content of the days, and the demands they placed on schools.

##### **Part Two**

Chapter Five is concerned with teachers' experiences of NCDs. It considers staff attitudes towards the days and describes the perceived benefits of the days themselves (their intrinsic value). It ends with a consideration of the factors which result in successful quality provision.

Chapter Six goes on to examine teachers' perceptions of the outcomes of the days in terms of their effect on the school as a whole, and of their impact on classroom and management practice (their extrinsic value). It considers whether the provision is felt to meet teachers' needs in terms of its impact on practice, and includes teachers' suggestions for areas for development in order to improve the level and/or type of impact.

The report concludes with a chapter that highlights the main findings of the study and points to possible implications for future practice in the design and implementation of NCDs.



# PART ONE

## CHAPTER TWO

### PLANNING AND ORGANISATION OF NON-CONTACT DAYS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on aspects of planning and organisation which precede an NCD. It begins by looking at those responsible for organising the day, INSET coordinators, in particular their backgrounds and the training that they receive. Attention is directed to the different forms of consultation used to formulate a training day agenda, followed by a summary of typical approaches, with reference to timescales and some of the problems encountered. The chapter ends with a discussion on the role of the headteacher, funding issues and evaluation procedures.

#### 2.2 INSET COORDINATORS

A key player in the orchestration of NCDs is the INSET coordinator, variously referred to as a staff development or professional development coordinator. For the purpose of this report, however, the title of 'INSET coordinator' will be used. In this section, we focus on who performed the role of INSET coordinator, how they became one and the training they received for this role.

#### Backgrounds of INSET coordinators

In the sample of 66 schools, this role was performed by staff at all levels of the teaching profession: heads, deputies, senior teachers and teachers. Overall, as depicted in Table 2.1, deputy heads were the most likely personnel to perform a coordinating role, followed by the headteacher.

**Table 2.1 Position of INSET coordinator**

<b>INSET coordinator</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
Headteacher	12	1	2	2	17
Deputy head	8	3	14	1	26
Senior teacher			5	1	6
Head of dept			3		3
Teacher	2		6	2	10
Shared role	1		1		2
No information			2		2
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

Notable differences emerged when comparing primary with secondary schools. In primary schools, the role of INSET coordinator tended to be retained by the headteacher, while in the secondary school system, and in three of the four middle schools, this particular remit was delegated to deputy heads. Indeed, in only one instance, did a headteacher of a secondary school 'formally' take on the role of coordinating INSET. In another case, the new head, having moved up the ranks from deputy, was about to transfer the INSET duties to another colleague. INSET coordination within secondary schools, by virtue of staff numbers, tended to be a more extensive and time-consuming process, and one which the headteacher was more likely to assign to another staff member.

Primary schools, by comparison, have a much smaller staff base and, perhaps, for this reason, control over staff training is more likely to be retained centrally by the headteacher. In about half of the primary schools studied, the headteacher undertook the role of INSET coordinator. At one primary school, both the headteacher and deputy head officially shared the duties of organising INSET. It is worth noting that in schools where the head did not assume an official coordinating role, it was not unusual for them to exercise substantial control over staff development. This is discussed further in Section 2.4.

### **Appointment, selection and the role of INSET coordinators**

From the interviews in the seven case-study schools, it was possible to trace the processes by which teachers had come to assume responsibility for the coordinating role, as well as its remit.

In most cases, individuals coordinating INSET had expressed a prior interest in CPD issues. One coordinator, for example, had been a representative on the INSET committee at their last school. Another had previously been involved in careers development and facilitation of counselling courses. Hence, the teachers undertaking the duties of INSET coordination had either applied for their teaching posts because of the staff development component, or had volunteered, or had been nominated for the role because of their prior interest in professional development issues.

Allocation of responsibility in some schools was related to personal preference. In one school, for example, the deputy wished to focus on SEN, so the head undertook INSET coordination. At a secondary school, CPD was originally linked to student welfare and guidance, which in time, was perceived as too large a role for one individual. Hence, on retirement of a colleague, the opportunity was taken to segregate the tasks and appoint a separate INSET coordinator. In addition to making this a more manageable role, the headteacher hoped it would serve to raise the profile of in-service training and ensure a closer match between overall school development and the individual professional development of staff.

The tasks of INSET coordination generally encompassed a remit for organising the five NCDs, or their equivalents. However, in one school, the INSET coordinator dealt solely with the training budget and application for external courses; it was the headteacher who assumed responsibility for staging NCDs. In another school, the

INSET coordinator played no part in budget management, but did undertake organisational tasks associated with NCDs. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the role of the coordinator may differ depending on the nature of the school, as well as the focus of particular NCDs.

### Training received to support the INSET role

During the interviews, individuals were asked to give details of any training, informal or formal, that they had received to assist them in the tasks of planning and organising INSET. Generally, experiences of training that specifically covered the INSET coordinating role were limited – just ten of those responding to the question of training had attended courses that specifically concentrated on INSET.

Overall, five different categories of response were obtained – coordinators spoke of:

- specific training courses for organising NCDs;
- support/advice from their LEAs;
- on-the-job training;
- previous work experience which they found relevant and helpful in coordinating INSET and;
- no training at all.

A summary of their responses is presented in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 Training received by INSET coordinators**

Training	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Special	TOTALS
Courses on INSET	5	1	3	1	10
Other courses	3		8	1	12
Advice and support	9		9	2	20
Learnt on the job	5		10	2	17
None received	3		8		11
Previous experience	4		5		9
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum up to the total number of schools, due to a combination of non-responses and multiple responses.*

*Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

The table shows that 22 individuals recalled having courses which made reference to INSET, although only ten of the courses were specifically designed to address INSET issues. Amongst those ten individuals, one coordinator had attended a support group which ran sessions on ‘the role of the INSET coordinator’, ‘the changing role of the INSET coordinator’, and the ‘coordinator of OFSTED’. Another teacher at a special school had no previous knowledge of CPD issues prior to appointment as INSET coordinator and identified this as an area of development. S/he subsequently attended a course, over several days, which looked at job descriptions and ways of helping staff

develop. In terms of their value, participants in training directly related to INSET, commented that generally the courses were ‘*relevant to school needs*’, ‘*useful*’ and helped provide guidance on the potential uses of the days.

Some interviewees described other courses that were not specifically orientated around INSET but included some coverage of issues pertaining to CPD and the INSET coordinator role. Four individuals out of the 12 falling into this category of training experiences were currently undertaking or had completed higher education courses, with modules on staff development, while eight others had attended courses which referred to INSET in passing:

*I, personally, have done an MEd module on staff development which looked at what was considered to be good practice in terms of delivering INSET. So, that’s the formal training, but it wasn’t given to me by any particular school because of a role; it was just part of my Masters course (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*I’ve attended numerous courses on management and organisation, so as part of those, we’ve had sessions on INSET training (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Many coordinators felt they had ‘*learnt on the job*’ through observing colleagues, learning from their mistakes and liaising with the previous coordinator. Generally, this was viewed as an obvious, valuable and effective means of acquiring the necessary skills, although in some instances, it may have been the only option available:

*I’ve observed colleagues and learned from colleagues in peer tutoring or from my old head. [I] watched the way [s/he] delivered training days and picked out the bits that I felt had been useful and then used it myself, but I haven’t had any specific training (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Other interviewees referred back to previous experiences, which they felt had prepared and aided them in taking on the post of INSET coordinator. Pertinent experiences included organising seminars and involvement in staff development as a head of a department.

Less than a third cited support and advice from their LEA in the form of meetings, network groups and consortiums. These provided opportunities for training and information exchange:

*We do support one another within a local consortium. We are an LEA school and annually we have a day or half a day for INSET coordinators (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*I belong to a networking group, where all the staff development coordinators meet and share good practice. Next year they are planning to have a day which is across the whole county (INSET coordinator, secondary).*



In five cases, such support was reported to have ceased or been reduced, possibly reflecting the devolvement of funds from LEAs in recent years:

*There's a programme that's put on by the LEA for INSET coordinators. We used to meet three times a year, and also they did put on a day course to support newcomers, if you like, being INSET coordinators. Those meetings now seem to have disappeared – whether that's to do with funding or whatever, I don't know (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Eleven individuals reported having received no training or support at all, informally or formally.

Having explored the training experiences of those organising INSET, a further question was posed to ascertain whether or not there was a perceived need for additional training. Eighteen individuals answered positively to the suggestion of further training, while 13 individuals indicated that they would not welcome such opportunities. Of those that responded positively, two expressed a need for training at the start of their INSET role, two made requests for good practice guidelines, one individual wanted guidelines for managing the INSET budget and three respondents supported the idea of additional training, but were concerned about time and cost implications:

*I would have appreciated something, but, by the same token, we have so much pressure on time and so little finance to release people for training that I think I would have taken the view that I would rather spend any time working things out for myself and another member of staff go for their own development (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Amongst those who rejected the notion of further training, the following rationales were offered: training would not be relevant, demands on their time would prohibit training, they could learn from the headteacher and because of their experiences, further training would be superfluous. Interestingly, of the 11 individuals who reported having received no form of training at all, only two interviewees responded entirely positively to training in the future. Others held reservations over costs, demands on their time and relevance of courses.

During the interviews, several teachers used the analogy of comparing a training day to a lesson – they believed the organisation, presentation and format of a training day corresponded very closely to that of a lesson. Indeed, when asked to comment on features which contributed to a successful training day, many teachers used the example of a 'good lesson', with thorough planning, a clear focus and some form of reflection afterwards. Their experiences as teachers were therefore deemed to equip them with the requisite skills for both organising and facilitating training events. In one instance, the suggestion that they may require training was promptly dismissed:

Interviewer: *Have you had any training?*

Interviewee: *No, nor would I. People are intelligent who are in this job and we don't need to be told how to do everything (headteacher, middle).*

*I think we are good at actually doing the training, because that's basically our bread and butter anyway. We train the children. We are teachers anyway and I personally don't think we need any training on what to look for and how to organise that (senior manager, secondary).*

*We have done it from experience. After all, it's a teaching exercise. We bring our teaching skills to an adult situation (INSET coordinator, primary).*

While some aspects of a training day may indeed correspond to those of an average lesson, there are other features which arguably stand in contrast. Firstly, the target group is a professional, adult one. Secondly, the aims of a training day are diverse, seeking to address a wide range of needs, from improving individual teacher practice through to coverage of national directives such as the Literacy Hour. Thirdly, the five days, or their equivalents, are often dispersed throughout the year, creating challenges in terms of continuity and cumulative benefits. Fourthly, for some, coordinating NCDs requires an awareness of the institutional context in which they are organised and an ability to manage the intricate processes of organisational change and teacher development. From this perspective, it is possible that some coordinators, therefore, underestimate the complexity of effective CPD and assume that their professional training as teachers adequately prepares them for a coordinating responsibility. For some interviewees, this attitude was associated with an overly narrow view of the challenges inherent in the management of change through CPD. This point was raised by the following INSET coordinator, who had recently undertaken a higher degree with modules on CPD:

*It gave an opportunity to look outside your school, look outside the LEA, look national and see what was going on – the types of activities undertaken – and giving you a wider view of the whole programme, so that you were able to come in with a much wider understanding of the whole concept (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Another interviewee from a primary school indicated that the 'process' of INSET was not immediately transparent and that training would have served to enlighten them on the overall picture of whole-school improvement:

*I think that [training] actually would have been useful, in terms of gaining an overview of the process ... I started two and half years ago ... and I see now very much the process of ... it's a cyclical process of individual needs and school needs feeding into the School Development Plan and then that developing the need for INSET and so on ... so I think that would have been pretty useful originally, on a process level (INSET coordinator, primary).*

In this sense, NCDs are more than isolated one-off opportunities for whole-school training. Instead, they can be viewed as pieces of a larger jigsaw which constitutes the overall school development process. Hence, planning an NCD not only requires consideration of short-term outcomes related to particular days, but an understanding

of how those outcomes feed into the entire INSET process, which may extend over a two- or three-year period.

Having discussed the background and training of those with a designated INSET role, we now move on to consider the broader planning and organisational aspects.

### **2.3 PLANNING AND PREPARATION OF NCDs**

Senior managers and INSET coordinators were asked to detail the planning and organisation preceding NCDs. This section therefore discusses consultation processes, typical approaches to planning and timescales and gives consideration to some of the problems encountered whilst planning an NCD.

#### **Consultation**

Examination of the planning systems revealed that programmes for a training day were often generated from a broad consultation exercise, drawing opinion from personnel both within and outside the school. Internally, staff, senior management, the head, governors and the staff development committee exerted some influence on the focus and format of NCDs. Externally, schools mentioned approaching other schools and their LEAs.

Most schools described some form of consultation in the initial planning stages. In only two schools did the coordinator perceive planning as a solitary activity, on account of there being little interest from colleagues and a concern that other staff would leave planning until the last moment. A more common approach was to invite comments from fellow colleagues or sometimes to extend the consultation process beyond the school parameters.

Approximately two-thirds (42) of the 66 schools reported approaching staff for ideas and suggestions in the lead up to NCDs. Teacher interviews revealed the benefits of embarking on a comprehensive consultation process. Firstly, according to the teachers' perceptions, consultation increased the probability that topics would be relevant to all staff, not just senior management, and the days, therefore, would be more likely to be effective in terms of their impact on practice. Secondly, some interviewees felt that consultation demonstrated that their opinions were valued. Not surprisingly, therefore, in those schools where genuine consultation took place, staff attitudes to NCDs were often more positive. In one secondary school, consultation took the form of a questionnaire to staff, leading to recommendations submitted to the staff development committee. The efforts made to consult staff were rewarded and teachers' perceptions of the days were notably positive:

*They've got to meet the overall school targets, but if you've got that right, they're going to meet the individual needs of the teacher. So to make sure they've been consulted somewhere down the line is important (teacher, secondary).*

*Taking into account the staff body's view is important ... but they've been brilliantly planned, asking staff to put in ideas (teacher, secondary).*

Again, in a primary school, consultation ensured that staff needs were met as much as possible. In this case, staff were able to make recommendations in team meetings; a questionnaire was circulated on an annual basis; and once an agenda had been drawn up, staff were again asked to comment. Hence, when one teacher was asked if the days could be improved at all, s/he explained:

*Not really, because we are given the time when we can allocate when we want them and what we want to do in them, so the only way we can improve them is by ourselves, and by saying 'we can use the time for this, this and this' (teacher, primary).*

By using this type of approach, it was felt that staff were given every opportunity to influence the content of training days and as a result, they are given a sense of ownership and an increased probability that their needs and the school's needs would be met. Thus, in terms of effective practice, it was often maintained that the success of a training day was deemed to correlate with the degree of consultation.

As well as surveying staff generally, 27 schools consulted within the structure of senior management team meetings and 25 singled out the headteacher as a key individual in consultation. Secondary schools demonstrated a preference for staff development committees, which drew together representatives from all strata of the school system to discuss staff training.

Twenty-four schools specifically mentioned contacting their LEA advisers for guidance or session facilitation. Another eight schools bought in other external consultants for facilitating specific sessions. Another form of external consultation entailed liaising with other schools in the area. Some schools were involved in pyramid days, which necessitated liaison between feeder primaries and their secondary schools. Alternatively, schools sometimes joined forces to address issues of shared interest. By such means, combined INSET budgets permitted contributions from external speakers:

*We have had INSET with other schools. We share a site with the [X] school. We both needed an INSET day on special needs. So we combined that and we combined with another school for a day on differentiation. We had an outside speaker, so we shared the cost (headteacher, primary).*

The exact details of how consultation took place were not always relayed in depth, but three main vehicles for canvassing opinion emerged from the interviews. Ten schools used a questionnaire, often at the beginning of the year as part of a general staff audit to identify training needs:

*Suggestions from individual members of staff are encouraged. In fact, we have a form that goes round when we review the subject in terms of where we're to put the funding for the following year. Every coordinator reviews it and in that form there are areas identified from INSET and they can put in there if they feel there are strong areas (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*I do give out a questionnaire once a year in which I ask people personal training needs and if I see a trend running through them, when I am analysing information, then I will organise something for the whole-staff to deal with that (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Six schools reported holding individual staff interviews, although these would often take place as part of the broader process of school and professional development. The following comment from a primary school coordinator describes how interviews were held to pinpoint individual staff training needs, as well as whole-school needs:

*Every year during the late spring or early summer term, every member of staff has an individual staff interview – it might last ten minutes, it might last an hour, it depends – where we look at what they feel they need. They are given a questionnaire beforehand and they bring that in with them. So I have tried to focus their thoughts and they bring that in and they talk about what they feel that they personally need in terms of development, and what they feel the priorities for the school are (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Meetings provided the most frequently used forum for discussion and included general staff meetings, meetings of the senior management team and, in secondary schools, staff development committees. At these meetings, ideas would be shared and decisions made as to the topics for forthcoming training events, followed sometimes by delegation of tasks. Many staff in small schools felt they were at an advantage, as concerns could surface regularly in meetings and ‘*the school is small enough for informal communication to operate*’ (headteacher, small secondary).

*On the staff development committee there’s a member of the admin. staff, NQTs, heads of department, heads of faculty, coordinator for assessment, the school improvement coordinators and some basic Main Professional Grade teachers. In terms of planning the day, I tend to do it, and then go back to them and say ‘What do you think of this?’, in terms of how we structure the days; whether they’re compact days or whether they’re longer days, that’s a decision of the committee (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*At the senior management meetings we look forward to the first three [NCDs]. It would be identified by the needs of the School Development Plan and there’s the input from the staff development committee ... It’s interesting to hear the perspectives of the staff, as well as the management (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

One secondary school presented plans for NCDs through a school bulletin, on which staff were invited to comment.

### **Approaches to planning and organising**

Given that training days varied across and within schools, planning and organisation were not only unique to individual schools, but also to individual NCDs. Hence, even within a school, the planning processes were modified according to the topics covered and the personnel involved. For example, the organisation preceding input by an LEA

adviser, may simply involve a series of phone calls and possibly a planning meeting between the adviser and INSET coordinator. This contrasts with days used for administration purposes, where planning and organisation may be allocated to department heads. It is, therefore, almost impossible to identify a 'typical' approach to planning an NCD. However, excerpts are presented below which exemplify a range of planning and organisational approaches, but more specifically, serve to identify the locus of decision-making power, by focusing on the chain of communication and discussion which precedes formulation of a training day agenda.

In a minority of schools, the coordinator took a solitary lead role in organising and planning. Both of the following comments originate from heads who also took responsibility for INSET coordination:

**Coordinator-led**

*Depending on what the session is going to be on, I do the majority of it. I am probably a control freak really ... but it is always me that does the training (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*Basically [it's] me. I do involve anyone I need to involve. This year the issues have been largely management issues, like the development planning. I have in effect done it (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

More commonly, NCDs would arise out of some form of collective discussion and collaboration. Already in this section, senior management teams, staff development committees and staff meetings have been mentioned as mechanisms for consultation. However, it is the order in which they are consulted which is most illuminating. While staff development committees were convened to specifically discuss and share ideas around staff training, the decision-making power often remained with senior management:

**Senior management team-driven**

*... in our senior management team, the decision-making forum, having considered the recommendations of the staff development committee and [the INSET coordinator's] recommendation, we agree what the topic of the training days is going to be. [The INSET coordinator] then puts together some kind of schedule for that day and runs it past me (headteacher, secondary).*

In some instances, the senior management team would also assist in the organisational aspects of NCDs:

*[We] do the planning during SMT meetings – divide up the tasks (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

The headteacher was often cited as a key individual during the consultation process and in some schools, they exercised 'the final say':

**Headteacher influence**

*There's a senior staff meeting every week, where [the INSET coordinator] would come with a plan for the INSET day. Obviously the head has the final say into what goes in (senior manager, secondary).*

A joint working arrangement between the head and coordinator also emerged from the interviews and usually entailed the coordinator sounding out and discussing ideas with the headteacher, before making them public to the rest of the staff:

**Coordinator-headteacher driven**

*I speak to the head first of all and we gather any current information. I have a meeting with her yearly, specifically to set up the next training days. I go away and get on with it and organise it. I formulate the agenda, take it back to the head. S/he looks at it and says 'It's all right', or not as the case may be, and I pass it round the staff (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Alternatively, planning may involve other staff, such as heads of department or subject coordinators. The following remarks from a case-study school first describes a whole-school consultation process leading to a checklist of training needs, followed by liaison between the INSET coordinator and curriculum coordinator:

**Democratic consultation**

*It's agreed by the whole-staff, because the development plan is a big consultative process, so everybody is involved with knowing what the plans are, where we're going, what our training needs are going to be ... Following the planning, what will normally happen is that the curriculum coordinator and staff development coordinator will get together and then come back to the management group with their recommendations for training. It then becomes a joint decision based upon their recommendations (headteacher, primary).*

Planning frequently included reference to the SDP and it was in this way that staff were given an opportunity to indirectly affect the focus of training days, some time prior to the actual event. One primary case-study school described how 'starting right from the beginning, we start with the development plan, and then the management plan, which is taken from the development plan and that prioritises the INSET for this year'. Another coordinator described a ground-level consultation process, culminating first in the overall SDP, followed by identification of training needs:

*I work with each head of department on their review and development plan each year. We then produce the development plan for the whole-school. Before they write their plan, they interview each member of staff and talk to them about their training needs and then through that they identify what the department needs are. From the development plan, I then write a training plan, which takes all the areas people have asked for training and then I take the standards fund money and allocate it to that plan. From the training plan, we identify the training needs of the school (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

NCDs which included a presentation by outside speakers required a different form of planning and involvement by staff – generally less, because the external contributor would organise their own input. The following extract describes the liaison which occurred between a school and an outside facilitator:

*So we may well need an adviser, and so then the SMT will contact the Advisory Inspection Service and we will contact the very best person who can help us with that, and they will, either by telephone conversation, or they'll actually come into school, discuss with us what we want from the day. They'll then take away with them anything from the school that they feel will help them in planning their bit of the day (INSET coordinator, special).*

Ultimately, planning and organising proceeded according to the particular features of the training day – in-house, externally provided, departmental focus, administration or whole-school issues. However, preferences did emerge when looking at the chain of consultation. In some schools, the headteacher took on a dominant role; whereas in others, the coordinator led the way. In secondary schools, planning was often actioned through committees.

### **Timescale**

Some coordinators were able to provide details of the time taken to plan and organise NCDs, although often the information lacked precise quantification, and was relayed using phrases such as ‘not long’ and ‘it varies’.

Ten schools stated that the time taken would vary, depending on the topic and whether or not an outside speaker was involved. External speakers usually organised their own sessions and, for that reason (rightly or wrongly), less time went into planning. Eleven schools estimated that planning took between half a day and a day. One particular school was able to give an hour-by-hour breakdown of the activities leading up to a training day: six hours getting the focus right, through various discussions; one hour seeking approval from the senior management team; two hours for the housekeeping arrangements; and three hours for financial arrangements: giving a total of 12 hours planning and organising time. One school which used SMT meetings as a planning forum reported using just one hour to plan a day, while another presented plans to the SMT a month in advance.

The following comment from a coordinator in a case-study school demonstrates a fairly typical time investment:



*Well, the actual venue and booking the venue and sorting the venue out, and who was coming to the venue, I would say, between the head and myself, took maybe a couple of hours. Actually planning the morning session took roughly, I would say, about a quarter of a day, because we actually spent half a day myself and the other teacher running the morning session, on planning the whole series of sessions which were two sessions together ... and I think the other member of staff who ran the afternoon session planned the other part, probably in the same sort of timescale. So in total, I would say about half a day plus a couple of hours in terms of planning time (INSET coordinator, primary).*

One issue for consideration is the degree to which training days were planned as discrete, one-off events or whether they were viewed as a connected, coherent programme of training activities over a year, from which cumulative benefits could be derived. Chapter Five highlights the value of continuity between training days, based on teachers' requests for cumulative training. Hence, descriptions of the planning process were trawled to see the extent to which this occurred. One secondary school coordinator viewed the planning process as an ongoing activity taking place throughout the academic year:

*In my mind, I try to look at the whole year, but along the way people will come and ask for particular topics to be covered. It's almost ongoing. It doesn't actually take long to sit down and do it, but the thinking process takes place over a very long period, because all the time you're watching the school and thinking 'What do they need?' (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Very often priorities for the days were extracted from SDPs, or sometimes OFSTED recommendations, and topics were then allocated to the five days. In this sense, the days were indeed conceived as part of a year-long programme, with some thought given to them at the beginning of the school year, or occasionally at the end of the previous year. Such early planning would generally be limited to specifying dates, identifying issues and booking speakers. Nearer the time, further planning would then proceed to deal with the practicalities of individual days – e.g. agreeing an agenda, informing other staff, collecting resources, etc. From a planning perspective, therefore, there was some evidence of an 'NCD programme', typically stemming from action points within the SDP:

*We don't plan days in isolation from other development – other plans that are either ongoing or about to come into operation (INSET coordinator, middle).*

*What we don't do is say 'We have got this day, this day and this; what are we going to do with it?', which, I think, is what a lot of other people must do, because the days are all set up in advance. We are driven by need and plans (headteacher, primary).*

There is less evidence, however, with regard to continuity of planning between days. While many of the schools reported undertaking evaluation following a training day, very few mentioned incorporating this feedback into subsequent training days:

*It's important to bear in mind how the staff felt. If it was perfect, which it never is, if it was perfect, then you are on track and you have got your plans for the next training day, but if you to modify it, you have to bear in mind their comments (INSET coordinator, special).*

*It [the evaluation] asks for comments – further suggestions, what you thought was good or bad about the day. I collect those in and keep them here and see if there's anything I should be organising as a follow-up for the day (INSET coordinator, special).*

The relationship between evaluation and planning will be covered in more detail later in this chapter.

### **Problems encountered**

INSET coordinators were asked if any problems arose during the planning and organisation of NCDs. The most frequently stated concern related to the engagement of outside speakers – an issue raised by Kerry (1993). Fourteen individuals cited this particular problem, mainly in terms of identifying good-quality speakers, but others commented on difficulties agreeing dates, cost implications and speakers who failed to deliver what was agreed. The following remarks serve to elaborate on some of these problems:

*The school had many phone conversations with him, printed out and distributed the handouts and then, during his presentation, he departed from what was agreed and reverted back to his usual content that he had given in many other schools (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*The people we need seem to be booked up far ahead of us. It seems that all schools have the same problems and getting the same people to come in and talk about the issues. They're all private, all booked up, all over the country (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*Within the school, one problem is finance. There are some people I would love to bring in, but I can't afford to (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

During the teacher interviews, a good-quality speaker was highlighted as a feature which made for a successful NCD, with specific references to good presentation skills, charisma, appropriateness of delivery and the ability to offer a fresh perspective. Thus, teachers clearly valued the contributions made by speakers, but stressed that they must be of the highest standards.

Several interviewees cited the challenge of '*pleasing everyone*' as a problem in the planning stages and the issue of differentiation emerged in all types of school. In a special school which catered for children between the ages of two and 19, a common approach was '*difficult to achieve*'. In secondary schools, there were often tensions

between addressing whole-school issues and allowing time for staff to tackle departmental tasks: *'The biggest difficulty is meeting the needs of all departments for departmental time'* (headteacher, secondary). In a primary school, the INSET coordinator explained that requests for training came from a number of different sources and *'that's one of the big problems with organising them, because there are people saying "I want to have training on such and such" and there isn't one route; they come in from everywhere'*. Those planning the days clearly struggled to achieve a balance and adequately differentiate the training programme, in order to satisfy a diverse range of needs and interests:

*There is always a problem though – a tension between whole-school issues and departmentally based issues. What heads of department really want is time in their departments. Some would see the whole-school issues as being less important, so we try and get the balance right* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

One interviewee acknowledged this particular difficulty and consciously incorporated the issue of differentiation into the planning process:

*If people's perceived needs are not met, it can be more frustrating than trying to put something on in the first place, which is why we have a big thing about INSET differentiation. People get angry if the work is not appropriate – just like in the classroom. They are all at different stages of their professional development* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

Tensions were also evident between tackling internally generated issues and giving due coverage to national directives. Government initiatives, such as the National Literacy Hour, were viewed by some to reduce the flexibility of training days, as well to upset prearranged planning for the year – a point forcefully made in the comment below:

*But I really do object when you have them sort of planned out on your school plan and you're having to change them at a moment's notice. That really cocked it up beautifully this year. We have our own priorities in school, as well as the Government initiatives, and I felt they've just been dismissed, but within this school those other issues really are important* (INSET coordinator/headteacher, primary).

Another source of friction was when LEAs stipulated the dates for some NCDs. An INSET coordinator of a primary school pointed out that firstly, if schools in the area all had to share the same days, then it was more difficult to book trainers and secondly, LEA-scheduled days did not always suit the particular needs of the school. S/he especially disliked having to split up the days and would have preferred to put a block of three at the beginning of the year, in order to concentrate on literacy training.

Clearly, those planning an NCD must juggle not only the competing needs of departments, individuals and the whole-school, but also satisfy the demands of Government and LEA directives.

A different problem concerned inadequate funding – not enough to furnish staff with lunch, not enough to bring in good-quality speakers and not enough to invite non-teaching staff, such as lunchtime supervisors. (This is examined in more depth in 2.5.) Other points raised by interviewees, when asked specifically to comment on planning problems, included time taken to organise the day, not enough time on the day to complete objectives and not having the support of the head.

## 2.4 THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER

The headteacher's role has already been mentioned with respect to planning and organising an NCD, but because of their unique position in the school, their contribution warrants further attention.

In 17 schools, of which 12 were primary, the headteacher assumed responsibility for coordinating INSET provision. In these cases, the head played a pivotal role in the planning, organisation and, when appropriate, the facilitation of NCDs. However, in the remaining 50 schools, where the role was formally relinquished to another colleague, often a deputy, the headteacher would sometimes continue to play a significant part in the orchestration of NCDs. The interviews demonstrated three different forms of involvement: session delivery, decision-making and organisation.

Not surprisingly, as a central figure within the school, the head often opened proceedings on the day and, in some cases, presented sessions, particularly if it was within their realm of expertise and knowledge.

### **Session presenter**

*[I] do make input to training days personally ... almost invariably I begin the training day with a little launch, objective setting, that sort of thing. Sometimes, I make specific inputs, for example, I am a trained OFSTED inspector and when we were preparing for inspection, I made a specific input about inspection (headteacher, secondary).*

In 22 of the schools, where the head did not assume a coordinating responsibility, the head still made a considerable input at the planning stages of NCDs. This figure increases if one includes participation at SMT meetings, which were frequently used as a forum for discussion and planning. Otherwise, the headteacher sometimes led staff consultation, or undertook one-to-one liaison with the coordinator, before submitting ideas for wider discussion. Indeed, this close working relationship between the head and coordinator was cited by several interviewees and the final programme was often a product of joint consultation.

### **Decision-making**

*My input from the headteacher's point of view is really negotiation with the INSET coordinator and SMT and, ultimately, staff, on what we actually cover as content and organisation in terms of the INSET days. I don't dictate them, but I do play quite a strong lead in that (headteacher, primary).*

*My deputy does the hands-on work, and the admin. side. But, it's a joint decision as to what the programme's going to be and what our thrust will be for the following year. We will talk about it and then go to the staff and get staff agreement. I'm involved, but it's my deputy's position (headteacher, primary).*

A third way in which the headteacher assisted in the preparation for NCDs was through organising specific aspects: sometimes particular sessions which they had chosen to facilitate because of their relevant experience and knowledge, or, sometimes, whole-days. In one case-study school, the INSET coordinator was more concerned with managing the GEST budget and applications for external courses, while the head took responsibility for coordinating aspects of the NCDs. Very often, an individual's involvement, whether a head or a teacher, would depend on the topic for discussion and who was best equipped to lead the session.

### **Organisation**

*The INSET days, I usually organise. But, having said that, I'll ask the [subject] coordinators, if it's a particular focus from them, to actually organise the day from time to time. So it really depends on what we do (headteacher, primary).*

The case-study interviews served to illuminate the reasons as to why headteachers, although not officially undertaking the role of INSET coordination, still made a considerable input, either in planning, organisation or presentation of NCDs. They spoke of maintaining an 'overview', providing a lead, and generally ensuring that on a macro-level, the needs of the school and/or the staff were being met:

*I feel that it's important that the impetus does come from me, that if we are going to move in a certain way, that people know what my views are, without it being a dictat ... I feel that I do need to be involved in setting out the stall of where I see the school being in the next five to ten years and what I want for the kids here. The staff need to know that, need to know where they stand within the organisation and what I expect of them, which is why I do like to, as I say, be involved on most of the days as the leader (headteacher, secondary).*

*So, in a sense, I am steering and I have an overview ... so I think I have just got to be aware of that, have that overview and push or shove or direct, sow a seed in whatever direction is appropriate (headteacher, primary).*

Clearly, as headteachers, the above individuals are concerned with the long-term development of their school, encompassing staff training issues which they are ultimately accountable for. Demands on their time require that, in many instances, the role of coordinator must be allocated to another member of staff, but in order to retain a strategic overview, headteachers frequently '*lead from behind*'. Accordingly, for many heads, it would be true to say that NCDs constituted a very important management and communication tool.

## **2.5 FUNDING ISSUES**

Those planning an NCD no doubt give consideration to the funds available to support various activities. For instance, schools may have to assess the benefits of contracting an outside speaker against in-house events, which incur little cost by comparison. Hence, this research sought to estimate the funding available for NCDs and how that money was used.

LEAs are invited to apply for grant support under The Standards Fund (formerly GEST fund), which offers 20 different grants, including, amongst others, school effectiveness, school leadership, National Literacy Strategy and drug prevention. The school effectiveness grant, in particular, is intended to meet the costs of teacher training in schools. The DfEE Standards Fund Circular 13/97, (GB. DfEE, 1997) relating to the financial year 1998–99, sets out the content and purpose of the grant, of which there are three elements:

- a standards and effectiveness grant, which is a formula grant (calculated according to number of schools or pupils) and is devolved to all LEA maintained schools;
- a post-inspection grant devolved to recently inspected schools; and
- an LEA priority grant directed by LEAs.

The first two elements are devolved to schools, and the DfEE stipulates that at least 80 per cent of this devolved money should be channelled into the training of governors, senior management, teaching and non-teaching staff. Within the Standards Funds, other grants also relate to school training needs, for example, part of the National Literacy Strategy grant can be used to fund staff cover for five days, during which the literacy coordinator disseminates work to other staff.

Funding for NCDs may therefore stem from a variety of sources, although largely from the standards and effectiveness grant. Schools in Phase Two of the research were asked to provide details of their INSET budgets and the proportion spent on NCDs for the financial year 1997–98.

It should be noted that different interpretations of what constitutes an INSET budget make it very difficult to draw reliable comparisons from the information collected. For example, the respondents did not always offer itemised budgets or explain where those budgets originated from. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 are therefore tentatively provided with this caveat in mind.

Average values have been calculated, accompanied by the range of values obtained (e.g. the lowest percentage spent on NCDs through to the highest). In some cases, budgetary information was not available.

**Table 2.3 Average (1997–8) INSET budget and range of reported budgets reported in Phase Two schools**

	<b>Primary</b> n = 15	<b>Middle</b> n = 1	<b>Secondary</b> n = 29	<b>Special</b> n = 5	<b>Combined averages</b> n = 50
Average budget	£4,270	£4,500	£14,798	£3,998	<b>£12,941.85</b>
Range	£2,030- £8,471	£4,500	£3,500- £44,000	£2,250- £10,000	

*Source: data collected from Phase Two interviews.*

**Table 2.4 Average percentage of (1997–8) INSET budget spent on NCDs in Phase Two schools**

	<b>Primary</b> n = 7 %	<b>Middle</b> n = 2 %	<b>Secondary</b> n = 23 %	<b>Special</b> n = 4 %	<b>Combined averages</b> n = 36 %
Average	15	31	12	22	<b>15</b>
Range	1-50	10-51	1.5-33	6-55	

*Source: data collected from Phase Two interviews.*

The average 1997–8 INSET budget for Phase Two schools was £12,941.85, of which an average of 15 per cent was spent on NCDs (i.e. £1,941.28). Broken down, this meant that the annual average amount spent on NCDs in primary schools was £640.50 (£128.10 per day), compared with £1,775.76 (£355.15 per day) in secondary schools (where the average percentage of INSET monies allocated to NCDs was 12 per cent compared with 15 per cent in primary schools).

Funding allocated for INSET ranged from £2,000 up to £44,000, with the highest values recorded in the larger secondary schools. Seven schools reported an increase in their INSET budgets in order to implement recommendations stemming from OFSTED inspections; indeed, one school's allocation had risen from £8,000 to £23,500. Interestingly, though, this additional funding was not channelled into NCDs, and reported expenditure on NCDs remained below ten per cent in all but one of the schools. Another school with 'special measures' status received extra funding and support from the LEA inspection and advisory team. Two schools reported supplementing their training monies from their own budgets, in one case by £10,000.

On average, 15 per cent of the INSET budget was channelled into producing and supporting NCDs, spanning from as low as one per cent in a primary school to 55 per cent in a special school. It should be noted that the average values presented have been inflated somewhat due to extreme outliers within the data (very high percentages in a small number of schools) and most schools used ten per cent or less of their INSET budget for NCDs. This is confirmed by calculating the median, giving a value of ten per cent. In 14 cases, the interviewees were unable to quantify precisely the amount dedicated to NCDs, but stated that it was generally 'small'. Of the remaining INSET budget, a large proportion went towards supply cover costs and external courses.

Expenses incurred related to catering charges, training materials and buying in external contributors to deliver all or part of the day. Costs were generally minimal as a large proportion of the training was generated in-house. The largest expenses involved payment for outside contributors:

*The percentage spent is done by need. A lot of that is made up by the cost of the catering, but it very much depends on the needs and the issues we've identified. If we bring in an external speaker, the cost of that can vary from virtually nothing, if it's an LEA person we've subscribed for, up to £200 (INSET coordinator, middle).*

Seven schools specifically mentioned subscribing to LEA service level agreements which entitled them to advisory support on NCDs. Another four schools made reference to 'free' provision, originating from the LEA:

*We buy in from the local authority and we get two-and-a-half consultancy days this year ... we try to use them if we can for our INSET days (headteacher, primary).*

In comparison with financing courses for individual staff members, NCDs were generally seen as a 'cost-effective' form of training provision – a feature which was cited by teachers when asked to identify the benefits of NCDs. Training days compared favourably with the costs incurred when sending a single teacher out on an external course, which includes not only course fees, but also supply cover costs, as explained by the following coordinator:

*There's all kinds of issues really to do with funding. The main one is the cost of supply teaching. On training days, that's fine because there are no children in school, but for the rest of training if you want to release your staff to go and monitor, to go and work alongside other staff to develop them, you are looking at a cost of about £110 a day for a supply teacher, and when your whole GEST budget is perhaps under £3,000 for the year, that very quickly whittles away (INSET coordinator, primary).*

The more extensive interviews in the case-study schools allowed individuals to raise further issues in relation to funding. Interviewees at four of the seven schools



commented on the inadequacies of their funding allocations and questioned the use of pupil, as opposed to staff numbers, to calculate funding:

*Funding, what funding? ... You know, if you're bringing in a key-note speaker, or a consultant for the day, you're talking about several hundred pounds for them to be here ... we've got to try and be as cost-effective as we can, which is why I think we're coming back on our own resources as much as we can ... it is forcing schools to look much more at value for money (headteacher, secondary).*

*... funding is never enough – it may be the way my LEA does it, I don't know. This LEA bases its devolvement of GEST monies on pupil numbers, which seems to me extraordinary. I don't know why they don't do it on staff numbers, but there we are. There isn't enough (headteacher, secondary).*

One individual expressed regret that s/he was unable to invite non-teaching staff to the days, as they were not considered in the funding equation. Similarly, some interviewees felt that part-time staff suffered because their attendance at NCDs was on a pro rata basis and they could not afford to provide additional remuneration. Others in small schools pointed out that because of their small size and thus limited funding, they were unable to contract the services of well-known, high quality speakers.

Overall, the modest amounts of funds allocated to NCDs bear out coordinators' concerns about the limited funding available to facilitate NCDs, even though in terms of staff release time substantial resources are invested in them. Thus, serious questions can be raised about whether an appropriate balance has been struck between organisational and release cost funding. Is there a danger, for example, that the considerable resources involved in the latter are not achieving the dividends they should, largely because inadequate amounts are being allocated to the former? None the less, it should also be acknowledged that schools themselves appear to be electing to restrict the proportion of their INSET monies they spend on NCDs. Does this suggest that other forms of INSET are perceived by schools to offer greater benefits to teachers' CPD and school improvement than NCDs? Alternatively, does it reflect a tendency to cut costs on NCDs (e.g. through low or no cost in-house approaches, using the days for administrative work), while attempting to meet the costs of other forms of INSET (e.g. courses) which cannot be so easily reduced or avoided? In both scenarios, the issue of the cost-effectiveness of NCDs becomes highly problematic, since effectiveness in terms of improving practice seems to be either doubted or compromised and the costs of NCDs are considerable once staff release time is calculated into the equation.

## **2.6 EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

Although most evaluation takes place during or after the event, it also contributes to the planning process, given that evaluation should generate ideas for future days and that evaluation procedures for NCD provision require forward planning. Hence, this chapter ends with an examination of these procedures.

NCDs were generally planned and devised with the intention of addressing specific goals and needs within a school, for example drafting behaviour policies, disseminating new teaching practices or tackling particular aspects of the SDP. In order to gauge the extent to which these aims were fulfilled, evaluation, either informal or formal, was reported in all but one of the schools. On the face of it, this contrasts with the findings of the Cowan and Wright (1990) study, which found that NCDs were not often evaluated.

Coordinators and senior managers were asked to express their 'perception of the value of evaluation' and their answers signalled the possible reasons for evaluating NCDs: eight respondents felt that evaluation generated useful information for planning subsequent NCDs, while seven individuals used evaluation feedback to improve quality and appropriateness. Five respondents cited evaluation as a facility for gauging staff satisfaction, and four acknowledged the value of evaluation in monitoring the fulfilment of specific objectives. Other comments included reference to measuring cost-effectiveness and the use of formal evaluation to demonstrate the importance and value of NCDs to other staff:

*I think it's important. Not all the staff like filling the form in; they think it's a bit of a chore. But it does a lot of things – it allows me to look at comments and evaluate if I used money sensibly, if it's been useful from the whole-school's point of view (INSET coordinator, special).*

*It's good – good thoughts come out of it. Many are supportive, but also people can be quite incisive in the comments that they make and suggestions as to what has gone wrong, down to the simple things like the venue, the meals and so on. Much of the comments come on the physical needs side. We use the responses to rearrange programmes and change the venue (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*Yes there is; we always evaluate every ... at the beginning of whatever INSET we do, we always set a very specific set of objectives as we would in a class. 'By the end of this piece of INSET we hope you will have ... picked up this, that and the other information, gained these skills, raised your awareness.' Whatever it is, at the end of any INSET we ask them to evaluate it and say have we met them, what could we have done better, what worked, what didn't work (senior manager, secondary).*

Formal and informal evaluation methods were described, although schools often used a combination of both, as described in the comment below. Formally, evaluation proceeded either through completion of evaluation forms or debriefings amongst relevant staff groups (e.g. working parties, staff development committees or senior management meetings). Informally, evaluative information was acquired through discussions with staff, whenever appropriate:

*We have a mixture. Sometimes, there's formal evaluation in terms of a sheet which we fill in and give back. Otherwise it's informal through the Staff Development Committee and people are asked for their comments and to feed back to the committee (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Table 2.5 details the frequency of specific evaluation procedures reported in the 66 schools visited.

**Table 2.5 Evaluation procedures reported by the sample**

	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Special	TOTALS
Forms	5		22	5	32
Debriefings	6	1	9	1	17
Informal	14	4	10	2	30
None	1		1		2
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum up to the total number of schools, due to multiple responses.*

*Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

### Evaluation forms

Approximately half of all the schools used evaluation forms to monitor staff perceptions of the days and this was by far the most common strategy employed by secondary schools. Forms were distributed at the end of a training day, allowing staff the opportunity to record their opinions formally and assign ratings to particular components of the day. Typical questions centred on:

- the strengths and weaknesses of the day;
- the degree to which needs had been met;
- suggestions for future NCDs;
- worthwhile use of time; and
- application of knowledge in the classroom.

The following observation summarises the purpose and nature of evaluation forms:

*The evaluation happens at the end. There are three main questions – what was useful, what wasn't and have you any suggestions for further development: where would you like to see us going? We've had all these evaluation sheets where you tick the smiley face, this, that and the other and I find it all a bit facile really. I'd rather have a comment, so I try and phrase it: 'To what extent?' Or 'Can you describe the things you felt were successful and why?' And finally, if they can give any suggestions for changes that might be made, further work that we can do (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

### Debriefings

In some schools, planning and organising an NCD was the remit of specific working groups, in the form of staff development committees or senior management meetings. Consequently, following a training day, these groups sometimes reconvened to review and feed back on the success of the day. 'Debriefings' were mentioned in 17 schools:

*We haven't had a formal evaluation. Quite clearly, the management group with the coordinator do discuss how it's gone, so it's done at that level, and if anything had been not as we planned, or not gone accordingly or anything that somebody was not happy with, it would have been said and we would have looked at that for future reference, but normally, as in this case, we just quickly and informally chatter to each other and say 'Yes, I think that went according to plan' and achieved what we wanted to achieve, then it's left; we are quite happy, no need to go any further (INSET coordinator, primary).*

### **Informal evaluation**

While tick boxes and staff meetings provided formalised systems for collecting evaluative feedback, in many instances, the opportunity to casually engage staff in discussion proved a preferable option. This was notably the case in primary and middle schools, where informal discussion was more viable on account of smaller staff numbers. Indeed, staff at nine different schools indicated a distinct preference for informal evaluation, based on the notion that it was more immediate and more effective. In contrast, the completion of evaluation sheets was viewed as unnecessary, bureaucratic and a waste of time. Others doubted the honesty of responses obtained through written evaluation:

*... people just tick boxes and hand them in. I don't really feel they say what they believe. They say what they think you want to hear (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*Always informally; on the odd day, formally. People tend to be more honest and open when you just discuss it. They'll discuss it for days afterwards. If there is not much discussion ... then that says it all (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Even so, in secondary schools with a much larger staff base, evaluation forms do at least provide a guaranteed channel for all participants to express their opinions as to the value of the day – especially if anonymity can be ensured.

A fourth evaluation measure was mentioned during the case-study interviews. Three individuals related the success of the day to the completion of objectives set beforehand. This did not necessarily require the subjective assessments of staff through evaluation forms or discussion, but a direct comparison between the goals set and the goals achieved – this was seen as the ultimate indicator of success, as alluded to in the following comment:

*I don't evaluate the days in the sense of evaluating this day. I think that we evaluate the day in the sense that we look at what we have achieved and how much we have achieved and how much we still have to achieve, and therefore look at whether or not we could have used that time differently or whether in retrospect we might have changed the emphasis, but I don't pass a sheet round and say to the staff 'What could have been better?', because at the end of the day they are evaluating themselves; the day is based on them. If it was*

*external, I would ask them to evaluate it or if we went somewhere, I would ask them to evaluate that* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

This approach underlines the task-orientated nature of many NCDs. Very often they are used to focus on and address specific issues within the staff development, or possibly, OFSTED action plan. Success therefore is judged on the basis of whether or not the given task has been completed, though it is not entirely clear where the evidence on which the judgements are based is drawn from.

Despite positive evaluations immediately after an NCD, the true merit of the day may actually take some time to emerge. A day may be successfully received and the objectives seemingly fulfilled, but its real value will depend on the extent to which its impact is seen in the classroom. This point was made by one interviewee who explained:

*You might think it's gone really well on the day, but if you don't see anything change afterwards, then you know that it's not been really effective ... it doesn't really work unless there's follow up in the classroom afterwards* (teacher, primary).

The interviewee then went on to describe an NCD which focused on language skills. While first impressions of the day were excellent – in terms of quality of presentation, content and materials – little impact had been observed on children's writing. This emphasises the case for implementing ongoing evaluation systems, which review the impact of NCDs some time after the event, in order that the genuine effects of NCDs can be determined.

Earlier in this chapter the issue of continuity was raised – continuity in terms of planning the days, both over a year and from day to day. The existence of evaluation procedures suggests that planners are receptive to modifying a set programme of days, in order to improve features such as mediation, relevance and balance of topics. However, the value of evaluation depends on the extent to which recommendations are observed and implemented. Despite the fact that nearly all schools reported undertaking some form of evaluation following a training day, only three schools, when asked to describe the planning process, specifically mentioned incorporating the evaluation into future planning. One primary school headteacher, however, recognised the importance in following up evaluation outcomes, as well as any issues raised during their NCDs:

*Indirect evaluation, would be that we would adjust our programme afterwards ... according to how well the day had gone and how much progress had been made. We would then be following up those INSET days with a series of meetings. They tend not to be one-off days, with nothing to follow. They do tend to be a day to get to grips with something and then we follow it up with a series of evening meetings* (headteacher, primary).

Note that there is a conscious effort here to avoid planning NCDs as discrete, one-off events, but instead, as part of an evolving programme of activities, based on the outcome of previous days.

A primary case-study school took a similar approach and used meetings to review NCDs. This served to keep issues raised on the agenda, to check the impact on classroom practice and to modify future days, according to the progress made since the previous NCD:

*We have had quite a lot of feedback sessions in staff meetings where we have asked people how they have got on with the group reading, what are they trying. We are telling each other what we are doing in our classrooms and how well it's working or not working, how we are finding the new resources. We used all that information, that feedback, to build on to the next session, whether it be a training day, half-day, twilight, or whatever (INSET coordinator, primary).*

In summary, schools clearly recognised the potential benefits of evaluation, based on the fact that nearly all undertook some form of assessment, though evidence on the actual use of evaluation findings was less convincing in the majority of interviews. On an individual basis, teachers named evaluation as one of the features which contributed towards a successful NCD, as it enabled future training to be modified and improved:

*Evaluation has been useful. Some evaluations in the past have thrown up things that people aren't too happy with, and it's actually been taken on board ... Follow-up is essential, so you don't just get one-off days and then the work is never touched again (teacher, secondary).*

In terms of good practice, therefore, some form of evaluation would be recommended by the majority of interviewees, although the most appropriate method would seem to depend on the nature of the individual school and the nature of the provision concerned. For instance, in larger secondary schools, it was generally not feasible to consult all staff on an informal basis and evaluation forms were therefore viewed as the most practical approach. By contrast, evaluation in primary schools tended to operate through informal and opportunistic staff discussions. In many cases, however, schools chose to adopt a combination of informal and formal evaluation.

## CHAPTER THREE FORMAT AND DESIGN

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a section on the history and the development of NCDs, followed by one on the naming of the days. It then goes on to discuss how and when the days are taken, their timing and location, the staff involved and the format of activities which teachers engage in on the days.

### 3.2 THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF NCDs

In Phase Two of the project, senior managers were asked about the history of NCDs in their school and if there had been any developments or changes in the school's approach to NCDs since they were introduced.

There was a general view that NCDs had become more rigorously planned, more structured and more focused because of the pressures of time, and because of the increasing need for accountability. The days were described as '*more sharply honed*' by one interviewee. Interviewees referred to an increasing number of new initiatives (mainly Government-instigated), the amount of paperwork demanded, the requirement for a SDP and the impact of OFSTED:

*They have changed a lot. They are a lot more structured and there is a lot less room for manoeuvre now. I mean, we have very definite ... we have a queue of things that we need to do and that we need the time to do as well, whereas before, I think my predecessor would have been hard pushed to find things to do on some training days, but now that isn't a problem (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*There's been a change over a period of seven to eight years, in that they've become much more focused. They were often fairly nebulous days, when you came in and chatted a bit, did a bit of work in your classroom. But these days we have so much to cover and so much to deliver. So, I suppose they have become more formal and definitely more planned with clear objectives – what we're aiming to get out of this day (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*I think it's partly a result of the National Curriculum. People started to have more policies to do, more documents to produce. There was no other time to do them but on those days (deputy head and INSET coordinator, primary).*

Frequent comments indicated that the days had increasingly become an integral part of strategic planning and the whole-school planning process:

*It's all about accountability. It's all about planning. It's all about developmental planning. That's the currency now – that you have to have a developmental plan and if you're going to do that and you want to do the job properly, then inevitably you have to use the time that is available for training days effectively (headteacher, special).*

*I think that, in the early days, we were casting around for 'What shall we use them for? What shall we do with them. Any ideas?' But, they've now become rationalised and strategically placed in the academic year for specified purposes (senior teacher and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*I think the big change is that it's become more strategic, or they have been used more strategically ... tighter, and I think, therefore, better focused. When they were first imposed – and people still do see them as five days of holiday being taken from them, or some people do – it wasn't quite so clear how you would use them (senior teacher, secondary).*

Teachers' evaluative comments discussed in Chapters Five and Six indicate that direct contributions of NCDs to the whole-school planning process increases their value and their impact. There was a general feeling that more effective use was now made of the time available on NCDs and that topics covered were more relevant and more valuable. Comments like the following were typical:

*I would say they might have changed in nature, because we want to make them more useful, whereas in the past they have perhaps been perceived as a bit of a waste of time (deputy head and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Another noticeable trend which interviewees reflected on was a decrease in the amount of time available on NCDs for preparation and individual planning and an increase in the time spent on whole-school issues. One senior manager commented that the school now addressed a better balance of individual and whole-school issues, whilst a few indicated that staff had been dissatisfied with this change:

*Now, when I came to this school, the very first day I spent in the school was a training day, and I used it to look with all the staff at what they wanted this school to be. They weren't very pleased about it. They thought they would have spent the day very much more productively having time to get ready for the year, even in their classrooms. This was quite a shock to me because I had been used to very rigorous training days used for training, used for the needs of the school, used for the development of the staff, professional and personal development, because they go hand-in-hand for me, personal and professional development. So, there was some degree of compromise for a period of years with some training and some time for teachers to do other things, like reporting, recording, getting classrooms ready and so on. In the last couple of years, we have probably moved back more to a balance towards training, after that sort of dip in training. So, yes, there have been changes and we are moving back more rigorously towards training now (headteacher, primary).*



In addition to this, some interviewees noted an increasing amount of professional development taking place on NCDs and, as such, they were now considered more legitimate:

*So, from that early time, when people were scratching their heads and saying 'What do we do with these days?', 'They've nicked a week off our holidays', and the resentments and so on, and people finding excuses for not coming in anyway, it's now become part of the psyche of the school that they are legitimate training days. They are looked at as professional training days to be used for development of one's individual expertise or the development of the school (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Some interviewees indicated that an increasing amount of 'in-house' training was taking place on NCDs, with one commenting that they were now considered more as 'something that you do to yourself' rather than 'something which is done to you'. In conjunction with this trend, more use was made of school-based rather than outside expertise in presenting the days. This was seen partly as a response to the need to be more cost-effective. It had also been precipitated by a change to unitary status (hence, less expertise within an authority) and as a result of previous industrial action, with teachers now being less willing to take part in INSET activities after school:

*I think people go out less and we do more in-house, I think. There was a lot of borough provision and a lot of after-school sessions and people used to go. Then after the period of industrial action, which is well over ten years ago now, that seemed to fall off and we found ourselves doing more and more in-house provision. By that I mean the facilitators were colleagues and there were fewer people that were perceived as experts outside, because we increasingly felt we had experts here. I think it's moved from that to a sense of 'we do it for ourselves', and we facilitate ourselves and we have in-house experts, and a lot of the work is done in groups, as opposed to individuals going out to participate in some sort of course. But, that's the training days themselves. I think that perhaps explains why we have fewer outside experts in than once we did (deputy head and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Some senior managers felt that staff were now consulted more about the content of NCDs and that, as managers, they were more aware of staff needs, although it was also noted that staff needs had to be balanced with the need for whole-school issues:

*I think we're much more aware of what the staff want and we are trying to respond to staff needs as well as what the school needs (head of sixth form, secondary).*

*I'd like to think, here, because it's allied to the development plan, and because a staff group put the days together, or are beginning to put the days together, it reflects more what the staff need and want. So, even if the day goes wrong, they can't then blame the SMT and say 'Why are we here?', because the day has been shaped by their own people (headteacher, secondary).*

A few interviewees indicated that there was a trend of increasing participation and the use of more practical activities (i.e. ‘less talk and more do’), thereby giving a sense of ownership of the work achieved. Other perceptions of changes in the use of NCDs raised included more small-group discussion, fewer off-site activities and less money available, while two headteachers had introduced the use of residential days. Continuity was noted by teachers as an important factor in determining the impact of NCDs, and this is discussed further in Chapter Six. However, when referring to the development of the days, only two interviewees suggested that there was now more continuity rather than less discrete or ‘bolt-on’ topics.

### 3.3 NOMENCLATURE

Since the nomenclature used might reflect the focus and the use made of the days, senior managers and INSET coordinators were asked what NCDs were called in their school. Table 3.1 shows the most frequent terms used by schools.

**Table 3.1 The most frequent terms used for NCDs**

<b>Nomenclature</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Training days	11	1	18	3	33
INSET days	12	2	13	2	29
Teacher or professional development days	2	3	5	0	10
Non-contact or non-teaching days	2	1	3	2	8
Baker days	2	0	3	1	6
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum to the total number of schools, due to multiple responses.*

*Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

Nearly all the schools (62) used the terms ‘training days’ or ‘INSET days’ to describe NCDs. The term ‘teacher’ or ‘professional development days’, ‘NCDs’ and ‘Baker days’ appeared to be used very little. It was noted that ‘Baker days’ tended to be used by older staff and, in one school, ‘non-contact days’ tended to be used exclusively by the SMT. One secondary school named the days ‘whole-school training days’, thereby emphasising the involvement of all staff. It was also noted that one primary school identified the days as ‘non-pupil days’. The following comment illustrates how one interviewee felt that the title given to NCDs reflected a shift towards whole-school issues:

*I think that the days have outgrown this title [staff development days], and, as they are now more focused on school matters, it would be more appropriate to call them ‘staff and school development days’ (deputy head and staff development coordinator, secondary).*

Overall, the clear message from the prevailing nomenclature would suggest that the days were invested with an expectation that they are primarily concerned with INSET and training.

The following sections go on to discuss the format and design of the days in more detail, beginning with how schools take their NCDs. It is important to note at this stage that NCDs were seen as an integral part of the whole-school planning process and, as such, inseparable from other forms of training. This can be a major factor in influencing the format of the days.

### 3.4 HOW THE DAYS ARE TAKEN

A number of options in the ways in which NCDs might be taken were identified. They could be divided into:

- single days;
- aggregated days;
- twilights; and
- half-days.

Table 3.2 illustrates how the majority of schools took their days.

**Table 3.2. How schools took their NCDs**

<b>How schools took their days</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Single days	21	4	32	6	63
Aggregated days	6	2	16	3	27
Twilights	11	1	8	1	21
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum to the total number of schools, due to multiple responses.*

*Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

The great majority of schools held their NCDs as single days spread throughout the year, and, because this tended to be the norm, no rationale was offered for this. There were only two schools which did not have any single NCDs. Some teachers felt that single days provided a good length of time to cover some issues in depth, whilst others felt that a greater length of time was needed for in-depth subject development and suggested that five days together should be devoted to this.

Twenty-seven schools had some NCDs as aggregated days, usually two days together (23 schools), with only a very small number having three days together (four schools). Approximately half of the secondary, middle and special schools used aggregated days, in contrast to only about a quarter of primary schools. Special and middle schools often held residential for team building on aggregated days:

*We had two residential INSET days quite near the beginning of the school year. That was deliberately planned then, because of the marked change in the make-up of the school staffing team. We wanted to do something that gave people the opportunity to work together and to plan and organise and develop team cohesiveness (deputy head, primary).*

Aggregated days were usually held at the beginning of the school year (either in September or October), in order to plan the year ahead. Other reasons given included the numbers of new staff, OFSTED and that they were historically determined:

*They were held then because there were four new teachers in school and, following OFSTED, it would have been rather foolish to have left it. So, staff meetings on a weekly basis have covered issues that could be included in INSET days, but the INSET days were important at the beginning of the year, because of the number of newly qualified staff – to be fair to them (headteacher, primary).*

In contrast, a few secondary schools had their aggregated days in the summer term, when their Year 11 pupils had left, and these were used for both reviewing and planning ahead.

One secondary school adopted the unusual model of three aggregated days in September and two aggregated days in July. A primary school held three lots of two aggregated days, one in each term. In stark contrast to many primary schools, which often tried to cover a number of topics in one day, this primary school used each of the sets of two days for one topic.

Twenty-one schools adopted the use of twilight sessions, with more primary schools using this model than secondary schools. Three schools noted that they used twilight sessions for training in addition to their NCDs. Others either used four twilights as equivalent to two NCDs in conjunction with three single days or two twilights as equivalent to one NCD with four single days. Whilst some teachers welcomed the whole-days, others found the twilight sessions more beneficial, but this often depended on how they were used. On occasion, they were used to provide some continuity with single days by allowing working groups to get together, either in preparation for, or following, a whole-day. This format was seen as beneficial. Other advantages identified included: enabling parents and governors to attend the sessions, allowing staff to have extra days off, and cost-effectiveness:

*From the exercises on the first day, we knew which areas we were looking for. We had five areas. We set up working groups prior to that and spent a number of the twilight sessions working together, and we continued on the morning of the second day in the working groups (headteacher, primary).*

*We had a joint twilight session with governors on target setting and monitoring (headteacher and INSET coordinator, primary).*

*We will work a twilight. We have done that once now. We will possibly do it once next year. There's an added bonus in that as well, of course. Staff get a*

*day off, which, in some ways, is illegal, but we are aware of that, but we actually get more done in two twilights. So, there's that side to it as well, and, if something can be split, it's more cost-effective sometimes to take two bites at it, in small sections. Like, two three-hour periods, rather than to have a whole-day at it, because you can't absorb that amount in a day (headteacher, primary).*

In contrast, one headteacher commented, with regard to twilights: '*I don't think they are terribly effective, I have to say*', although they continued to be used in the school for joint training sessions with other schools.

Although the teacher evaluation, discussed in Chapter Five, suggested that morning sessions tended to be more productive than afternoon sessions, only one secondary school used a half-day as part of their non-contact time.

The data suggest, overall, therefore, that the majority of schools still take their NCDs as single one-off days, although the use of two aggregated days and twilights appeared also to be fairly common. Other formats, such as aggregating more than two days and the use of half-days were rare.

### 3.5 FACTORS AFFECTING THE TIMING OF NCDs

A considerable number of interviewees were dissatisfied with the timing of NCDs and felt that this had serious implications for the success of the days and the impact of training on subsequent practice. These views are elaborated on in Chapter Six.

The factors which influence the timing of NCDs are shown in rank order in Table 3.3. The numbers refer to the number of interviewees who made a response.

**Table 3.3 Factors influencing the timing of NCDs**

<b>Factors influencing the timing</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
OFSTED inspection	8	2	10	4	24
Planning and preparation	6	1	12	3	22
Avoiding disruption	7	3	6	4	20
LEA-dictated	5	0	9	1	15
Nearby schools	4	2	3	1	10
Need/content	0	1	6	2	9
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum to the total number of schools, due to a combination of non-responses and multiple responses.*

*Source: senior manager interviews in Phase Two of the study.*

#### **Linking NCDs to OFSTED inspections**

The most frequently quoted rationale for the timing of NCDs was their relationship to OFSTED inspections, although this was closely followed by their relationship to the

whole-school planning process and the SDP. For secondary school respondents, the latter was more highly ranked.

NCDs were held both in preparation for OFSTED inspections and in order to review them. NCDs related to OFSTED in this way were generally felt to have been very effective in bringing about the necessary changes in schools, but their impact on practice and whether it is long-term or short-term was less easy to determine. Some senior managers expressed frustration at the conflict between individual school priorities and external forces. The dilemma that schools face in relation to OFSTED, and the timing of the limited number of NCDs, is illustrated in the following comment:

*This year, because we had OFSTED in March, we also took the second day of the academic year. Big mistake, that. I now bitterly regret that, but we took that date to concentrate on OFSTED, to look at the framework, to look at what was coming, to look at the timetable, to look at the whole process through to the report. We just concentrated for the whole-day on that. So, that was genuine professional development for staff, whether they'd been through it or not. It was the wrong time to use that. The staff really wasn't in tune to it, and it was a waste of a day. The intention was good, but the timing was wrong. We should have taken the day after OFSTED to have looked at what the report said, because we'd run out of days by that time (headteacher, secondary).*

*This year, the days were related to changes made in the school post-OFSTED. The focus of each of the days between October and Christmas was split between pastoral and academic – half a day each. Another whole-day on basic skills – a post-OFSTED issue. After OFSTED, the SMT felt that both the pastoral and academic issues needed time in chunks as we went along (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

### **Planning and preparation**

In many cases, the timing of NCDs was seen as an integral part of the whole-school planning process and the SDP. As highlighted in the literature review in Chapter One, the introduction of SDPs is often considered to have led to increasingly more effective use of the days. Teacher evaluative comments, discussed in Chapter Five, suggest that the degree of relevance to the SDP is a major determinant of the perceived effectiveness of NCDs.

Roughly a quarter of the schools appeared to have spread their NCDs evenly throughout the year and interviewee comments indicated that this was a deliberate strategy. This may be linked to planning, although one interviewee did say that this provided regular breaks for both staff and pupils.

As discussed in the literature review, it has previously been found that the first day of the school year is largely regarded as the least productive one on which to hold an NCD. Despite this, having at least one NCD at the beginning of the school year was found to be a common strategy, evident in 48 out of the 66 schools. The most

commonly stated rationale for this was in order to plan ahead and develop aims for the coming year. Headteachers and deputy heads felt that they established the tone of the school for that year and they perceived them as having a direct impact on practice. In some schools, however, the day was used for preparation time.

Other rationales offered for having a NCD at the beginning of the school year included the induction of new staff, reviewing examination results, preparing the timetable, easing staff back in and that staff were usually too tired at the end of term. In contrast, a few schools deliberately chose not to take a day at the beginning of the year, for example:

*We tend not to do what a lot of schools do, which is to take the very beginning of the autumn term as training. We have the view that it's best to get on with the job, make a start, get the children in and get on with it (deputy head, middle).*

One secondary headteacher noted that '*there was a lot of pressure to use first day of the school year, which I resisted*'.

The following remarks illustrate the impact that some interviewees felt having NCDs early in the year can have:

*One of the advantages of holding INSET early is that whatever input you have actually affects that academic year, because a lot of things are implemented almost straightaway and the sooner you have these INSET days, the quicker it's going to affect, especially when you do a major input like this – the quicker it affects the year as it goes through (headteacher, primary).*

*We try to have an INSET day in the autumn term when ideas are unfolding and then you've got the rest of the academic year to act upon those and evaluate and so on (senior manager, secondary).*

There appeared to be conflicting views about the value of having NCDs in the summer term. Twelve schools (five secondary, five primary and two middle) avoided having NCDs in the summer term. The main rationale offered by secondary interviewees was that there was too much to do at this time of year, whilst the main rationale presented by primary interviewees was that the impact would be lost by September:

*If you leave it towards the end of the year, like using that last day towards the end of July, it's all lost by the time you come to September. It's like the children in a way. When they have their holiday, you have to pick them all up again. Whereas, if you attack it early, it has an immediate effect on the school (headteacher, primary).*

In contrast, nine schools (six secondary, one primary and two special) had NCDs in the summer term. The main rationale in secondary schools was that they had more time once Year 11 pupils had left and that this was a valuable time in which to plan for the next year:

*We try and build as much into the summer term as possible. Year 11 have gone, so you've got a bit more slack and you're losing less teaching time, but more importantly, you can then build that time in for planning for the following year (headteacher, secondary).*

A conflicting view, however, was that, once Year 11 and Year 13 pupils had gone, staff planned their own time, and, therefore, did not need specified non-contact time. It was also noted (by one interviewee) that not having a day in the summer term enabled staff to finish a day early and that this was a considerable morale boost.

### **Avoiding disruption**

In 26 schools, NCDs were timetabled for the beginning and ends of terms. It has been questioned, however, if these are the most effective times for teachers to have NCDs, because of the possibility of fatigue, their lack of receptivity to new ideas at these times and the lack of possibility of immediate follow-up. The main rationale offered was that this caused minimum disruption for staff, pupils and parents. Primary, middle and special school interviewees highlighted disruption for parents:

*We always add them to a holiday. We feel that is better for parents, so that there are not odd days scattered around that cause inconvenience (headteacher, primary).*

One teacher thought that parents disapproved of NCDs and felt that it was important to think of parents' problems in planning child care when schools were arranging dates for NCDs. However, the requirement to fit in with parents was thought to compromise the school's preferred timing of the days and, as such, was seen to be detrimental to the impact of NCDs. Another teacher said that they deliberately had to plan their NCDs in advance '*because of asking governors' permission and letting parents know*'. S/he believed this in itself could be a drawback. During the current year, for example, because they had already planned their five days a year ahead, the school had to ask the authority to let them bring one NCD forward from next year in order to fit in a literacy day before September, as required.

In contrast, secondary interviewees' main concern was avoiding disruption for staff and, in particular, pupils:

*We nearly always put our training days up against a holiday, either a half-term holiday or a full-term holiday, mainly because, in our school, attendance of the pupils is a problem. So, if, for example, we put a training day in the middle of the week, there would be a noticeable decline in attendance on the far side of that training day. If we make long weekends out of the training days, it tends to knock attendance for the whole of that week. So, it's easier to do it at the end of the half term or a term (headteacher, secondary).*

*We try and choose different days to avoid hitting the same day every time. We've done it on Monday or Friday and you find that you've got five Fridays or Mondays or three Fridays and two Mondays hit, with Bank Holidays, and*



*people say that the curriculum is hit too often (deputy head and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Avoiding disruption for special school pupils was particularly important:

*For our pupils, any change affects them. So, to minimise the change, if you tag it on to a holiday or if it's a day when it's an election day, which traditionally people have off anyway, then it has no effect on the students. If you take an extra day, it upsets the routine. They like established routines and, if something changes, it will affect them in lots of ways, and there will be some behaviour problems (deputy head, special).*

### **Factors beyond the control of the school**

A number of interviewees referred to factors that were largely beyond the control of the school. Given that autonomy and flexibility were regarded as key factors in influencing the impact of NCDs (see Chapter Six), this may be a particularly significant issue. Surprisingly, however, very few interviewees commented on the role of the LEA in dictating the timing of NCDs in the way that these headteachers did:

*The LEA designate all the training days at present and, I think, there is a feeling amongst secondary school heads that we'd like to move towards a model where there's a little more flexibility (headteacher, secondary).*

*I would prefer to choose all five of my training days to suit the needs of my particular school, rather than have the dates set for three by the LEA (headteacher, primary).*

The timing of the days in conjunction with other schools appeared to be a bigger factor for primary and middle schools and, for two primary schools, the timing of some of the NCDs was dictated by polling day. The following interviewee illustrates the constraints that some schools feel under:

*The LEA direct three of our training days. One is held at the beginning of every term. The school then gets a choice of two, which they can place wherever they want, although it is suggested that pyramids of schools actually choose the same day. We've not found that convenient here. So, I've tended to choose a day immediately before or after the autumn or spring half term and use it for planning. There is a major problem in finding the time to get together to discuss what we are going to do each term (headteacher, primary).*

### **Content**

When considering the success of the days, teachers and senior managers both drew attention to the effectiveness of cumulative training as opposed to one-off events and the fact that this needed to be taken account of in the timing of the days. There was, however, little evidence of provision for continuity in the interviewee responses to questions regarding the timing of the days. Some interviewees stated that the timing

of NCDs was related to 'need' at the time, and to the content of the days. A few secondary interviewees, for example, noted the importance of allowing appropriate time for GCSE moderation. Apart from this, little was noted about how content might influence the timing of the days.

Although special school interviewees responded with similar rationales to those from other schools, some factors that influence the timing of their NCDs appeared to be related to their specialist nature. These included, for example, having them at times when other schools did not need support, when they could attend national conferences and when they could get outside speakers in.

There was little indication of general staff involvement in making decisions about the timing of the days, despite the fact that teachers appreciated a genuine opportunity to be actively involved in deciding the content and the format of the days. In some cases, a staff development committee arranged the timing of the days and in others the head determined it.

### **3.6 THE VENUES FOR NCDs**

The great majority of NCDs were held in school, although evaluations showed that teachers welcomed the opportunity to be in a different environment and saw this as a valuable experience. Some felt that an off-site venue raised the status of the days. These views are detailed in Chapter Five. Thirty-three schools had spent at least some of their NCDs at off-site locations. Comments indicated that staff valued this opportunity:

*Some take place in school, but my impression was that, as a staff, they preferred outside venues (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*We have been off the premises and held them at a hotel once. A one-off. It was a very good idea (acting deputy head, primary).*

In contrast, some schools felt they were restricted because of the cost involved, and, for some activities, it was more practical to be on-site:

*Training is done mainly within the school. We don't use hotels now because of the cost implication. It is actually better to be here as the resources are here. Sometimes, it's better to be off-site, but with doing numeracy or literacy, or departmental work on schemes of work, assessment and moderation, it's better being here. It makes it easier, certainly (deputy head and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*We would like to go to [X] Hall or somewhere, but it's hardly justified spending the money. I recognise that it would be valuable having a residential. It would be even more valuable having done things like that myself, as a head. You get a lot more out of them than you think, but to justify, from such a small budget, doing that sort of thing, when you have got so many*

*other things that you need to address, is difficult (headteacher and INSET coordinator, primary).*

Off-site venues included hotels, teachers' centres, specialist training centres and other schools. The most frequent off-site venues used are shown in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 The most frequent off-site venues for NCDs**

Off-site venues	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Special	TOTAL
Hotel	2	4	5	3	14
Teachers' centre or specialist centre	6	0	3	3	12
Other schools	3	0	3	1	7
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum to the total number of schools, due to a combination of non-responses, multiple responses and because the majority held their NCDs in the school.*

*Source: data collected from the Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

Fourteen schools had used hotel accommodation for their NCDs and it appeared that a high proportion of middle and special schools had done so (although the number of schools in these samples was small). Interviewees referred to the relaxed atmosphere, the opportunity for reflection and the quality of the venues making staff feel valued:

*It's quite a commitment, in terms of finance, in terms of booking a venue, in terms of having 16 or 17 members of staff there for a full day. It has quite major cost implications, but because it followed straight on from OFSTED, I think, it had really to have this flexibility built in, have this allowance for people being able to talk in quite a relaxed manner. I mean, the original plan was perhaps even to use outside the building to go for walks and talk about things, actually going for a walk, but obviously that didn't work, with the weather and so on. So, I think it worked well for the time, for where it fell in the school year, really (INSET coordinator, primary).*

*Well, if you are having a whole-day, I think it's really nice to go somewhere that has facilities that are appropriate and that puts on a really nice lunch. I know that sounds kind of silly, but I think it's important, because it makes everybody feel valued and it makes it special. So, I think those things are important (deputy head, middle).*

*It was really good. I was, personally, really grateful to be out of the school in another environment, having the chance to catch up a little bit, with people having had a really frantic time, and it was just paced really nicely. We did quite a lot of reflection on the OFSTED week first of all, because of the speaker, who didn't turn up, and that was just really useful, just hearing how other people had felt about it (Year 1 teacher, primary).*

In five schools it was evident that the days held at hotels were on a residential basis, and it would seem that the impact of NCDs might be increased by providing a residential setting:

*We had three days together and we went to the [X] Hotel at [X]. We all stayed as a staff and we had a full programme of activities (headteacher, primary).*

NCDs were also held in teachers' centres or specialist training centres, generally, when practical activities were involved, such as first aid and information technology. One secondary school had tried to book their local teachers' centre, without success, illustrating some of the practical difficulties that may be encountered. Seven schools had some of their NCDs at other schools, although there were mixed views regarding the value of these.

Visiting local places of interest was a feature found in a few primary schools only, with visits usually based on curriculum specialities, such as history and religious education. Informal evaluation of one such day highlights the enthusiasm that can be generated:

*We did something wonderful in February and I was ill. Our art curriculum is being reviewed this year and we planned a visit to [X] Museum and everybody tells me it was the best INSET we ever had (headteacher, primary).*

When NCDs were held in school, a variety of locations were used, including classrooms, the hall and the lecture theatre. The main considerations were comfort, convenience and practicality:

*We use one of the most pleasant classrooms in the school with a carpet and comfortable chairs. We avoid using the school hall because, for 20 people, it's too cavernous (acting deputy head and INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Interestingly, one primary school interviewee stated that on some NCDs, teachers wrote reports at home, although this was the only comment of its kind and was not elaborated on.

### **3.7 STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN NCDs**

#### **Attendance**

In the great majority of schools, it was compulsory for all staff, at least all teaching staff, to attend NCDs. The opportunity for all staff to meet together and exchange ideas was valued (see Chapter Five) and seen to lead to a greater cohesion amongst the staff group (see Chapter Six). In five schools, interviewees observed that attendance depended on the content and its relevance for different staff. This appeared to refer to attendance by non-teaching staff and support staff, for whom the days were optional. Non-teaching staff were sometimes involved in their own separate training activities, either on the same day as NCDs or on different days:

*The support assistants and the support staff, who support children with special needs, have had one training day last year and they are having another one*

*next term, which is organised by the deputy head and the SENCO and we provide time for that. We pay them for that time. It takes place during school time (headteacher, middle).*

*Obviously, if particular issues are clearly only pertinent to the teaching staff, then what we have done is organise specific training for the ancillary staff and administration staff, and so on. So, for example, we were dealing with reading and writing last training day. The office staff were doing work towards their NVQ level 3 courses that they are following. The canteen staff and the cleaning staff – some – were actually doing first aid. So, we tend to address all the staff (headteacher, primary).*

In some schools, particularly special schools, attendance of non-teaching staff and part-time teaching staff appeared to cause a problem:

*So, at the beginning of the year, we'll look at the diary and ... because half the staff don't have to work training days, that's the other problem. In a specialist school you've got a large number of support assistants, and that is a problem from the point of view of dissemination of information. Teachers and nursery nurses have to work Baker days, but half the staff don't. From other points of view, you have a lot of part-time staff here and part-time staff don't work every day, but everybody works on a Wednesday. Wednesday's a kind of focus day, because everybody's here and, therefore, we normally have training days on a Wednesday, because it means I'm not having to pay overtime to people who don't work and then having them say 'Well, I'm not coming because I don't work on a Monday' (headteacher, special).*

In contrast, in other schools, the situation seemed to have been amicably resolved. In some, part-time staff attended on a pro rata basis and in others non-teaching assistants and part-time staff attended out of interest:

*All part-time teachers attend on a pro rata basis and the view of the part-time teachers is that we don't expect anybody to come to a session except for the day they are working, and we expect them to come to a proportion appropriate to how much their time is. Nearly all of them come to all of them, unless we organise it on a day they are not working. We do that. All our evening sessions this year have been on a Wednesday and most of the part-time staff work on a Wednesday. Then, there's two full days on a Monday, where everybody, except one person, will attend it anyway, even though they don't work those days (headteacher, middle).*

One headteacher stressed the importance of having everyone involved in the school attend the days:

*We have a number of special needs support staff, who are not on contracts, but we employ them to come. It's very, very important that, if the school is doing it, the whole-school is doing it. You can't have some colleagues not knowing, otherwise it's not really happening everywhere. So, we employ our non-contract colleagues to come (headteacher, primary).*

Apart from the support staff already identified above, other staff who attended, when relevant, included midday supervisors, ancillary and administration staff and governors.

### Session input

A number of different people were identified as taking a lead role in presenting sessions during NCDs and these are shown in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5 Those who take a lead role in presenting NCDs**

Those who take a lead	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Special	TOTAL
Outside speakers	10	2	24	4	40
Teachers	8	4	20	4	36
Head or member of the SMT	7	3	15	4	29
<b>N. of schools</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>66</b>

*Note: the above figures do not sum to the total number of schools, due to a combination of non-responses and multiple response.*

*Source: Data collected from the Phase One and Phase Two interviews.*

Forty schools involved outside providers in leading NCDs, although primary and middle schools tended to use these less than secondary and middle schools. The involvement of outside speakers was seen as an opportunity for staff to improve their skills and knowledge in areas in which they were lacking, and the value of such input was related to the speaker's quality, expertise and knowledge of the school.

The cost was a factor noted by some interviewees. This had led many schools to use their own staff expertise more or to arrange for outside speakers in conjunction with other schools:

*It would be too expensive to have someone come to run a training session at the school. We find it cheaper to attend twilight courses. We only buy someone in when all six schools in the cluster arrange it as a joint activity (headteacher, primary).*

In contrast, some schools appeared to use outside speakers fairly frequently, and a range of expertise was called upon. Outsider providers included LEA advisers and curriculum advisory teachers for particular subjects or themes, those from specialist support services, such as the Hearing Impaired Service and behavioural units, OFSTED inspectors, educational psychologists and consultants to do with particular initiatives, for example Investors in People. The difficulty of getting LEA trainers in, because of the competition with other schools, was noted and two primary schools had been unable to obtain the literacy adviser for this reason.

Internal expertise was used more by secondary schools than primary schools, perhaps reflecting the greater number of staff in secondary schools and, hence, a larger pool of expertise. Where teachers were used to lead sessions, the choice of leader was dependent on their expertise. A range of staff was mentioned – heads of department, SENCOs, pastoral staff, curriculum coordinators and key stage coordinators (noted by primary staff only). Some teachers pointed out the benefits of having the responsibility for planning and leading NCDs (see Chapter Five) and one middle school senior manager highlighted the opportunity which taking a lead role provided for staff to be involved:

*One of the things I have been really keen to do is to involve staff in leading INSET sessions for the obvious reasons of involvement, because we believe it's a way of demonstrating that staff have got very specific and useful skills that need to be shared, and also it's very useful for staff development. We have had some wonderful INSET last year. We had six members of staff lead aspects of whole sessions of INSET. That's a third of the teaching staff virtually (headteacher, middle).*

### **3.8 THE FORMAT OF ACTIVITIES**

Nineteen senior managers suggested that using a variety of methods of presentation was important. The following comment, for example, was typical:

*We try to have a balance between practical and non-practical activity. So, if we did the training days, for example, on literacy and sat round watching things, we would try to have a bit of variety, so that we get staff doing things as well, or making things, or having a go at things (headteacher, primary).*

The method of presentation varied with the content and the balance between whole-staff and group issues. A number of senior managers indicated that it was important for interactive methods to be used:

*Sometimes, if you don't talk about it, you don't actually know what you think. It's only once you have formulated your ideas and talked about it that it becomes clear to you (deputy head, middle).*

*It won't just be some didactic approach to that INSET. It will be much more activity-based (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Some of the teachers in the case-study schools elaborated further on the benefits of this approach, highlighting that it made the input more significant and enabled them to accept responsibility for the work:

*When we have done it ourselves, we feel that we own it, or I think I have part ownership in this thing that we have done. It's more meaningful to us rather than somebody saying 'Well this is what it's all about. This is what you are going to do. This is what I am going to do, and this is what will happen.'* (acting deputy head, secondary).

One interviewee, however, held a different view:

*I know it's nice to have a group activity once in a while, but, if I know my colleagues as well as I think I do, a lot of them would have said that they would prefer to have spent that time otherwise. You could have transferred that information on existing channels without having to go through all the activities and pinning things up on the wall and such like (IT coordinator, middle).*

Interviewees identified interactive activities, such as workshops, discussion groups and practical activities that had taken place, although, in contrast, one teacher stated that *'we could have outside speakers all day'*.

Presentation of information by speakers (i.e. a didactic approach) was also a common method, used by 39 schools. This usually entailed a presentation by an outside speaker, someone in the school with particular expertise or an address by the head. This was often used to lead into a topic or to focus staff on a topic before tasks, workshops or group discussions were undertaken. A number of senior managers indicated that it was important for staff not to *'sit and listen'* all the time.

Many teachers noted that there needed to be a balance between interactive and didactic approaches:

*I think there has got to be a fair balance between us doing something and somebody telling us something. I suppose they work the same way as our lessons. We can only sit and be told stuff for so long before we have to go and do something, and the actual doing something is much better, I think, for my development, because it gives you an opportunity to share ideas and bounce ideas off each other, and develop your opinions and take account of other people's opinions. It's all right sitting and listening to somebody who is more knowledgeable, but you can only do that up to a point (teacher, middle).*

A limited number of methods of presentation were identified as taking place on NCDs and these can be broadly classified into the following categories:

- speaker presentation;
- group discussion;
- practical activities;
- individual time; and
- visits to places of interest.

The following are examples of how these methods of presentation were incorporated into typical NCDs in the case-study secondary schools:



**Secondary**

whole-staff group presentation led by deputy head  
year-group discussions/tasks  
lunchtime  
whole-staff group feedback session led by deputy head  
sixth-form meeting

**Secondary**

whole-staff group presentation led by an outside speaker  
lunchtime  
whole-staff group presentation led by an outside speaker  
departmental discussion groups

The data suggests that secondary school NCDs often have a limited and fairly predictable format, with a common design being a whole-staff plenary session followed by small-group discussion and then, often, whole-staff group feedback. Data collected in Phase Two of the study supported this finding.

The following is an example of how the methods of presentation were incorporated into a typical NCD in a case-study primary school:

**Primary**

whole-staff group presentation led by the head  
small-group discussions  
individual time in classrooms  
lunchtime  
*key stage 1 group*  
practical activity and group discussion led by outside an  
provider  
*key stage 2 group*  
group discussion and video led by outside provider

There appeared to be a greater variety of methods of presentation and more practical activity incorporated into the days in primary schools, interestingly, perhaps, reflecting the ways in which they work with pupils in comparison to their secondary school colleagues. Having said this, the range of format still contained little variety.

Different methods of presentation, however, can involve a variety of activities and, using the case-study observations of 12 days, it was possible to get a more detailed picture of the actual activities undertaken within these settings. It could not be

assumed, for example, that because a presentation was being given, teachers were simply listening, as opportunities might be presented for questions, discussion, etc. An audit was therefore undertaken of the actual activities that were taking place to give a flavour of the activities teachers were actually engaged in. Activities were counted for discrete sessions and it is therefore only possible to give a rank order as this takes no account of the length of time the activity was undertaken. The results are given in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6 The rank order of activities undertaken on 12 NCDs that were observed**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number</b>
Discussion in small groups	17
Listening to a presenter	12
Question and answer session with presenter	9
Giving feedback to whole-group from small groups	5
Writing down ideas on flipchart paper	5
Reading information	4
Completing a worksheet or form	3
Looking at and discussing resources	3
Individual administration and preparation time	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

*Source: data collected from Phase One case-study observations.*

Other activities (each noted twice) were practical activity, watching a video, assessing pupils' work, producing a leaflet or booklet and whole-group discussion.

As noted previously, the three most highly ranked activities again reflect the most common format adopted – for staff to meet together as a whole-group, split into groups and then to meet back together for discussion or feedback time. This was also highlighted by senior managers:

*On the whole, I suppose, it's a very typical model for a training day, isn't it? Starting off with something, going off into groups and coming back, but the key to our training days has been, if you like, to always have a definite target for action (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Whole-group discussion and practical activity appeared to be a feature of primary schools only. The one primary school from the case-study schools in which teachers were largely involved in practical activity within different year groups stood out as notable. The evaluative data suggests that teachers would like more practical activity that is directly related to teaching and learning in the classroom.

## Staff grouping

A range of staff groups, including whole-staff, departmental, faculty and key stage groups, was adopted for activities on NCDs. It was usual for staff to meet as a whole-group at some point during the day, often at the beginning of the day, or for a plenary session at the end.

The majority of secondary schools spent some time in groups with a curriculum focus (either departmental or faculty groups). In contrast, this only occurred in four of the other schools. This may reflect the large number of staff involved in one curriculum area in secondary schools and the need, therefore, for them to plan together. Thus, departmental working groups were a key feature and comments indicated that teaching staff valued this time:

*Departmental time, that's what I think we are really short of. I am the only English specialist in the school and the middle school teachers have done some English training, obviously. But a lot of people in key stage 3 say, 'Well, I have not done Shakespeare', 'I have not done poetry', 'It's a long time since my school days', and would welcome more concrete INSET, which I could easily do. It's just being given the time. I would feel better, because I often feel that I am asking people to do things with half a knowledge that they probably won't do it, because they don't feel secure about doing it, and I don't like to now (English coordinator, middle).*

Groups with a pastoral focus were also used, although less than departmental groups. Working in key stage groups was mainly a feature of primary schools. It appeared that, because of the small nature of primary, middle and special schools, the whole-staff group was an optimum size to work with.

However, alternative groups were used on specific occasions to deliberately mix people up as a form of differentiation. Thus, cross-departmental groups in secondary and cross-key stage groups in primary schools were evident. The value of this approach was highlighted by some teachers and senior managers:

*It's useful to work in groups because you tend to be put with people that you don't normally work with. If you work in key stage groups, then, we are all fairly familiar with our opinions, especially in key stage 2, because we are a very tight team and we all work together very closely. So, it's really good to be put with someone whose opinions you are not necessarily sure of. It sparks up some very interesting conversations that way. So, I enjoy the group work, because I tend to... talk quite a lot in those and there are others who sit and don't do anything. So, there's a place for both of those ways of doing it, I think (Year 5 teacher, middle).*

*When I used to do it, I used to set teams, if you like, and try and get people with different experiences, different amounts of years in the job. If there were four groups, you would have an English teacher in each one, a maths teacher in each one, that kind of thing – so there was a sort of spread throughout. If you just allow people to do what they want, they would stick in friendship groups,*

*and that's nice in some ways, but not necessarily wholly beneficial to the staff overall* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

Occasionally, time was made available for the senior management team or departmental heads to meet. Very little individual time was made available for teachers on NCDs, although in a few cases individual time seemed to be built into the day. The time that was available appeared to be used for planning and preparation rather than individual study and this issue is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Overall, the data supports previous findings that different INSET cultures exist in the primary and secondary sectors. A greater range of INSET experiences is offered to teachers in primary schools compared to those in secondary schools. Primary INSET is more practically based and directly related to classroom practice, whereas secondary INSET is dominated by subject-specific input and tends to take more the form of collaborative discussion. This divergence of cultures has implications for the impact of INSET on practice. The lack of opportunities for secondary teachers to engage in individual practical activity means that direct impact on classroom practice may be limited.

## CHAPTER FOUR CONTENT AND FOCUSES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Whilst the previous chapters have outlined the planning processes and formats of NCDs in the 66 schools involved in this study, this final chapter in Part One documents and discusses schools' use of NCDs in terms of their content or focuses. The data seeks to address three key questions: What are the days used for? What factors influence the content of the days? What tensions exist between the main determinants of content?

### 4.2 WHAT ARE THE DAYS USED FOR?

Senior managers and INSET coordinators were asked to describe how they had used or were planning to use the five prescribed NCDs during the 1997–1998 academic year. Like respondents in a previous survey of the use of NCDs (Newton and Newton, 1994), interviewees saw the days as addressing a wide variety of purposes, '*covering the spectrum of school work*' (ibid., p. 388). Although one issue in schools' use of NCDs is whether the days were being used for CPD or for other activities such as administration, in the categorisation of schools' use of NCDs developed for this study, the making of judgements about what is professional development and what is not was avoided. The categories developed therefore attempt to represent the topics schools addressed on their five NCDs, rather than entering into discussion about the value of such days as professional development. However, teachers' views on the merit and impact of NCDs are discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Table 4.1 shows the focus of the NCDs held in all 66 schools involved in the project. Many days contained either dual or multiple focuses; where multiple events occurred, the day has been categorised to represent the main focuses, using half-day units. Thus, for example, if a school had a staff meeting at the beginning of an NCD, but then spent the rest of the morning on OFSTED preparation and the afternoon on behaviour policy, this has been categorised as half a day on OFSTED and half on behaviour.

Although in most schools it was possible to list the focus day by day, it must be noted that in a few cases, descriptions and information about the days were not consistent either in the perspectives of different staff members, or when comparing interview data with documentation provided. One problem may have been that staff had difficulty recalling whether a particular session occurred as part of an NCD or at a staff meeting or other form of INSET. A further issue was that although a topic such as 'behaviour policy' may have been given as the focus for the NCD, teachers may also have spent part of that day involved in general administrative departmental meetings or in classroom preparation. This was not always evident from teachers' accounts. Another difficulty occurred in some cases in distinguishing the content of the day from the format (discussed in the previous chapter). Many interviewees described a day as being used for 'departmental time' or 'personal preparation',

without being able to elaborate further about the focus of such time. Whilst the categories presented in Table 4.1 attempt to best represent the number of NCDs spent on different focuses, and to illuminate differences in use across school types, the difficulties outlined above need to be borne in mind.

**Table 4.1 The number of NCDs (1997–1998) spent on different focuses**

Focus	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Special	TOTAL	%
Curriculum	47	3	11.5	7	69	21
Reorientation	20	4	27	3	54	16
Dept/pastoral issues	2	1.5	32	1	36.5	11
School-level issues	9.5	2.5	18.5	3	33.5	10
OFSTED process	8	2	7.5	1.5	19	6
Behaviour	.5	.5	8.5	5.5	15	5
Networking/liaison	3		6.5	1	10.5	3
Pedagogy	1.5		7.5	1	10	3
Pastoral	2		8		10	3
Personal preparation	4.5	2	2	1	9.5	3
Special needs	2.5	1	2	3.5	9	3
Teacher development	1.5	.5	4	1	7	2
Assessment	3.5		2.5	.5	6.5	2
Unclassified/not clear	10.5	3	27.5	1	41.5	13
<b>N. of days</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>331*</b>	<b>(101)</b>

*Note:* Due to rounding, percentage does not sum to 100 per cent.

\* The total number of days is 331 rather than 330, as one school indicated that they had held six NCDs in this academic year.

*Source:* data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.

Particularly striking in the above table is the predominance of ‘curriculum’ as a focus in primary schools (41 per cent of NCDs compared with 23 per cent in special schools, 15 per cent in middle schools, and seven per cent in secondary schools). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that primary teachers teach across the curriculum, and thus whole-school NCDs on curriculum issues are more likely to be relevant to all teachers in the school. In secondary schools, curriculum issues related to specific areas are more likely to be addressed as a departmental issue (although from our data it does not appear that curriculum areas were themselves often the focus for departmental time; administrative tasks such as moderation were more common). However, this emphasis on a curriculum focus for NCDs in primary schools is also a reflection of the current educational climate and Government recommendations. With changes in the teaching of literacy, primary schools spent time on general literacy issues, as well as using NCDs to undergo training for the National Literacy Hour.

In contrast, foremost in secondary schools was the use of NCDs to address departmental or pastoral team issues. To reiterate, there was a difficulty here in distinguishing the content of day from the format of the day, as in many schools, the focus for these departmental meetings was not provided. However, common focuses

given for department time in secondary schools included coursework moderation, OFSTED preparation and departmental development planning.

Ten per cent of NCDs (across all school types) addressed school-level issues, including target setting, development planning, documentation and school effectiveness. This figure was slightly higher in secondary schools than primary schools. As well as this, six per cent of NCDs focused on the OFSTED process – this was relatively higher in primary schools. This focus is discussed further later in the chapter.

‘Behaviour’ was the focus for 18 per cent of special school NCDs, and five per cent of NCDs in secondary schools. It was very seldom a focus in primary or middle schools. The number of days spent addressing behaviour in secondary schools (8.5 out of a total of 165) is interesting in light of the statement made in the OFSTED review of secondary schools (OFSTED, 1998, p.65) that *‘managing pupils’ behaviour in the classroom should be a priority for in-service training’*. However, it may well be that behaviour is also being addressed in other forms of CPD – or that it was not reflected due to the timing of this research.

Fifty-four of the 66 schools involved in this study had an NCD on the first day back after the summer holidays, labelled ‘reorientation’ in Table 4.1. For the majority of these schools, this day was used for activities falling under the administrative umbrella, variously described as: meetings, information-giving, revisiting school aims and policies, induction of new staff, date setting, planning and preparation, housekeeping, and ‘start up day’. In secondary schools, an aspect of this day was often a review of examination results, and some schools with upcoming inspections began to prepare for this. Some part of this day was often available for individual teacher preparation. Whilst teachers welcomed this opportunity for organisation and the gentle introduction back into school (see Chapter Five), some interviewees questioned the legitimacy of this. One primary headteacher described the planning and preparation that occurs on the first NCD of the year as *‘important, but it’s not training’*.

Other categories that featured less frequently included pedagogy (a focus on teaching and learning), pastoral issues, special needs (although this was more evident in special schools), teacher development, such as personal IT training, and assessment. Although ‘personal preparation’ was not often given as the focus of NCDs, as discussed, it is probable that individual preparation was an aspect or small part of many more NCDs than identified here. This is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

Further discussion of the focus of NCDs follows, with an audit of the range of issues addressed within each broader category for each school type (secondary, middle, primary and special).

### **The focus of NCDs in secondary schools**

An audit of the range of issues in the seven main categories addressed through NCDs in secondary schools is outlined in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: An audit of secondary school use of NCDs**

<p><b>Departmental issues</b>                      <b>32 days</b></p> <p><i>Planning for tutorials</i></p> <p><i>Preparation for the new term</i></p> <p><i>Assessing pupil portfolios</i></p> <p><i>Improving pupil performance</i></p> <p><i>OFSTED-related issues</i></p> <p><i>Department development plans</i></p> <p><i>Reviewing coursework and moderating</i></p> <p><i>Developing plans and schemes of work</i></p> <p><i>Administration, e.g. organising sets</i></p> <p><i>IT training</i></p> <p><i>Teaching and learning styles</i></p> <p><i>Differentiation</i></p> <p><i>Developing a literacy policy</i></p> <p><i>Departmental policy updating</i></p> <p><i>PSE work</i></p> <p><i>Departmental discussion on SDP</i></p> <p><i>Departmental effectiveness</i></p> <p><i>Managing a department (for HODs)</i></p> <p><b>Reorientation</b>                              <b>27 days</b></p> <p><i>Administration and preparation</i></p> <p><i>Staff briefing and meetings</i></p> <p><i>Looking at examination results</i></p> <p><i>Staff induction</i></p> <p><i>Focus on inspection</i></p> <p><i>Planning</i></p> <p><i>Introduction of new reward system</i></p> <p><i>Classroom practice</i></p> <p><b>School-level issues</b>                      <b>18.5 days</b></p> <p><i>Looking at school improvement within the</i></p> <p><i>OFSTED framework</i></p> <p><i>Investors In People</i></p> <p><i>Target setting</i></p> <p><i>Bench marking</i></p> <p><i>Raising achievement</i></p> <p><i>Monitoring and evaluation</i></p> <p><i>Assessment and improvement</i></p> <p><i>Managing change and problem solving</i></p> <p><i>Action zones</i></p> <p><i>Communications review</i></p> <p><i>School improvement programme</i></p> <p><i>Core values</i></p> <p><i>School development planning</i></p>	<p><b>Curriculum</b>                                  <b>11.5 days</b></p> <p><i>Oracy</i></p> <p><i>Literacy</i></p> <p><i>Developing a literacy policy</i></p> <p><i>Language across the curriculum</i></p> <p><i>Curriculum development</i></p> <p><i>Improving IT delivery</i></p> <p><i>Basic skills</i></p> <p><i>Planning – schemes of work</i></p> <p><b>Behaviour</b>                                  <b>8.5 days</b></p> <p><i>Behavioural policy</i></p> <p><i>Rewards policy</i></p> <p><i>Code of conduct</i></p> <p><i>Discipline policy</i></p> <p><i>Developing a code of practice for</i></p> <p><i>behaviour and discipline</i></p> <p><i>Managing pupil behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Managing low-level pupil disruption</i></p> <p><i>Assertive Discipline programme</i></p> <p><i>Behaviour management (whole-</i></p> <p><i>school approach)</i></p> <p><b>Pastoral</b>                                      <b>8 days</b></p> <p><i>Drugs education/awareness</i></p> <p><i>Health education – drugs and alcohol</i></p> <p><i>Moral and spiritual development</i></p> <p><i>Pastoral care</i></p> <p><i>Role of the tutor</i></p> <p><i>Guidance issues</i></p> <p><b>OFSTED</b>                                      <b>7.5 days</b></p> <p><i>Whole-school preparation</i></p> <p><i>Governors in looking at key issues</i></p> <p><b>Pedagogy</b>                                    <b>7.5 days</b></p> <p><i>Teaching and learning styles</i></p> <p><i>New learning skills in the classroom</i></p> <p><i>Effective teaching and learning</i></p> <p><i>With educational psychologist</i></p> <p><i>working on learning skills</i></p> <p><i>Student perceptions of learning</i></p> <p><i>Accelerated learning</i></p> <p><i>Whole-school approach to classroom</i></p> <p><i>strategies</i></p>
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Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.



The largest number of days was spent on departmental business, working on a range of issues. The later evaluative chapters document that the opportunity to work with colleagues on departmental issues was a highly valued aspect of NCDs. The predominance of departmental time, and a strong focus on OFSTED – often evident in schools with an impending inspection – were evident in the focus of NCDs in one particular secondary school, as shown below:

***One secondary school's use of the five days***

1. Assertive Discipline, year group meetings, OFSTED preparation, school policy.
2. OFSTED-oriented – planning and preparation.
3. Senior Planning Group meeting. Most of day was department time.
4. Year team meetings and support staff meetings. Department time for most of day.
5. Two twilights – review of OFSTED in departments and with governors.

Time spent on school-level issues was particularly valued by school managers. In the following school, school development planning and documentation were key aspects of NCDs, perhaps because there was a new headteacher:

***One secondary school's use of the five days***

1. New head setting out vision for the future. Organisation and planning.
2. School development planning.
3. School development planning.
4. Department Development Plan – explaining its rationale.
5. Issues to do with in-school documentation and planning items, e.g. department budgets.

Curriculum, behaviour, pastoral issues and pedagogy each accounted for about five per cent of NCDs in secondary schools. Literacy was the predominant focus when curriculum was addressed, and when behaviour was addressed, the key concern appeared to be the development of policies. The following example of a school's use of its NCDs illustrates a focus on behaviour, pastoral issues and curriculum. The fourth day was disaggregated, where staff identified and addressed their own IT needs.

***One secondary school's use of the five days***

1. 'Housekeeping'.
2. Oracy and drugs education.
3. Reviewing the behaviour policy.
4. IT (disaggregated).
5. Planning for tutorials, discussion of policy for rewards and code of conduct.

## The focus of NCDs in middle schools

From the small number of middle schools included in this study, no dominant focus emerged. Figure 4.2 outlines the content covered.

**Figure 4.2 An audit of middle school use of NCDs**

<p><b>Reorientation</b> <b>4 days</b>  <i>Personal preparation</i>  <i>Meetings</i>  <i>Looking at school policies</i>  <i>Team building and induction</i>  <i>Producing materials for reading</i></p>	<p><b>OFSTED</b> <b>2 days</b>  <i>OFSTED preparation</i>  <i>The new OFSTED framework</i></p>
<p><b>Curriculum</b> <b>3 days</b>  <i>Literacy</i>  <i>Numeracy</i>  <i>Basic skills</i></p>	<p><b>Key stage/departmental</b> <b>1.5 days</b>  <i>Planning for 1998/99</i>  <i>The use of drama</i></p>
<p><b>School level</b> <b>2.5 days</b>  <i>School self-review</i>  <i>Value added</i>  <i>Quality mark update</i>  <i>School effectiveness (target setting, curriculum development plans, leading up to compiling SDP)</i></p>	<p><b>Behaviour</b> <b>1 day</b>  <i>Assertive Discipline update</i></p> <p><b>Special needs</b> <b>1 day</b>  <i>Autism in the mainstream</i></p>

Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.

Curriculum issues (particularly literacy and numeracy) were addressed, along with a range of issues at the level of the school, including target setting, value added and school effectiveness.

The five days were used as follows by one middle school – OFSTED preparation was the focus for two days; other content addressed was special needs, and the use of drama (discussed in department groups):

### ***One middle school's use of the five days***

1. Staff meeting and departmental meetings.
2. Staff meeting, departmental meetings – theme was drama and its use in assessment.
3. Looked at autism in the mainstream.
4. OFSTED preparation.
5. Looked at the new OFSTED framework.

## The focus of NCDs in primary schools

An audit of the key focuses of NCDs in primary schools in this study is presented in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3** An audit of primary school use of NCDs

<p><b>Curriculum</b> <b>47 days</b>  <i>English</i> (22 days)  <i>(National Literacy Hour, literacy, evaluation of reading resources, spelling audit of the English curriculum, KS2 writing process, First Steps training on writing)</i></p> <p><i>Technology</i> (7 days)  <i>IT (practical, policy outline and scheme of work, planning units of work, National Curriculum)</i>  <i>Food technology</i>  <i>Design and technology</i></p> <p><i>Maths</i> (3.5 days)  <i>(work with adviser, Numeracy Project)</i></p> <p><i>Art</i> (3 days)  <i>(National Curriculum requirements, policy, day at a museum – how to approach art, working with children, questioning, schemes of work)</i></p> <p><i>Science</i> (2 days)  <i>(space science)</i></p> <p><i>Geography</i> (1 day)  <i>(use of maps)</i></p> <p><i>History</i> (0.5 day)</p> <p><i>PE</i> (0.5 day)  <i>(top play and sport)</i></p> <p><i>Planning</i> (7.5 days)  <i>(long-, medium-, short-term planning, curriculum planning)</i></p>	<p><b>Reorientation</b> <b>20 days</b>  <i>Administration</i>  <i>Planning</i>  <i>Sequencing and progression</i>  <i>Classroom organisation</i>  <i>Meetings</i>  <i>Individual staff development interviews</i>  <i>Independent learning</i></p> <p><b>School-level issues</b> <b>9.5 days</b>  <i>Teaching Quality Initiative</i>  <i>Looking at nursery document</i>  <i>Target setting and monitoring (with governors)</i>  <i>Ethos and writing the mission statement</i>  <i>Monitoring and evaluation</i>  <i>Supported School Self-Development (dissemination of course attended by headteacher)</i>  <i>SWOT exercise</i>  <i>School portfolio</i>  <i>School development planning</i>  <i>Record keeping in the school</i></p> <p><b>OFSTED</b> <b>8 days</b>  <i>Preparation and planning</i>  <i>Framework of inspection</i>  <i>Action planning</i></p> <p><b>Assessment</b> <b>3.5 days</b>  <i>Policy</i>  <i>Ongoing assessment</i>  <i>Marketing policy</i>  <i>Formative assessment</i></p>
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Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.

Most striking in primary schools' use of NCDs was the prominence of curriculum issues, certainly when compared with the secondary phase. Although a range of curriculum areas appear in the audit, unsurprisingly, given the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, English was the focus for the largest number of NCDs (22 days). Technology was the focus for seven days, whilst maths and science received comparatively less attention (three-and-a-half and two days respectively). Art was the focus for NCDs in two schools (accounting for three days), but music is noticeably absent. The following example from one primary school illustrates the use of NCDs to work on curriculum issues, in particular literacy:

***One primary school's use of the five days***

1. Independent learning.
2. Art – National Curriculum requirements, implications for each year group in the school. Produce a policy and outline scheme of work.
3. National Literacy Hour.
4. IT – practical plus look at policy outline and scheme of work.
5. Literacy.

Primary schools focused less than secondary schools on school-level issues such as policies and documents, target setting, and school improvement. Significantly less time was also spent on a departmental/key stage focus (only two days compared with 32 days in secondary schools), with more time spent on individual preparation than in secondary schools. A further difference when comparing the use of NCDs in primary and secondary schools was the absence of time spent on the issue of behaviour (half a day compared with eight and a half-days – five per cent – in secondary schools).

Other content not included in this list were: special needs (two-and-a-half-days), pastoral issues (drugs education and child protection, two days), pedagogy (teaching and learning, one-and-a-half-days), behaviour (half a day). Three days involved staff in liaison with other schools.

A positive aspect identified by teachers in some schools was a variety of focuses at NCDs across the school year. The following two examples are from primary schools where

a wide range of topics were addressed over the five days:

***One primary school's use of the five days***

1. Planning and preparation.
2. Special needs and behavioural policy.
3. Literacy.
4. Visited another school to look at their good practice (classroom organisation and management). Produce a full display policy and review of classrooms.
5. Twilights – target setting and monitoring (with governors); ethos and writing the mission statement.

***One primary school's use of the five days***

1. Classroom organisation and general staff meeting.
2. IT day spent at Advisory Centre for Computer Education.
3. Planning and assessment.
4. Supported School Self-Development – dissemination of INSET course attended by headteacher (morning) and SWOT exercise (in afternoon).
5. School development planning (morning) and KS2 writing process (afternoon).

**The focus of NCDs in special schools**

An emphasis on the 'pupil' was evident in the use of NCDs in special schools, with a notable amount of time spent addressing behaviour (particularly challenging behaviour more evident in the pupils attending these schools), special needs, the curriculum (with a focus on modifying aspects to meet the needs of pupils) and planning. The equivalent of three NCDs was spent addressing school-level issues (policies, action plans, budgeting, SDP); however, two of these occurred in one school (another two schools spent half a day each discussing these issues as part of continuing professional development on other issues). Three days were spent in preparation for OFSTED, with one of these being preparation at an individual or department level. Figure 4.4 presents an audit of the use of NCDs in the special schools included in this study.

**Figure 4.4 An audit of special school use of NCDs**

<b>Curriculum</b> <b>7 days</b> <i>Teaching reading</i> <i>Literacy Hour</i> <i>Modifying the history curriculum</i> <i>Teaching music to children with a hearing loss</i> <i>Looking at resources</i> <i>Early years curriculum</i> <i>Planning</i>	<b>Special Needs</b> <b>3.5 days</b> <i>Basic language disorders</i> <i>Children with cochlea implants</i> <i>Multi-sensory impairment</i> <i>Children not verbalising normally</i> <i>Music therapy</i>
<b>Behaviour</b> <b>5.5 days</b> <i>Behaviour management</i> <i>Challenging behaviour</i> <i>Evaluating and recording difficult behaviours</i>	<b>School-level issues</b> <b>3 days</b> <i>School policies and documentation</i> <i>Action plans</i> <i>Budgeting</i> <i>Long-term planning for SDP</i> <i>Target setting</i>
	<b>Reorientation</b> <b>3 days</b> <i>School routines and staff handbook</i> <i>Administration</i> <i>Security and self-protection</i> <i>Conversational Urdu</i>

Source: data collected from Phase One and Phase Two interviews.

Single days not included in the figure were spent on curriculum meetings with another special school, assessment, individual preparation, and addressing individual training needs. The use of NCDs in two special schools is illustrated below. In both schools, the emphasis on special needs and curriculum issues is evident. The fifth day at the first school shows how staff needs were met in this particular context – the staff at this school for the hearing impaired worked in a number of mainstream schools, and one of the NCDs was therefore flexible to enable them either to access signing courses, or to spend an NCD with their link schools.

***One special school's use of the five days***

1. Security and self-protection session; conversational Urdu to develop parenting skills; child protection.
2. Became a packing day (a move of accommodation was brought forward).
3. Basic language disorders – in children with hearing loss (in morning). Teaching reading – text based and spoken (in afternoon).
4. Three groups rotating around sessions – Literacy Hour; teaching children with cochlea implants; modifying the secondary history curriculum (in morning). Teaching music to KS1, 2, 3 children with a hearing loss (in afternoon).
5. Governors allowed staff to address individual training needs, e.g. signing courses or to join their host-resourced school days.

***One special school's use of the five days***

1. Administrative day in school.
2. Prior to inspection, led by curriculum coordinators. Support staff had an alternative activity.
3. Multi-sensory impairment.
4. Children who are not verbalising normally.
5. Music therapy.

**The focus of NCDs: relevance and continuity**

Two key features in teachers' accounts of successful provision of NCDs were 'relevance' and 'continuity' (see Chapters Five and Six). Given this finding, it is interesting to view NCDs in terms of:

- the provision of differentiated content on NCDs to meet the diversity of staff needs; and
- continuity or cumulative training, where multiple NCDs are linked, or where NCDs are linked to other forms of continuing professional development.

***Differentiated content***

The vast majority of days involved the whole-staff focusing on the same issue (these sometimes took place in departmental groups, but the focus across the school was the same). However, in some cases, particularly in secondary schools, it was evident that

staff were working on different issues or focuses. The three main ways in which this occurred are described below:

- a) *Departments or pastoral teams decided on their own focus (as opposed to departmental time where every department was addressing the same issue).*  
This focus on meeting a diversity of departmental needs (rather than individual needs) was the most common form of differentiation by content.

***An NCD at one secondary school***

One secondary school allocated an NCD to curriculum groups and year groups (half a day each) where each decided the focus. An English teacher explained how his/her department had used the time to look at key stage 4 oral work and prepare for GCSE examinations. In the year group time, Year 10 tutors had focused on careers education, whilst Year 11 tutors had discussed the writing of references. Staff at this school were positive about having a clearly defined issue to address in departmental/pastoral groups.

- b) *Different activities were available during the day with staff having a choice about what to attend.*

Examples of staff having choice on NCDs were scarce, in line with the view often expressed by interviewees that individual needs were met through other forms of CPD, rather than NCDs. However, the following secondary school gave staff some choice on two NCDs:

***Two NCDs at a secondary school***

For one day the focus was information and curriculum technology and a variety of workshops were held. Teachers could choose which to attend, from basic word-processing, to how to make your own web page. When asked about the rationale behind this particular focus, the INSET coordinator replied: *'Our aim is that by the year 2000 everyone will have a pretty good working practice with ICT – support staff, everybody.'*

A second day at this school was called an 'outset' day. A group of teachers went by coach to an Education Fair, whilst others had the option of an industry placement or visiting another school.

- c) *A subgroup of staff have a different focus from the rest of the staff.*  
For some NCDs, a particular group of staff, or an individual, focused on a different issue or activity from the remainder of the staff.

***Examples of NCDs where particular groups of staff had a different focus***

At one secondary school, the pastoral team went on a 'team building' residential, NQTs spent the day at a large comprehensive school in a neighbouring authority, whilst the rest of the staff visited primary schools.

At another, HODs had input on managing a department, midday supervisors had their own training, the SENCO visited a primary school, whilst the rest of the school were working on departmental tasks (set by HODs). One teacher was positive about this 'split' with different training for HODs and teachers.

A special school gave teaching staff input on evaluating and recording difficult behaviours, whilst senior management worked on long-term planning for the School Development Plan.

***Continuity***

Cumulative training or continuity in content was seldom mentioned in responses from senior managers and INSET coordinators, when they were asked for the reasons for the focus of NCDs – nor was it a clear feature in their description of the focus of each of the five days. Although some NCDs may have been followed up in staff meetings or other forms of CPD, it would appear from the descriptions of the NCDs in this sample that the vast majority were 'one-off' events. However, the following examples of cumulative training or continuity were evident:

***Examples of continuity in two primary schools' use of NCDs***

***School A***

One primary school used a full day NCD and a twilight session to focus on spelling.

***School B***

Another had focused for the year on IT. One NCD had looked at the National Curriculum and planning units of work in IT, and part of another had been spent looking at two computer programmes. A senior manager at the school stated that, but for the Literacy Hour, there would have been more of a focus on IT: '*You have to be flexible, according to how the Government changes the goal posts.*'

***Examples of continuity in two secondary schools' use of NCDs***

***School A***

A secondary school held an NCD where the focus was target setting, starting with general issues and then on school-based topics. The next two NCDs were held as a residential where a number of issues were covered, including the continuation of target setting.



**School B**

Two NCDs were held on oracy and literacy at a secondary school. At the first, an adviser focused on developing a literacy policy and on oracy in the classroom. At the second, staff worked in departments on developing a literacy policy for the school. A senior manager at this school also described the INSET programme which consisted of 'a weekly INSET evening meeting, two or three of those a term given over to curriculum development. That often leads to, or out of NCDs.'

Many interviewees linked the focus of NCDs to the SDP, with the suggestion that this gave a sense of continuity to NCDs, although this was not always evident in the days described:

*The focus for all of the INSET days in this school have been this year linked to the School Development Plan ... The priorities in school this year have essentially been maths, literacy, science and assessment. So, all of the INSET time that we have used, either the INSET days or the meetings after school, have always been very tightly focused in blocks on those areas (headteacher, primary).*

Distinctive from continuity, some schools described a 'pattern' or 'tradition' in the use of the days: an established use of the days for particular topics. This was more evident in secondary schools, where NCDs were utilised for a range of purposes, including administration, departmental preparation and tasks such as GCSE moderation and policy development. The patterns in two secondary schools are described below:

**One secondary school's use of the five days**

1. Preparation.
2. An outside speaker on an ongoing school development issue, e.g. differentiation, schemes of work, teaching and learning styles.
3. Standardisation and moderation for GCSE.
4. Departmental time to develop plans and schemes of work.
5. Setting up for new school year.

**One secondary school's use of the five days**

1. Preparation: HODs setting up departments.
2. Moderation.
3. Departmental time for departments to meet their development objectives.
- 4/5. Two days for 'new ideas, new training', e.g. key skills, new OFSTED regulations.

Thus, whilst some examples of differentiation by content, and of attempts at continuity in the provision of NCDs, were evident, relevance and continuity did not appear to be seen as key factors which influenced the choice of content or focus for NCDs.

### 4.3 WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE THE CONTENT OF THE DAYS?

As well as outlining the focus of each NCD, senior managers and INSET coordinators were asked about the reasons behind this focus. They were also asked specifically about the characteristics of the staff and pupils, and whether these had any implications for CPD, and more particularly for NCDs. This section therefore presents six key areas that were identified as influences on the content of the days:

- the OFSTED process;
- the School Development Plan;
- the school context;
- Government-imposed initiatives;
- ideas from staff; and
- time constraints during the school year.

Other reasons given for focuses included needs perceived by the headteacher and staff giving feedback from INSET courses they had attended. One primary headteacher described their NCDs being '*mostly driven by the National Curriculum and how we organise the school*'.

#### **The OFSTED process**

Across all sectors, senior managers and INSET coordinators in schools in either a pre- or post-OFSTED phase gave this as a key reason for the focus of NCDs. Six per cent (19 days) of the NCDs focused on the OFSTED process – either with a whole-school focus, or with preparation and discussion in departmental groups. These days were predominantly spent on preparation for inspection – briefing staff about the process, looking at the new guidelines, and preparing paperwork, although a few schools also spent time 'debriefing' post-OFSTED. However, it must be noted that preparation for OFSTED was also included in other categories, e.g. under departmental issues, or in reorientation on the first day. The amount of time spent on OFSTED-related matters would also have been noticeably greater if days spent addressing points from the action plan were included in the OFSTED category. In order to best represent a school's use of the days, if a recommendation in the OFSTED report was to address spelling or behaviour and an NCD was used for this purpose, this has been categorised as curriculum or behaviour, rather than OFSTED.

These results are similar to the findings of Newton and Newton's 1994 survey, where it was reported that seven per cent of NCD events in primary schools and 17 per cent in secondary schools related to inspection matters. In our sample, five per cent of secondary, seven per cent of primary and ten per cent of middle school NCDs were related to the OFSTED process. It is possible that the decrease in time related to OFSTED for secondary schools in this study reflects the more established position of OFSTED in school life where schools are more prepared for what an inspection entails. However, as already noted, the amount of time spent on OFSTED would have been greater if all mentions of OFSTED had been included.

As discussed in later chapters, there were mixed views from teachers on the use of NCDs to prepare for OFSTED. Whilst many felt that NCDs had been effective in bringing about the changes required for OFSTED, they did not necessarily agree that NCDs should be used for this purpose.

### **The School Development Plan**

The SDP was most often the response when interviewees were asked about the reasons why they focused on particular issues. NCDs were seen as a vehicle for implementing objectives in the plan. Two senior managers in case-study schools were particularly adamant that all NCDs should be strongly connected to the SDP:

*I certainly wouldn't dream of wasting a training day unless it was linked ... that's what it's there for, even if the time is given to teams to do their own work. They are not at liberty to do whatever they want. It has to be in the furtherance of an objective that's in the development plan (headteacher, secondary).*

*Totally, they totally run alongside each other, one runs the other ... There are all sorts of strands on the School Development Plan, obviously, but the curriculum and the staff training needs just run together ... If you look back in our School Development Plan, say three years ago or whatever, when English was highlighted, and you can trace that then ... right to now, and look at the training sessions, staff development that's gone in since then on the School Development Plan with the training alongside it (INSET coordinator, primary).*

Another INSET coordinator assumed that working from the SDP was the only acceptable approach to NCDs. Other senior managers, whose approach may have been less structured, nevertheless agreed that the SDP was an important guide. A new INSET coordinator at a secondary school, where the staff appeared very positive about NCDs, observed that NCDs '*should link in with the SDP, the way you see the school going, your vision for the school*'. S/he felt that if training was related to the SDP and was perceived to do so by staff, NCDs were much more likely to be effective. A key stage 1 teacher in a special school appreciated both the way staff had been included in developing the SDP and the fact that it was interpreted to take individual professional needs into account:

*... everybody is aware of what the School Development Plan is about. I have worked at schools where basically the School Development Plan has been done by the head and you have got no idea; ... we are very much given time to say 'Look, this is the School Development Plan for me, can I have a certain amount of time to do this?'*

A primary headteacher regarded NCDs as a valuable opportunity to realise the aspirations of the SDP: '*... from your School Development Plan ... to rewrite and focus ... actually pencil action into training days ... they are spaces where you can actually say "We can do it there."*'

### **The school context**

Continuing the central theme of the above section – that schools see NCDs as a vehicle for implementing school-specific objectives – this section summarises responses from INSET coordinators and senior managers when they were asked about the influence of the school context on NCDs. Many spoke at length about the specific situation of their school, and how staff and pupil characteristics impacted on topics focused on during NCDs. Responses to this question were particularly telling in light of the trend for NCDs to be procured to implement Government-initiated imperatives such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. It is evident from the data presented here that schools have very different contextual settings, and many view the time available on NCDs as valuable CPD to address issues specific to their particular context.

Key areas identified with regard to the implications of staff characteristics on the content or focus of NCDs were NQTs, staff turnover, the size of the staff and staff experience. These are expanded on in Figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5 The influence of staff characteristics on the content of NCDs**

<b>Staff</b>	
Newly qualified teachers	A need to train in particular areas not seen to be covered in depth during initial training, e.g. target setting (secondary), child protection (primary).
Staff turnover	<p>High turnover: Implications for induction and familiarisation (secondary); activities tend to be repeated (special); new staff mean team development is needed (middle).</p> <p>Low turnover: Need to stimulate (secondary); use NCDs for updating skills (secondary); refining good practice (special).</p>
Size of staff	<p>Small rural primary with teaching headteacher – try to share expertise between a cluster of schools.</p> <p>High number of part-time staff – focus on immediate requirements of planning and resources (primary).</p>
Staff experience	<p>Special school – with the demise of ITT in special needs, have to provide training for teachers coming from the mainstream system.</p> <p>With a range of staff experience, training does not apply across the staff (secondary).</p> <p>Focus on moderation and classroom control for less experienced staff (secondary).</p> <p>Tend to give older staff responsibility for delivery to counter any lack of enthusiasm (secondary).</p>

A wide range of ways in which the catchment area or pupil characteristics influenced the choice of NCD content emerged from the data. Key areas presented in Figure 4.6 were geographical features, ability range, selective systems, behaviour, drugs and ethnic background. Particularly evident were the voices of those in schools with large numbers of pupils on the SEN register – senior managers in these schools described how they used NCDs to address topics such as differentiation, raising self-esteem, behaviour support, and special needs. An issue unique to special schools was the need for them to address issues on NCDs that are not provided for through mainstream CPD provision.

**Figure 4.6 The influence of pupil characteristics on the content of NCDs**

<b>Pupils</b>	
Geographical aspects	Rural school – emphasis on community aspects and PSE, working together as a team (middle).  Large catchment area with 51 feeder schools – have to concentrate on differentiation and on ensuring uniformity (secondary).
Ability range	Focus on the more able child (primary).  Schools with large numbers of lower-attaining or SEN pupils often focused on issues such as literacy, numeracy, raising self-esteem, behaviour support and child protection.  Schools with a range of abilities focused on differentiated learning.
Selective systems	Secondary schools that ‘lose’ higher attaining pupils to grammar schools have focused NCDs on differentiation, behaviour, special needs, disaffected pupils.  Selective girls’ grammar had a day on ‘ <i>gifted and able</i> ’.
Behaviour	Focus on discipline is a reflection of catchment area (secondary).  Intake was becoming unruly, so held an NCD on behaviour to ensure a common approach (secondary).  Bullying a problem in the school so focused on this (secondary).
Drugs	Drugs a problem in the area so had an NCD on drugs awareness (secondary and primary).
Ethnic background	30–40 languages spoken in the school so have addressed issues around literacy (secondary).
Special schools	Characteristics of the pupils have large implications for topics covered – issues not covered in mainstream.

### **Government-imposed initiatives**

In contrast to the above accounts, some senior managers felt that NCDs were not influenced by the school context, or driven by pupil or staff characteristics, because they were used to implement ‘*externally imposed requirements*’ such as OFSTED and the National Literacy Hour. In the schools in this study, 12.5 days had been allocated to this training. Other national initiatives given attention in schools were target setting (seven days), appraisal (two days), action zones (one day) and the Numeracy Project (one day).

Although some teachers commented that they felt more comfortable with the National Literacy Hour initiative, following NCDs addressing it, many other interviewees were disturbed by the expectation that NCDs be used to address Government initiatives. These views are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### **Ideas from staff**

Some schools were considered to offer opportunities for teachers to suggest ideas about NCD content. However, acting on these was not always seen to be feasible – days were ‘*earmarked*’ for things such as OFSTED, national initiatives or the development of policies. The following comment from a teacher illustrates this situation:

*We have been given questionnaires, ‘What do you want?’ ... the majority of staff put down IT [but it] doesn’t happen. We end up writing other policies, which are obviously important, but they seem to take over* (teacher, secondary).

In some schools, it was felt that if an issue was raised by a number of teachers, efforts would be made to address it:

*... if it is just one person there saying it, we would not do a holistic thing for the whole-school on it, but if we begin to get trends ... we would respond to those, and have done* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

However, the issue of planning ahead was seen as another constraint to this. Many schools recognised that staff had input into the SDP and that, if NCDs were used to implement points from the SDP, this indirectly gave teachers some input into the focus of NCDs:

*[it would be hard to] re-jig a programme ... if you have got your School Development Plan and staff have had input into that, which they do at the beginning, then there is no scope once the ball is rolling for somebody to say ‘We ought to be doing this on our training day’* (INSET coordinator, primary).

A new headteacher in a secondary school wanted to encourage staff to generate more ideas, but also recognised that teachers’ priorities may not be in line with his/her views on the use of NCDs:

*They do ask for things like time – time to do things which I think they should be doing anyway, things like coursework moderation and things like that, which I have to say is not what I think the days were intended for when the venerable Mr Baker brought them in in the first place. They were to bring us up to scratch, to bring us up to speed on current thinking. So, I’m not in favour of using them for marking or coursework moderation.*

It is clear from the number of days spent on such tasks across the sample of schools in this study that many headteachers and INSET coordinators did not concur with this view. This illustrates the diversity of opinions held by school managers on just what the days were intended to be used for.

### **Time constraints during the school year**

Some interviewees, like the headteacher quoted above, questioned the legitimacy of using NCDs to carry out administrative tasks such as preparation for the school year, or for departmental activities such as coursework moderation. However, others

greatly valued this time and justified the use of NCDs for this purpose, emphasising the time constraints within ordinary school days:

*We found it was becoming very onerous for staff to do it in their own time or it was becoming impossible for us to take them off timetable and arrange cover. It's an essential part of the year, that moderation is done efficiently (deputy head, secondary).*

One middle school teacher felt that it would be very difficult to 'run a school successfully' without time on NCDs to address planning, administration and other school-level issues. Several teachers in primary schools pointed out that in most primary schools, teachers have no non-contact time during the day, so NCDs were perceived as valuable time for planning. A key stage 2 coordinator, for example, said s/he found NCDs a very useful time for looking at assessment and timetables. At one very small primary school, the headteacher asserted that NCDs were the only time available to spend time together on planning, because both teachers were part-time and staff meetings were invariably occupied with more immediate concerns.

#### **4.4 TENSIONS BETWEEN THE MAIN DETERMINANTS OF CONTENT**

The range of rationales presented above, and indeed, the lack of consensus on what the five days should be used for, is perhaps in part responsible for the tensions identified between competing sources of influence on NCDs. The range of uses for NCDs inevitably means most schools are in a situation of attempting to meet the needs of pupils, individual staff, departments, the school as a whole, the LEA and the Government, when determining the content or focus of NCDs. In accounts from teachers and school managers, there was evidence of two main levels of tension:

- a) between school needs and national or regional initiatives; and
- b) within the school, between 'school-level' needs and the needs of departments or individual staff.

#### **Priorities of the school perceived to be at variance with national and/or regional initiatives**

Senior managers in some schools were exasperated by the imposition of external requirements for training, partly because they perceived them to disrupt their established priorities for the school, and partly because they resented being prevented from organising their staff development for themselves. As one primary headteacher affirmed: *'I think autonomy and flexibility are the key things ... because we are all at different phases of development ... and have different priorities.'* A secondary head agreed: *'... the days must be used at the discretion of the individual schools. I would be very much against any move to be told what we must do.'*

This emphasis on schools having responsibility for and control over their use of NCDs is consistent with the emphasis on the SDP as a basis for NCDs, and on the influence of the school context on their content:



*Just give us choice – one a year as Government initiatives – but please, please, we've got so many other issues in school from our own OFSTED and our own issues for the children to improve school. When we're doing literacy and it's coming from on high, it's not giving them the ownership of this school and the children ... (headteacher, primary).*

Flexibility was particularly important to the head of a primary school: '*... desperately at the moment ... we need a stress management course, but I think with literacy we don't have facility next year to do that ... that's going to take the full year I'm afraid. We have actually pencilled it [stress management] in for a Saturday morning.*'

The head of an infant school agreed: '*If people didn't drop things on you from a great height, it would help ... so your agenda stayed your agenda*' and his/her deputy also said it placed them in a '*dilemma ... other things get marginalised.*'

### **National Literacy Strategy**

A particular issue for primary, middle and special schools was the training required to follow the National Literacy Strategy. In some schools, this was regarded by senior managers as a serious disruption of the continuity and cumulative impact of a momentum already set in motion through the school's own training programme.

A middle school headteacher was unequivocal: '*I resent the fact that some of next year's NCDs have been dictated to us by the literacy demands; there are so many things we'd like to develop and continue building, or other initiatives which we'd like to bring in.*' It may be worth noting, however, that his deputy head had found their recent NCDs on literacy and numeracy very helpful. The acting head of a service for the deaf expressed concern at the prescriptive nature of NCDs; the forthcoming requirements for the National Literacy Strategy were inappropriate for his/her staff, who needed more time to spend on specific areas such as sign language.

### **OFSTED**

As discussed earlier, a number of NCDs were used by schools to prepare for OFSTED or to implement the inspection action plan. Using training days to implement points from the OFSTED action plan was also seen by some to disrupt forward planning for NCDs and make it difficult to implement a long-term approach:

*We had our OFSTED inspection in January, and the sad thing about that from our point of view, is that we had a previously agreed agenda ... but of course the OFSTED action plan has rather overtaken us. So, there is a certain feeling of frustration – perhaps might be the word – that we seem to be dragging behind in our projected plan because of the impetus put upon our current educational year and next term of the new academic year, in order to implement the OFSTED action plan (headteacher, primary).*

### **Regional requirements**

Regional requirements could be just as unwelcome as national imperatives in some cases. One head, whose school had participated in the past on '*county-wide*' events, felt they did not work very efficiently because they were not really relevant. Negative

perceptions of nationally or regionally instigated NCDs were balanced by correspondingly positive perceptions of those initiated by the schools themselves. A key stage 1 teacher in a special school appreciated the school's NCDs for being *'definitely school-based ... in some areas I have worked in they have been much more authority-based and often you have thought "Oh, I don't quite know why I was here".'* This view was repeated elsewhere, in particular by an INSET deputy who attributed the success of a recent NCD to the fact that it was *'sort of home-grown'*.

### **Priorities of the school perceived to be at variance with departmental or individual needs**

A second source of tension identified by many teachers was between NCDs meeting the perceived needs of the school, or the needs of departments or individual teachers. Whilst it would appear from the number of NCDs spent on departmental issues in secondary schools (nearly a fifth of the days) that attempts are being made to provide time for departments, the meeting of individual needs is less evident. The following situations were common:

- senior managers perceived that staff input into the SDP also provided input on the content of NCDs;
- INSET coordinators asked teachers what they would like to address, but then found there was not time to meet these diverse needs; and
- many schools saw NCDs as a forum to meet school needs, with individual needs being met by other forms of CPD.

Senior managers particularly valued NCDs where school-level issues and policies could be addressed; however, teachers tended to place high value on time in departments or time on content directly relevant to classroom practice.

# PART TWO

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INTRINSIC MERIT OF NCDs

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The second part of this report presents interviewees' evaluative commentary on NCDs. In order to make an assessment of the value of the days or sessions, the concepts of 'merit' and 'worth', first proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1981), have been employed. They argue that there are two ways in which an entity can have value: on the one hand, its merit, '*a value of its own, implicit and inherent, independent of possible application*' (Guba and Lincoln, p. 39); and on the other, its worth, '*value within some context of use of application*' (ibid.). They give as an example, a professor '*who might be judged for merit on his scholarliness, that is his standing in the academic community and his contribution to his discipline*', but who might be '*judged for worth on such factors as whether s/he provides a good role model for his students, whether s/he attracts outside grants to the university, and whether s/he teaches in a high demand field*' (ibid., p. 40). In this analysis of NCDs, 'merit' centres on interviewees' perceptions of the actual days themselves, that is their views on the value of the experience itself. 'Worth' refers to their opinion of whether what was covered during the NCDs had a value which extended beyond the provision itself and actually impacted on practice.

In this chapter, interviewees' comments on the intrinsic merit of the days/sessions are explored, and in the next chapter, their views on their worth are discussed. Specifically, this chapter first looks at staff attitudes towards NCDs, then describes the perceived benefits of the actual days themselves, i.e. their intrinsic merit. The features of successful provision are then identified.

#### 5.2 STAFF ATTITUDES TO NCDs

##### Positive attitudes

When NCDs were first introduced, there was substantial hostility towards them from teachers, who felt that the five days had been '*stolen*' from their holidays and imposed on them without any proper consultation. From this piece of research, it was apparent that there had been an improvement in staff attitudes towards NCDs, as interviewees, whether senior managers or teachers from all types of school, reported that they and their colleagues were generally positive about NCDs. Typical comments of this nature included:

*I think they are very valuable (teacher, primary).*

*I think the value is ... on a scale of one to five, one being absolutely excellent and five being absolutely unsatisfactory ... I would put it in a two/one (headteacher, primary).*

*They're really good* (head of department, secondary).

*They are essential. I wish we had an awful lot more of them* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

There was the perception that '*... we've more or less overcome the residual resentment that has been there for many years – of these having been imposed on the teaching profession originally without effective consultation*' (headteacher, secondary). Additionally, staff who had at one time felt '*bitter*' towards the days now felt they were worthwhile:

*I would have said there were a lot [of drawbacks] three or four years ago, but certainly in the last couple of years, I wouldn't have said that because you can see the reason for them* (head of department, secondary).

*They have great value and they've improved. If you'd asked me the same question three years ago, my views wouldn't have been quite the same* (headteacher, primary).

Chapter Three, discussing the historical development of NCDs, highlighted that INSET coordinators and senior managers felt that schools had become better at the planning and organisation of NCDs, and, interestingly, interviewees ascribed the improvement in their attitudes to their schools making better use of the days. A head of department from a secondary school explained that because NCDs in his/her school were now better related to the school's needs and the days themselves more tightly focused, s/he found them useful:

*If you'd have asked me that three years ago, I would have said every day we had was probably not useful ... They used to be days that dragged and you didn't have a focus. But I think as a school we've developed that and we try and keep everything short and sharp and set up the agendas. We time things and try and keep them tight* (head of department, secondary).

Several interviewees commented that their schools' NCDs used to be organised by the LEA for all the local schools and were often irrelevant to their needs; now that their schools were responsible for NCDs, provision had improved and so had their attitudes. An INSET coordinator from a secondary school, for example, attributed his/her change of attitude – '*I feel happier about them now*' – to the fact that '*the school itself is able to decide on the agenda*', whereas, '*at one time many of them were LEA-run and everybody, say, in English would go off to this meeting and you would have an agenda forced upon you*'.

A further reason for the improvement in staff attitudes was felt to be the result of a generally more positive attitude towards in-service training amongst those new to the profession. A teacher from a secondary school had noticed that the recently qualified staff were '*very supportive*' of NCDs, whereas those leaving were '*older colleagues set in their ways, and with respect, a lot of them didn't want to take on these sort of new initiatives*'. New teachers were said just to accept NCDs '*as part of*

*their contract*': 'A lot of new teachers come in and, of course, it's something that's always been there to them, and therefore the feeling about training days is more positive' (head of department, secondary). In contrast, staff who were 'longer in the tooth' were said to regard NCDs as 'five pinched holiday days' and were reluctant to come into school for them. A primary school headteacher had observed a difference in the attitudes of teachers who were just embarking on their teaching careers and those who were very experienced:

*The more newly qualified they are, the more eager they are, the more demanding they are that it should happen. They expect to have their professional development looked after. People who've been in teaching longer think 'Do we need this?' (headteacher, primary).*

Although most interviewees were of the opinion that newly qualified staff were more receptive to NCDs, an INSET coordinator from a primary school had observed that, whilst they found the days useful, the NQTs in his/her school were also 'quite critical' because they did not appreciate the time involved in planning the provision or how difficult it was to pitch it correctly '... because they are inexperienced, they don't know what goes on behind the scenes'.

Most interestingly, there was evidence that some senior managers and INSET coordinators used certain tactics in order to achieve and preserve teachers' enthusiasm for NCDs. A number reported that, as 'a sop' to staff, they would use NCDs sometimes in ways they did not believe they were intended but they knew would appeal to staff. A secondary headteacher described the 'trade-off' at his/her school: one NCD was given over to moderation – a focus s/he believed 'not overtly to do with professional development' – because otherwise staff would come to resent the five days if they were all spent on whole-school issues. Allowing time for personal preparation was also used as an incentive: in one primary school, staff had worked a continental day, 8.30–12.30, on NCDs to allow them time for personal preparation. Equally, the use of twilight sessions was said to improve the palatability of NCDs, because staff could have an extra day's holiday. (It should be said that whilst in these schools, time for moderation and personal preparation was regarded as a 'sop' to staff, in other schools these were considered legitimate purposes of NCDs. Also, as Chapter Three showed, twilight sessions were deemed by some to have other advantages.) An INSET coordinator from a secondary school had found that negative staff could be won over by asking them to lead the training, because when they were preparing for the day, 'real camaraderie' developed between them and their fellow contributors as 'it's not easy standing up in front of your peers and suddenly appearing to be an expert'. Indeed, a head of year from this school commented:

*I think my view is to get the best out of whatever is on offer, because I've been on the other end of one. I had to organise one for appraisal and it's hard, so the least you can do is to be very willing (head of department, secondary).*

This need for INSET coordinators and senior managers to 'bribe' staff for their good will towards NCDs might indicate that, for some individuals at least, their attitudes towards the days might still be delicately balanced between the positive and the negative. A headteacher from one of the case-study primary schools had, for example,

noticed that the staff's attitudes towards NCDs fluctuated depending on how useful they perceived the provision to be. Further, while attitudes were found to have improved, there was evidence of grudging acceptance of the days from some: a head of department and colleagues, for example, recognised the value of NCDs, but still felt that there were '*a thousand things*' they could do instead. Equally, interviewees' change in attitude was not always the result of sophisticated reasoning and realisation of the benefits NCDs could bring: an INSET coordinator's account of why s/he and his/her colleagues had become increasingly positive about the days was more indicative of the busy working lives of teachers: '*The more time you spend on that day that's given [to] you on something, the less time you have to spend at home on it.*'

INSET coordinators and senior managers were aware that their colleagues' attitudes towards the days vacillated at times. They recognised that the demands of teaching impacted on staff attitudes towards the days: '*Occasionally staff begrudge having to spend a whole-day on training when they've got things to do in the classroom*' (INSET coordinator, primary). Equally, they were aware that the timing, organisation and subject matter for the day could affect their colleagues' opinion of NCDs:

*If they're timed well, staff recognise the need for the training. If your needs identification exercise has been effectively carried out and the staff know they have had an involvement in it, then they will come to the training more willingly, with more commitment than they would if you just said, 'Right, we're training on this'. If the day is well constructed with an appropriate balance of activities, then they will enjoy it more (headteacher, secondary).*

Indeed, some interviewees remarked that NCDs were only valuable if certain criteria were filled: if the provision was linked to the Staff Development Plan or individuals' needs; if staff had had a role in determining the topic under consideration; if they were well planned, well organised, and tightly focused; if they were on a relevant topic and would offer something of value for classroom practice. The following comments illustrate the type of condition teachers placed on their approval of the days:

*There are a lot of positives ... if they are run properly (teacher, primary).*

*I think if they are used properly, if staff have a lot of input and it's decided on as a whole-staff where the needs are and what you need to do, then I think they are very beneficial (senior manager, primary).*

*Provided they are on a useful topic that you can then take away and elaborate on, then they are positive (teacher, secondary).*

Notwithstanding some interviewees' conditional or temperamental support for NCDs, as previously stated, an improvement in attitudes was apparent. An INSET coordinator from a secondary school had even observed a shift in colleagues' perceptions of the benefits the days/sessions offered:

*There was a time when people regarded them as a bit of a doss time: 'Thank God we've got one now 'cos this has been a tiring term' idea. More and more*

*now, staff want the days early in the term so that they can develop with the term ahead (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

From interviewees' comments, it was possible to identify the NCDs which were particularly popular with staff. There were some teachers who valued NCDs spent discussing the formulation of whole-school policy. One individual in a special school described a day where they had worked on the behavioural policy '*as a staff*' as '*excellent*', because '*we all knew exactly what was put down in the policy and we are all able to contribute to it*'. In general, however, teachers expressed an unmistakable preference for NCDs which they judged to be directly relevant to the improvement and development of their practice. Provision on classroom management was conspicuously popular: a CDT teacher, for example, claimed that out of the total of 35 NCDs experienced so far, only the most recent one on classroom management had been of any use. Acquiring a range of alternative strategies, both in order to vary the learning experiences they offered to their pupils, and also in order to develop their skills in managing the challenges of continuous social interaction in the classroom, seemed to give a significant boost to the professional self-esteem of both newly qualified and more experienced teachers.

In secondary schools, there were many teachers who expressed a determined preference for 'departmental' days/sessions because this was when they felt they really came to grips with '*the nitty-gritty*' of teaching. In some primary schools too, staff also preferred NCDs directed at specific key stages; the needs of Year 6 teachers and those working at key stage 1 were perceived in some cases to be very different, and at the same time more pressing than whole-school concerns.

### **Negative attitudes**

Although staff attitudes had improved since NCDs were first introduced, some negative attitudes still prevailed. A number of interviewees commented that whilst they valued NCDs, they were aware that some of their colleagues did not. A teacher from a secondary school acknowledged most of his/her colleagues 'slated' NCDs and felt that '*I am more receptive than most here*'. In a minority of schools, headteachers and INSET coordinators reported widespread apathy, resistance or even deliberate hostility to NCDs. A headteacher of a secondary school described the staff's attitude to NCDs:

*Some would like to wash the car because of where the day is at the end of the holidays, or in the twilight hours when they could be marking a set of books. We still have staff coming to the school who, when asked, give as their suggestion that they would like to use the day for administration (headteacher, secondary).*

Similarly, a primary headteacher felt that colleagues were '*pretty negative*':

*I think because it's a training day, they think it should be a day off basically. They don't really want to have to think and if they don't think, they're not going to take the ownership of it (headteacher, primary).*

A new INSET coordinator at a secondary school recounted his/her experience of his/her first NCD there; s/he was *'amazed at how hostile they looked ... culture of resistance ... a physically perceptible resistance ... the shutters were up from the beginning'*. S/he perceived this defensive attitude to derive from two distinct sources. Firstly, from an inability to see any need *'to be developed in their role'*; s/he believed individual members of staff were not likely to have had to come to terms with any change of role and had reinforced the status quo through building up experience and skills already acquired. S/he further attributed their resistance to change to *'a very healthy cynicism'* resulting from a series of initiatives which had been externally imposed, introduced and subsequently neglected. S/he imagined that the most useful NCD from the staff's point of view would have been the day they were given for moderation, because it would have eased the *'ever-increasing burden of paperwork'*. This INSET coordinator suggested that if staff could opt to attend different sessions, rather than a single whole-school session over the whole-day, a more positive attitude would be likely to evolve. It was interesting that in spite of these comments, a PE teacher said s/he had found NCDs very useful, especially a day held jointly with other schools. However, like the coordinator, s/he was new to the school. A modern languages teacher, who had been there for four years, said NCDs were useful if the time was spent on relevant issues and properly structured, but s/he was aware that they were *'certainly not widely accepted'*.

There were further indications of staff harbouring negative attitudes towards NCDs. The introductory chapter of this report highlighted the lack of official explicit specification as to the purpose of NCDs. Possibly as a result of this lack of clarification, diversity in the perceived role of NCDs was evident amongst interviewees – whether, for example, they were for personal preparation, continuing professional development, or the formulation of policy documents. Where an individual's perception of the purpose of NCDs was at variance with that of their school, it appeared to negatively affect their opinion of the NCDs they had experienced and consequently their view of the value of the days. A teacher from a secondary school, for example, felt that it might be more beneficial to sort out his/her classroom or organise the stockroom on NCDs rather than contribute to a policy document or participate in the training offered. Similarly, a head of department from a secondary school, aggrieved with the school's approach to NCDs, commented: *'I'm sure some schools do use them usefully to best advantage. I don't think that's the case here ... I feel they ought to be a chance to catch up on all your marking.'* In contrast, however, a SENCO/English teacher from a junior school believed that NCDs should concentrate on CPD, and was dissatisfied with both the focus of NCDs (the preparation and review of policy documents) and the lack of staff consultation in his/her school:

*I think training days would be very valuable if staff were involved in identifying an aspect of the curriculum in which they felt they needed to be trained, and that it was an actual proper training day and not just a paper sifting exercise (SENCO/English teacher, primary).*



### 5.3 THE SPECIFIC BENEFITS OF NCDs

This section discusses the interviewees' perceptions of the benefits which the experience of NCDs brought, that is their intrinsic merit. Chapter Four described the wide variety in the content of the NCDs held in the survey and case-study schools, and highlighted above was the diversity in interviewees' perceptions of the purpose of NCDs. When interviewees were asked to identify the specific benefits for which they valued NCDs, most striking again was the sheer range of views expressed: NCDs were said to be appreciated because they offered an opportunity:

- for guaranteed CPD for all;
- to listen to outside speakers;
- to meet staff from other schools;
- to be in a different environment;
- for reflection;
- to consider school-level issues;
- for staff to meet and work together; and
- for a change from normal routine/teaching duties.

Again it may be that this diversity in interviewees' views of the benefits of NCDs is attributable to the lack of official clarification as to their purpose and the resulting variety in their content, as evidenced in Chapter Four. It might have been assumed that because the vast majority of schools referred to NCDs as 'training days', 'INSET days' or 'teacher/professional development days', the benefits identified by interviewees would have been concerned with the opportunity NCDs afforded for CPD. This was certainly the case to some degree as NCDs were seen, for example, as opportunities for guaranteed CPD and to listen to outside speakers. However, it was also evident that interviewees felt that NCDs offered other benefits: the chance for staff to be together, to go to a different environment and a change from normal teaching routine/duties. Such diversity suggests that the intrinsic merit of NCDs operates on several different levels. This may have had a positive effect on teachers' attitudes towards the days, because it means that there is enough scope for most to find something to value. However, it also has the potential to damage staff attitudes too. The diversity in their value might make it difficult for schools to establish consensus on what NCDs are for, and as was highlighted above, where teachers and schools are at odds over the purpose of NCDs, it detrimentally affects individuals' attitudes. It may also have repercussions for NCDs' worth. Without clear consensus on the purpose of NCDs, it may be that their impact on practice is variable. However, any official attempt to clarify their purpose might colour staff attitudes to the days themselves, and therefore undermine the intrinsic merit of NCDs.

The benefits of NCDs identified by interviewees will now be described in greater detail. Typically interviewees cited several different benefits. However, for the sake of clarity, each of the benefits will be considered separately. It was apparent that the individual schools' experience made a difference to why NCDs were valued: for example, whilst some interviewees welcomed the chance to work with staff from other schools, others had found that such days were unlikely to meet their needs.

### **NCDs as guaranteed CPD for all**

NCDs were said to ensure that, during the year, all staff would receive some CPD: *'They guarantee that people will have a number of sessions every year where they are thinking in terms of staff development'* (deputy head, secondary). This was said to raise the profile of staff development, and was considered particularly important at a time when the pace of change in education, with the introduction of initiatives like the National Literacy Hour, was such that *'there's probably a greater need for training and updating than previously'* (head of department, secondary). In addition, the changes brought about by LMS and the pressure on school budgets meant that it could be difficult for some schools to send staff on external courses, as a senior manager from a primary school explained:

*With budgets as they are, people are not going on the courses. When I first came into teaching, you could just pick any courses and go on them because the budget wasn't done in the way it's done now, whereas now everything has to be geared round the money that you have got, availability and the cover for staff to go on courses. So I think at least with having INSET days, you know that all staff are getting some curricular development throughout the year. So take those away and there's nothing* (senior manager, primary).

An issue worth considering here is perhaps whether NCDs are always an adequate substitute for external INSET courses for teachers. A teacher from a secondary school, who was not enthusiastic about NCDs, did believe that they had some advantage over external courses, because all staff received some input and were not reliant on the member of staff who had attended a course for information: *'The idea of them is all right – the fact that the whole-staff is given some input all together, so you're not relying on someone to do the course for you and then come back and feed back for you – that's useful'* (teacher, secondary). However, whilst the opportunities that NCDs provide for CPD are clearly better than no such provision, it may be that at times they are a cursory nod in the direction of teachers' CPD: staff receive some training but it may not always be specific enough to their individual needs or at an appropriate level for them. Obviously, teachers' experiences, length of service, role in school, their subject specialism, the key stage or year group they teach all impact on their training needs, which at times may only be addressed through a specific course. In fact, a headteacher from a junior school commented that NCDs should be used to meet *'whole-school needs'* because teachers' CPD needs were so individual they must be addressed through courses.

### **NCDs as opportunities to listen to outside speakers**

The involvement of expert speakers in NCDs was seen as an opportunity for staff to boost their confidence and improve their skills and knowledge in areas in which they were lacking:

*Your confidence is improved by listening to a speaker about a certain aspect or if you're going to learn a new skill* (senior teacher, infants).

*I do enjoy when we get outside people coming in, as we did in the top sport things, and they show us their skills or help us to develop our own skills (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

The *'injection of new ideas'* from expert speakers and the very fact that they came from outside the school were said to be beneficial: *'... they're not one of us – they're speaking from a different standpoint. It starts people thinking in different directions'* (teacher, middle). Their potential to *'motivate', 'stimulate', 'inspire'* staff was also valued. The fact that a school could bring in a speaker to address all staff at once was considered very beneficial. The size of the school did emerge as an issue here, however: whilst a teacher from a secondary school felt that the input from an outside speaker was cost-effective, a teacher from a middle school commented that such inputs were expensive because of the small staff size: *'... the funding ... is quite hefty. It costs more per head in this school than, say, a large comprehensive.'*

Despite the benefits associated with an outside speaker, it is worth bearing in mind that, as will be shown in the next section, they could have both a positive and negative effect on staff perceptions of the value of NCDs. Whilst an effective and knowledgeable speaker could enhance an NCD by motivating and inspiring staff and improving their skills, a poor or patronising speaker could anger staff and lead them to question both the merit and worth of the days.

It should be noted that, although the value of using outside speakers was more frequently cited, the opportunity NCDs afforded schools to make use of the expertise within their own staff was regarded as a specific benefit by a number of interviewees. Indeed, a primary school INSET coordinator felt more use should be made of this, especially at primary level: *'I don't believe that people's expertise within the primary area is really being tapped, and non-contact days are very useful if you use them to tap into the expertise within your staff.'*

### **NCDs as opportunities to meet staff from other schools**

The opportunity to meet staff from other schools on NCDs was particularly appreciated by a number of interviewees, especially those from small schools. NCDs for a tiny village school with one full-time and two part-time members of staff meant the opportunity to meet with staff from other schools who had subject specialisms not represented in their own school *'so that you come away with a clearer picture at the end of what you should be doing'* (teacher). Meeting with staff from other schools was also said to ensure that teachers did not become too *'isolated'* or insular. Interviewees from a few secondary schools commented that NCDs occasionally allowed them access to fellow subject specialists from other schools. A head of department from one school valued this for the opportunities it afforded to *'see other people's departments'*, discuss his/her subject with fellow specialists and occasionally recruit an outside speaker to lead a session. There was no consensus on the value of joint NCDs, however, as staff from some schools had experienced days with other schools or pyramid groups which were less useful because they were not specifically related to their own school's needs.

### **NCDs as opportunities to be in a different environment**

The opportunity to be in a different environment was said to be ‘refreshing’ by a number of interviewees. A different environment was beneficial psychologically for staff, boosted morale and could make the days more productive:

*It does bring a fresh approach because when people are in a different environment, in a different kind of set-up and they're not harassed, that does everybody good. I think it's a morale booster and I think that's what they should be seen as, a morale booster, because teachers' morale, not just in this school, is very, very low at the moment (INSET coordinator, primary).*

A middle school, which had organised a two-day residential NCD, found these days particularly valuable as they offered the opportunity for staff to work hard during the day and socialise in the evening. The effects of this were said to be evident after the staff returned to school:

*The biggest benefit we get is from the residential days, where we stay in quite a nice hotel. We will work really hard as a staff, and socialise as a staff, as you can't at any other time, and we have a really good meal together in the evening ... There's always an air of revitalment when we get back (headteacher, middle).*

### **NCDs as opportunities for reflection**

The time NCDs offered for reflection was prized: ‘just gives you time to reflect really’ (teacher, special). Reasons suggested for this were that NCDs gave staff the time to ‘refocus’ on elements of their own teaching, and the opportunity to consider both general educational issues and current initiatives like the National Literacy Project:

*It ... gives you time to reflect on – if it's been to do with the National Curriculum or the literacy or something like that – on what is actually happening at the moment and how education is moving forward, and I think that's very important (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

This time for reflection was seen as important for teachers’ sense of professionalism. The ‘busyness’ of teaching was said to prevent staff from considering their practice on a regular basis and resulted in teachers becoming ‘operational rather than professional’ (head of department, secondary). NCDs could counteract this by giving staff the opportunity ‘to raise their eyes above the horizon of day-to-day work’ (headteacher, secondary). A headteacher from a primary school expanded:

*I think the benefit is that it gives all staff the opportunity to remember they are human beings, not on a conveyor belt ... In the normal course of a day you can go from 9.00, if that's when we kid ourselves we start, to whatever time you finish and you don't actually think much about what you're doing. It sounds awful, but I don't think we think very often. I think we react and get on with and do, and I think we need time to think about what our practice is.*

### **NCDs as opportunities to consider school-level issues**

NCDs were further regarded as beneficial because they gave schools the chance to consider school-level issues. This could be the formulation or review of policy documents, assessment criteria or schemes of work, and also the opportunity to consider 'the big issues' like school development and improvement. NCDs allowed all staff to come together to work collectively and contribute their perspective to these school-level issues, and also enabled the senior management to 'get their view across' to all year groups or departments. Further, subject matter could be covered comprehensively in a way that was not possible during staff meetings. Indeed, some interviewees admitted to being perplexed at how the school would cover certain issues without NCDs:

*If we didn't have them, I don't know what we would do on specific issues ... if we didn't have a big slot of time, what would we do? It's much better to be able to get across that big wodge of stuff and then work through it after that from meeting to meeting or whatever. If you didn't have that, I think we would be stuck on some issues (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Even running the school would be difficult without them:

*Problems are aired, solutions are found. Without those days, it would be very difficult to get everything covered regarding planning, talking about new ways forward. It would be very difficult to run a school successfully, in all aspects – administration, legal, teaching methods – without these sort of days (teacher, middle).*

*They're invaluable. Without them we'd have great difficulty in moving forward and getting the staff together to focus on what we really need to focus on (INSET coordinator, middle).*

This benefit of NCDs could be tapped because schools could decide for themselves the focus of the days and could therefore tailor provision to meet the needs of the staff and school. This flexibility was particularly appreciated by senior managers, who cited this as an important benefit of the days: 'I think it gives us the autonomy to pick and choose the sort of things that we do' (headteacher, primary). The specification that three NCDs should be spent on literacy training in 1998–1999 was seen as a threat to this, however.

### **NCDs as opportunities for staff to meet and work together**

The opportunity afforded for the whole-staff to meet and work together was also identified as a benefit of NCDs. This was valued for two main reasons: the social aspect (the opportunity for staff to spend time together) and the professional aspect (the chance for staff to work together):

*It gives staff the opportunity to meet socially. In school you don't really get the chance to talk to colleagues, so it's quite nice on five occasions in the year to have lunch together, and it's quite civilised (head of department, secondary).*

*I enjoy it when we get together as a staff and discuss current issues or discuss the key stage work that we have to do. I think that's very important that teachers do have time to do that (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

The next chapter of this report shows that interviewees felt that an important effect of NCDs was greater staff cohesion and collaboration, and the opportunity the actual days afforded for both social and professional contact was a prerequisite for that, as a teacher from a secondary school explained: *'If we staff do not have time as a whole-staff to discuss together, then you cannot have a team, because we cannot have a common shared vision if we are not ever going to cohere.'* Such was the emphasis on spending time with colleagues, a number of interviewees commented that even if they learned nothing new on an NCD, the chance to be together made the day worthwhile:

*The main value, I feel, with training days personally is that you have got time to talk to members of staff without any pressures around you, and I think you can just get so much more done ... I think you can actually say 'This is our time', and I think even if you don't always learn anything, it's just important that you just get together (teacher, special).*

At primary level, the opportunity for staff to spend time together was particularly appreciated because in the normal teaching week teachers were usually isolated in their own classes, non-contact time was non-existent, and any liaison between staff tended to be with teachers of the same year group:

*In a primary school particularly, non-contact time is goodness knows where, and so you sort of tend to get within your own year group and you don't see what's happening and you don't have contact with other members of staff, and so I think in that respect, then, they [NCDs] are very beneficial (senior manager, primary).*

The opportunity that NCDs offered for teachers, especially those from different key stages, to socialise and to work together was particularly valued by a headteacher from one primary school:

*Actually working with different people, that's something it gives you the facility to do. So you actually cross-phase it. You get infants [staff] working with junior staff ... so different members of staff work together, and I think that's good because it gives different ways of looking across a whole-school (headteacher, primary).*

Similarly, at secondary level, the facility NCDs afforded for liaison across departments and year groups was valued:

*I would hope that they're useful in getting the school working together ... a way of providing a focus on that day, for the school to work together ... on an issue outside the normal departmental, year group boundaries that people tend to work in (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

*It's good that you actually get together with other members from other departments. So you get some discussion, different years and so on. You don't always get to see those people to work with. So it's quite good from that point of view (teacher, secondary).*

In addition, the opportunity which NCDs offered for teachers to work with other members of their department or faculty was highly regarded, one interviewee describing this time as like 'gold dust'.

### **NCDs as a change from normal routine/teaching duties**

That NCDs offered staff a change from the normal routine or teaching duties emerged as a specific benefit of the days themselves. The chance of a 'full dinner hour' on NCDs was welcomed, as was the opportunity the days gave for planning and administration. As the following extracts show, an NCD at the beginning of the term or the year was seen as a most welcome opportunity for preparation; offered a gentle introduction back into school after a break; and was a useful means by which to integrate new members of staff:

*I think those three at the beginning of each term are really beneficial to get staff meetings started and everybody back together and everything sorted and ready to start the next day. So I think those ought to be sacrosanct (senior manager, primary).*

*An NCD first day back [is useful], then they feel that at least they have got a cushion before they start with children and the real work that we are about. So there's that side of it (headteacher, secondary).*

*In September, it is a good way of getting back together. It's good if you've got a new member of staff joining to have days like that where you can work informally to start with; then when they go off to their classroom ... it's a good way of getting staff in (headteacher, middle).*

An NCD in the middle of a long term was a 'a breather' and a chance 'to get your act together' (deputy head, secondary).

The absence of pupils from the school on NCDs was also said to be appealing: '... it's useful for staff to have a whole-day where they haven't got to worry about children (INSET coordinator, secondary); '... it's usually quite nice because you have not got all the children and you have not got to plan (Year 6 teacher, primary). As well as being a benefit in its own right, the absence of pupils also led on to other benefits, like the opportunity for staff to be together: '... hate to say it but school without the children is a totally different place. A day when we can socialise together – nice to have a day when it's just us, the staff' (deputy head, primary). Furthermore, without the children for distraction, staff were better able to concentrate on the topics under consideration on the day, therefore ensuring that the most could be made of the opportunity to consider school-level issues:

*I think the value is that it gives space and time within a busy routine with children, to have the opportunity to look at curricular and management issues for the whole-school in great depth. You cannot do that if children are around because your mind has to go to them as a teacher (headteacher, primary).*

*I think they're useful for giving staff the chance to get together without having children around ... One of the most difficult and draining things about teaching is you're constantly isolated with a lot of young people and it is very good to have the opportunity to work with adults (teacher, secondary).*

Like the absence of pupils on the days, the time available on NCDs was identified as a benefit in itself – ‘*the key to INSET days is that you have time*’ (head of department, secondary): ‘*I think they appreciate the time ... it's the little bit of relaxed time*’ (INSET coordinator, primary) – as well as being contributory factor to other benefits like the opportunity for in-depth consideration of school-level issues, for staff to meet together and for reflection.

#### **5.4 FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL PROVISION**

Interviewees were asked to identify the features which, in their opinion, constituted a successful NCD. Consistent with the Guba and Lincoln definition introduced earlier, this chapter focuses on the interviewees’ perceptions of a ‘successful day’ in terms of the actual experience of the provision. Success in terms of its impact on practice is considered in Chapter Six. The features highlighted were concerned with all elements of the day: planning, content, format, presentation, practicalities and evaluation. A common analogy was that a successful NCD was ‘*like a lesson*’. A headteacher of a primary school elucidated:

*It's like a good lesson, I would say: well planned, well focused, well prepared, relevant overheads, well presented to staff with clear objectives of what you are going to do and clear targets of what you hope to achieve throughout the day. Good content in the middle, good summaries at the end, good evaluation, which to me is quick and relevant, and soon afterwards, see that work transfers into classroom if it's of a nature that can be transferred, or if it's general improvement of skills base, to see those skills being taken on as a whole, or else some documentation that we all agree on and we are actually following and we actually go with, and enjoyment – I would say that that's important, that staff come away feeling fulfilled on those days, as they would do from their own teaching if they do all those things to it.*

As Chapter Two argued, however, there may be some limitations in regarding a successful NCD like a lesson. Whilst the actual mechanics of a lesson and an NCD may be similar (the need for good planning, a range of activities and a varied structure), there would appear to be certain differences between them. Obviously, a whole-day NCD is much longer than a lesson. Secondly, they are aimed at a professional adult audience more accustomed to the role of instructing than being instructed. In fact, a number of interviewees pointed out that teachers were ‘*the worst group of people to talk to because they can mimic the children's attitude*’ (head of



department, secondary). Perhaps most importantly, NCDs tend to be one-off sessions, and, unlike a lesson, they do not follow a scheme. A lesson may build on from what has been covered before, and future lessons are likely to continue on from what was covered, giving definite opportunities to reinforce knowledge gained and to practise any skills. With an NCD one day, then teaching or a holiday the next day, there may be few subsequent opportunities for reinforcement or practice and refinement. As the next chapter will show, the need for continuity between NCDs and follow-up was identified as a key factor in ensuring that what was covered on the days was put into practice.

The features of a successful day as identified by interviewees will now be discussed in greater detail.

### **Planning**

Interviewees stressed that a successful day must be well planned and prepared. Chapter Two, which describes the planning and organisation of NCDs in the case-study and survey schools, reported that just under two-thirds of the schools had some form of consultation with staff over the content of NCDs. When asked to identify the features of a successful day, interviewees frequently suggested that all staff should have some involvement in deciding the topics to be covered: *'I feel first of all it needs to be something that's agreed by the staff, that they need to do a training day in'* (SENCO/English coordinator, primary). This involvement was said to demonstrate to staff that they were valued and to ensure that the focus of NCDs was relevant to them. A deputy head of a secondary school commented that otherwise the senior management team might get *'carried away'* and cover issues not relevant to those in the classroom on a daily basis. To most interviewees, the opportunity to suggest the content of NCDs appeared sufficient, though a smaller number did state that staff should have the opportunity to propose the format of the day:

*Staff need to be informed, basically, maybe through a brief meeting or a questionnaire so they can have some input into the days themselves, possibly suggest a format or people they know of who could come in and offer some expertise (Year 4 teacher, primary).*

This is perhaps an area for development in schools' planning of NCDs because, as will be shown, teachers were very concerned about the timetabling, format and any external input on the days. While Chapter Two found that schools canvassed staff opinion over the content of NCDs, specific consultation over the format of the day was not apparent, suggesting that such consultation regarding the mechanics of the days is often overlooked.

In Chapter Two, the importance the schools placed on linking NCDs to the SDP was highlighted. Here, it was identified as a feature of successful practice in the organisation and planning of NCDs:

*[NCDs] should link in with School Development Plan, the way you see the school going, your vision for the school. If you have that right, that will have identified the areas that you need to tackle (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

The timing of NCDs was also cited as a factor which could impact on the success of the provision, as an INSET coordinator from a secondary school noted:

*The timing of them is very important as well. I find the afternoon is not a good time. The first day back at school is not a good time either. Certainly the last day of term is not a good time.*

His comment that ‘*the first day back at school is not a good time*’ is perhaps interesting in light of comments in the previous section that NCDs at the start of terms were highly regarded by staff. This interviewee, however, felt that these days tended to be taken up with general preparation for the term ahead rather than school development or CPD. Again, this demonstrates the key issue concerning the lack of consensus as to what NCDs should be used for.

‘*Good organisation*’ on the actual day was considered important. The need to have clear aims and outcomes in mind was stressed, as was the importance of ensuring that teachers were aware of these:

*Clear, achievable goals. The staff should know what the outcome should be (teacher, middle).*

*There have to be very clear aims and the staff need to know what those aims are, and an expected outcome (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Fulfilling the aims of the NCD and achieving the outcomes might involve providing the staff in advance with some details of the main issues to be addressed – ‘... *pre-released material, no matter how brief, so people can think about it, or even prepare something to ensure they are involved*’ (INSET coordinator, secondary school) – and timetabling the day appropriately – ‘... *a day that’s broken up into manageable, achievable sections, that staff feel that each one means that we have done this and we have got to do that*’ (INSET coordinator, primary). Indeed, it was asserted that careful thought should be given to the timetabling of the day, possibly providing staff with an agenda. Teachers, in particular, were keen to tackle the demanding work in the morning:

*I think you need a timetable so that you know on the day what you are going to do and when you are going to do it, if it’s going to be things that are going to be broken up. Again, I think you need to think about what is actually going to be on that day, and if it’s going to be something that’s really brain-taxing, then it needs to be in the morning when everybody is awake, and you have got to remember that teachers are up and down and all over the place all the time. I find it very difficult now to sit still in one place for more than ten minutes (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

This is interesting given that a successful day was said to be akin to a lesson and may possibly beg the question whether being on the receiving end has the inadvertent effect of prompting teachers to reconsider the planning and structuring of their own lessons.

## Format

The format of the day was identified as an important feature in a successful NCD. Interviewees commented that poor delivery and format could have a detrimental effect on even relevant content and useful information:

*It's the way people have approached it. When you've sat down for three hours listening to someone talking and it hasn't been broken up into discussion, and you've been told 'You can't ask questions till the end', I think that's what can make the day negative even if the actual topic of the day is positive and is useful. It's the way people have gone about structuring it that actually makes it work or not work (teacher, secondary).*

*You can give a lot of valuable information out in a very boring way and gain nothing (deputy head, primary).*

Chapter Three of this study described the format of the NCDs held in the sample schools and reported that senior managers and INSET coordinators were aware of the importance of a varied format. This emerged strongly in interviewees' descriptions of the features which constitute a successful day as it was stressed that it should involve a combination of approaches and tasks. A varied format was said to ensure that the different learning styles of staff were catered for, made the provision 'quite pacy', and, most frequently mentioned, meant that staff did not have to listen constantly. A long time spent listening was both unappealing and fruitless:

*I don't think a successful training day can possibly be one where one person is talking to an audience for a whole-day (deputy head, special),*

*... sitting listening to someone else talk ... you find you're thinking about the following week, what you're going to do with your new class (Year 1/2 teacher, primary).*

Three key elements in the format of a successful day appeared to be a mix of 'listening' (input from an external speaker or a member of staff), 'discussing' (exchange of views, either whole-school or in groups) and 'doing' (hands-on, practical activities or the opportunity to apply the focus of the NCD to either the individual or school's current practice):

*Some input, some time to discuss it between us, some time to apply it to where we are – all those things make for a successful day, I think (Year 4 teacher, primary).*

*Lots of different things throughout the day, not lots and lots, but a combination of listening and practical and chance to talk together as well: I would say they are the most successful really (Year 3 teacher, primary).*

Interestingly perhaps, as Chapter Three showed, a format involving input, discussion and tasks was already used in many of the sample schools. Whilst this clearly

suggests that interviewees were satisfied with this format, it may also be indicative of a rather narrow view on the part of some interviewees in their constructs of formats for NCDs. The similarity in the format of this kind of NCD and a lesson was acknowledged, which possibly intimates that interviewees' own teaching practices, as well as their experiences of NCDs, contributed to this view:

*I suppose it's very similar to teaching or planning a lesson – you want to have a doing bit, a discussion bit and a listening bit, and if you can get the balance right between listening, discussing and hands-on doing, then that's quite positive (teacher, secondary).*

Some new approaches and areas for development in the design of NCDs were identified, however. For example, INSET coordinators in a few secondary schools in particular felt that offering staff some choice of parallel workshops or sessions during an NCD had the potential to be '*highly advantageous*'. Chapter Three reported that four schools in the sample had used this type of format on NCDs held in the school year 1997–1998. Attitudes to these days were, to some extent, mixed, however. A teacher from a secondary school, for example, had found that when such an NCD took place, the workshops s/he attended were very useful but s/he was disappointed not to have had the opportunity to attend the parallel sessions. At another secondary school, a head of year had found that an NCD involving a choice of sessions on IT '*was not appropriate to my needs*' (head of year, secondary), even though one of the reasons for this format was so that staff could attend the session which corresponded best to their current level of skill.

'*Some good handouts*' to take away from NCDs were also cited as a feature of successful provision so '*you're not sitting there scribing all day*' (teacher, special). They were also said to act as an *aide-mémoire* for teachers in case they wanted to incorporate an idea they had learned on an NCD into their teaching at a later date or develop their own skills further, as an INSET coordinator from a primary school explained: '*... you know at the time but a week later you've forgotten – so you need to go back and if you've got a really good handout, you can go through it yourself.*'

Chapter Three documented that a range of group settings was used on NCDs in the sample schools. This was identified as a feature of a successful day, a headteacher from a secondary school commenting, for example, that:

*Staff need the chance to get together in small groups for professional discussion and as a whole-staff simply in order to relate to each other as human beings (headteacher, secondary).*

In the previous section of this chapter, the opportunities NCDs offered for staff to spend time as a whole-school, with colleagues from different departments, key stages or year groups, and with members of their own department or key stage emerged as a specific benefit of the days. Each of these was identified here as an element of successful provision. Secondary school staff, in particular, stressed that for them, time with colleagues in their department was an important part of an NCD. Indeed, when interviewees were asked to identify which of the NCDs in the school year

1997–1998 they had found most useful, days which had involved departmental time were frequently chosen by secondary school staff.

Individual time for administration or personal preparation was identified by some as part of a successful provision. In a previous section of this chapter, this was cited as ‘a sop’ to staff for their cooperation on the day, and it was clear that staff found this time very useful. In one of the case-study primary schools, for example, teachers were allowed time on the observed NCDs for personal preparation in their classrooms, and they commented that this was as useful as the input they had received from outside speakers. The headteacher felt that this time for administration and preparation, whilst ‘*not strictly what the INSET is for*’, might ‘*improve the quality of what’s delivered to the children*’ because teachers were better prepared.

### **Speakers**

Chapter Three reported that NCDs in the sample schools frequently involved input from a member of the school staff or an outside speaker. When identifying the features of a successful day, interviewees advocated that input should be ‘*well presented*’ and the speaker, either in-house or external, ‘*charismatic*’ and ‘*inspiring*’:

*I think the person who is leading it has got to have a bright enough personality to keep your attention because we all know in classrooms that you are likely to drift away even in the best subjects. So that's important (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

Although cited less often than the use of outside speakers, input led by a member of the school staff was said to have the advantage that it could be tailored exactly to the needs of the school. The actual preparation that the member of staff did for the session could be regarded as professional development for them; although this was also seen to have an adverse effect because it required them to do much extra work. Furthermore, because the individual leading the training was a member of staff, there were greater opportunities to follow up the work covered on NCDs, which, as the next chapter will show, was seen as fundamental in ensuring there was impact on practice. In one junior school, classroom observation, though ‘*painful and time-consuming*’, was used to identify an individual’s expertise and to determine which member of staff could lead training. A teacher from this school commented that the best NCDs were led by school staff because they were so directly targeted to the needs of the school.

The previous section of this chapter showed that one of the reasons why NCDs were valued was the opportunity they offered for input from outside speakers. The importance of securing an effective speaker was strongly emphasised because the quality of the input was not only integral to the actual success of the day, but also had wider implications: most importantly, it might jeopardise staff’s improved, if somewhat temperamental, attitudes towards NCDs. It was stressed that, whereas a good speaker could fire the teachers up with new ideas and enthusiasm, a poor speaker demoralised them and made them resent not having spent the time on personal preparation:

*... whenever we're doing new things, we must make sure that the people we invite in are of high quality, or they [teachers] would be very disillusioned if we got people that really patronised them or were not good (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

A headteacher from one of the case-study primary schools commented that, because staff attitudes towards NCDs *'fluctuate with how useful they think the training has been'*, it was *'very worrying if you get in somebody to do training who isn't a good speaker or who doesn't know where to pitch it'*. A poor speaker meant that the money spent on buying in a trainer had been wasted, and an INSET coordinator from another of the case-study schools explained that, although generally cost-effective, well-known speakers could be expensive and if their input was poorly received, *'you've gone to the expense of spending a considerable part of your GEST budget, which means that some courses for individuals won't take place because you've haven't got the money to spend'*.

Given that a poor speaker could do damage both to staff attitudes and the INSET budget, interviewees offered guidance to ensure that an effective speaker was recruited to lead an NCD. Firstly, it was acknowledged that outside speakers must be carefully chosen. As the next chapter shows, an area for development in schools' use of NCDs was seen to be the establishment of a list of accredited professional trainers to ensure the quality of provision. A headteacher from a secondary school commented that in his/her school, only external speakers who had been vetted by a member of staff would be asked to contribute to an NCD:

*We don't get anybody in to work with the staff unless we have seen them working. We don't get anybody in who we have just heard about. We always send someone to see them working, whether in another school or in a public session (headteacher, secondary).*

Secondly, in order to enable them to target the training appropriately, it was considered essential that the speaker was made absolutely clear as to what the school required from them and was made aware of the level at which the school was already working: *'There must be clear liaison with the school first, so that they know absolutely what the school needs'* (headteacher, primary). An effective speaker would then pitch the session at the appropriate level and extend the staff's knowledge and skills. However, even good liaison with the speaker was no guarantee that they would meet the school's needs. Interviewees in one of the case-study primary schools had found that a misunderstanding between the school and the advisory teacher who had led an NCD on reading over staff's current level of skill and knowledge had resulted *'in a sense we had wasted a bit of time'* (INSET coordinator), because *'on the training day the things s/he was suggesting we were actually doing'* (curriculum coordinator). This was in spite of considerable liaison with the advisory teacher which had included him/her attending a meeting at which the school's long-term plans for reading and literacy were set out and INSET needs established: *'We told him/her where we felt we were at, we gave him/her details of what we have already done, but obviously we hadn't given him/her enough'* (curriculum coordinator). They felt that a possible way to avoid this was to buy in the trainer to observe in the classroom prior to the NCD.

It was further acknowledged how ‘*absolutely crucial*’ it was that outside speakers were familiar with the demands of classroom teaching:

*... it's no good somebody going in and saying 'This is what you should be doing and this is how you should be doing it; you take two children and you do this, this and this' because the first thing that the teachers will say is 'Fine. What do I do with the other 28 children?' (headteacher, primary).*

In order for outside speakers to have credibility with their audience on NCDs, this headteacher from one of the case-study primary schools believed that it was essential ‘*that people don't just show something that's idealised, you know, that they show when they are talking to staff that they really are aware of the issues in a classroom, aware of the pressures of the width of the curriculum, of the lack of non-contact time for primary teachers, the numbers in classes* (headteacher, primary). This issue was also raised at secondary level where a headteacher commented that, whatever their expertise, the fact that many outside speakers were no longer classroom practitioners detrimentally affected some teachers’ perceptions of them: ‘

*... many of them have been too long out of the classroom to have the 'street cred' of a teacher who's got to face five hours' teaching the next day and has another 80 books to mark at night, and who sees these people as coming off the planet Mars! (headteacher, secondary).*

Interviewees were also clear about how outside speakers should present their sessions. Because they were seen as possessing considerable expertise and a different perspective, some teachers objected to being asked to ‘*brainstorm*’ during sessions led by outside speakers: ‘*[I] hate it when you go and they say "Right, you get together as a group and you tell us!"*’ (Year 3 teacher, primary). They commented that having the speaker there meant that their skills were lacking in some way and instead of ‘*brainstorming*’ and using their own information, they wanted the speakers to impart their knowledge and skills; otherwise it was a ‘*waste of time*’ (Year 6 teacher, primary).

An NCD at one of the case-study primary schools illustrated the importance of an effective speaker and the difference it could make to teachers’ perceptions of the day. Two outside speakers came to the school, one of whom led a session on the use of artefacts in history teaching for key stage 1 staff, while the other speaker spoke to key stage 2 teachers about mental maths. Those who had attended the history session were very complimentary about their speaker, who, they felt, was knowledgeable, well prepared and a charismatic presenter:

*I thought he was a very good speaker. He clearly knew what he was talking about and he made it very interesting and appealing to us because he brought along all sorts of different artefacts that we could look at and all sorts of different ideas that were applicable for us at that key stage to use in the classroom. I think he really knew his stuff, definitely (reception teacher).*

The many ideas he had were both relevant to classroom practice and original – ‘*... he had some interesting ideas, things that you never thought of before*’ – and the

activities and tasks he had organised were enjoyable and stimulating: *'... he was getting us actively involved in the activities ... and making us really think.'*

By contrast, the maths session was less engaging. There was a feeling amongst interviewees that the speaker was not well prepared and, although he had raised their awareness about the National Numeracy Hour, he had given them few of the new ideas on mental maths which they had expected to glean from him: *'I can't say that it was anything new really, and I don't think, to be honest, it was anything very different from the way a lot of us teach anyway.'* In addition, the delivery of the session, which had involved watching a video and looking at handouts, was not considered the best use of time on an NCD *'because we can all read up on things and we can watch a video in a staff meeting'*. The headteacher/INSET coordinator was aware that staff had been *'disappointed'* and, consequently, s/he felt that not only had the school lost the money paid to the speaker, but some of the staff's goodwill towards NCDs was also lost, because *'staff are very pressured for time. They have got some records to fill in, things to prepare for the classroom, resources to prepare for the classroom, planning to do. They don't want to do a half-day course where they come out at the end and say "What did I bother with that for?"'*

## **Content**

The previous chapter outlined the content of the NCDs in the sample schools. The content of the days was identified as a key feature in successful provision, and central to this was relevance. Content which was not considered worthwhile was *'a waste of time'*:

*I think, first of all, it's got to be relevant whatever you are doing. It's got to be seen to be worthwhile, and if it's not worthwhile I tend to sort of switch off and think 'What am I doing here?' Whereas, if I think it's relevant and important, then I am in there with everybody else, working as hard as everybody else (teacher, secondary).*

As stated previously, focusing on issues which all staff had been involved in identifying was a way of ensuring the relevance of the subject matter: *'The topics need to be relevant and need to have been agreed upon by staff that they are going to be beneficial'* (senior manager, primary).

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the 'relevance' of the subject matter on NCDs was a prerequisite to the days' having 'worth'. Here the need for NCDs to have practical relevance was most frequently cited, as interviewees stressed that the content of a successful NCD should be directly applicable to their everyday practice or the school: *'It's got to be seen that you can use it in your classroom or of benefit within the school'* (teacher, secondary). Some felt that the provision should offer them new knowledge, skills and ideas which they could use in the classroom and feed into their teaching:

*I think it's having something that you can actually use in a classroom situation, something that's quite practical, being offered advice or different strategies (teacher, special).*



*Making sure the content of the day is useful, and it's something they go away at the end of the day with something they can use (INSET coordinator, middle).*

This desire for the content of a successful day to have practical relevance and even at times to offer something which could be taken on trust – ‘*I think sometimes we would like somebody to say “Do it this way; it’s been tried and tested; we have tried it elsewhere and it’s working”*’ (headteacher, primary) – clearly emerged. However, there was also the suggestion from a smaller number of interviewees that the content of a successful NCD should have theoretical relevance too: content set in a broader educational context which met teachers’ need for professional consideration and reflection. A teacher from a primary school, for example, felt that a successful day should update staff on the latest education research, and a teacher from a secondary school expressed a preference for ‘*the ones which make you think*’. A head of department from a secondary school commented that the content of the day should have both practical and theoretical relevance: ‘*... a balance between showing you how to do something and thinking about why. I quite like that balance.*’ Meanwhile, a head of department from a secondary school remarked that ‘*good INSET makes you a thinking teacher rather than a doing teacher the whole time*’.

The need for the content of a successful NCD to have relevance of whatever type was clearly evident. However, an INSET coordinator from a secondary school, whilst acknowledging that the content of NCDs should be relevant, did not believe that the subject matter must be immediately relevant to staff. S/he explained that although a recent NCD on SEN at the school might not have been relevant to the staff ‘*at that particular time*’, longer term it would be beneficial: ‘*although in their own mind, it might not have been the most important thing to them individually at that time, in the long run they’ve benefited a great deal from it.*’ This was not the consensus view, however. Typically, interviewees were keen that the content of NCDs was ‘*quite directly and quite immediately*’ relevant:

*I think there’s a problem ... when you take an issue ... there’s a problem in terms of whether, for any individual member of staff, it’s actually relevant at that time for what they want. A lot of training is not exactly wasted, but ... you think ‘Why am I doing this now?’ ... It’s just something that happens on that afternoon or that morning and then it’s forgotten about (teacher, secondary).*

## **Evaluation**

Chapter Two of this report showed that all but one of the sample schools used either formal or informal evaluation to assess the effectiveness of NCDs. The need for evaluation of the day was highlighted as a feature of successful provision, though less often than aspects of planning, content and format, suggesting that evaluation was considered to be less important than other elements of successful provision. There appeared to be a contrast in views between those like a headteacher from a primary school who felt that evaluation of the day ought to be ‘*quick and relevant and soon afterwards*’ and a Year 4 teacher from a primary school who believed that evaluation should take place after some time to see how skills, strategies and knowledge acquired

on the day operated in practice: *'To evaluate the day itself without seeing it put into practice is not much benefit really.'*

### **Practicalities**

Good domestic arrangements on NCDs were seen to contribute towards successful provision and said to raise the status of the day to that which a similar session would have in industry or business. Providing tea, coffee and a good lunch were regarded as important by some interviewees because they were the means by which the importance of the day could be established: *'... regular breaks, and providing a buffet lunch or something. It shows the staff are valued. That's important* (INSET coordinator, middle). This was felt to be mutually beneficial, because staff who felt valued would perform better and be more positive about the NCD:

*The sort of domestic arrangements are quite important and if people have had a nice meal, they feel quite good about the afternoon session* (senior manager, secondary).

The physical surroundings were also highlighted. Having a *'decent chair to sit on'* could be deceptively difficult to provide because schools, especially primary schools, whilst the most convenient and cost-effective location, might not always have appropriate facilities to hold an NCD:

*How does an adult deliver their best work or be their most attentive when they are sat on a chair that's really meant for a six-year-old? I sometimes find that the actual furniture and building goes against getting the best out of the day when, sometimes, we are working on our knees* (headteacher, primary).

An off-site venue could raise the status of the NCD and remove teachers from the distractions in the school environment which might impair their concentration:

*The physical environment is quite important. I think that if we were able to take staff away from the school more, that would have an advantage of them being in a setting where they can't sit and think 'I could be at my classroom now' because there are too many distractions from their normal roles that don't enable them to focus on their development activities* (INSET coordinator, secondary).

Some interviewees, however, rejected the notion that good domestic arrangements contributed to the success of an NCD. A small number of interviewees felt that for the school to provide lunch was *'a waste of money'* which could be better directed towards the pupils or new resources. For a teacher from a secondary school *'a wonderful, lavish lunch'* was *'a waste of time'*. S/he commented: *'Personally I would rather work through my lunch hour and finish an hour early.'* Similarly, an off-site venue was regarded by some as profligate and also as impractical: *'Because everything you need for the day is in school ... it seems crazy to go off to another venue to do it. You have got to take everything out with you; it's much more convenient being here, I think'* (teacher, secondary). It is perhaps interesting that there was disagreement amongst interviewees over the value of providing tea, coffee, good

lunches and an appropriate physical environment on NCDs, given the view of an INSET coordinator from a secondary school who had previously worked in industry and declared himself 'amazed' at 'how amateur school staff development days are':

*I don't feel that in most of the staff development days in schools, staff are treated as professionals, whereas in industry, there are far better models for making staff feel like they are being treated as professionals.*

### **Sense of achievement**

Senior managers in particular placed importance on the immediate outcomes at the end of an NCD. An INSET coordinator from a primary school felt that the worst days were those when 'you end up having explored the issues, but not having achieved a satisfactory resolution'. A successful NCD, in contrast, meant that the intended aims and outcomes had been achieved, further emphasising the need to determine the goals of the day in the planning stages. The day should end in a specific achievement:

*... a satisfactory outcome where we can say 'We have achieved this', not a day that says we have got to the end of the day and that now means that we have got to go away and do this, this, and this and come back together. A day that ends in achievement, job done (deputy head and INSET coordinator, primary).*

*At the end of the day, you should feel you've achieved something – you've filled in a form, planned a lesson, managed to acquire a list of useful resources (teacher, middle).*

These achievements appear to be very much tied up with intrinsic merit: a feeling of satisfaction at having completed what was set out to do. However, for some interviewees, fulfilling the aims of the day was not sufficient: a truly successful NCD must impact on practice. In short, it must have merit and worth:

*At the end of the day, a successful training day is one that's of benefit to the school, and it shows up in benefits in the way you teach (deputy head, special).*

*The most successful days are the ones which have a big impact on what happens in the classroom (headteacher, primary).*

The need for follow-up after an NCD, 'to keep the bubble bubbling', was acknowledged as a significant factor in ensuring that what was covered on the days was put into practice in the long term. This key finding will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Other issues**

The dichotomy between a useful and an enjoyable NCD was often acknowledged by interviewees. For some individuals a combination of both was considered important: '... for it to be really effective, you need both to go together' (teacher, special); '... if they're not enjoyable, they're unlikely to be useful' (headteacher, middle). An enjoyable day was said to be more productive and improve teachers' concentration:

*I think if you can get something that perhaps sparks a bit of enjoyment off, that's important ... because teachers aren't very good at sitting. I think we are the worst kind of people to sit and listen (teacher, special).*

*Just as with children, if things are too serious, if things are too pressured, too heavy, it's not going to go as well as something that is enjoyable (deputy head/INSET coordinator, primary)*

A headteacher from one primary school identified the means by which NCDs could be made more enjoyable for staff. S/he argued that the palatability of an 'academic' NCD involving long discussions and the in-depth consideration of policy documents could be improved by splitting it into a number of twilight sessions. S/he further felt that varying the focus of NCDs over the school year, so interspersing the 'academic days' with 'lighter days' looking at new ideas to use in the classroom, could aid enjoyment and productivity.

Despite the benefits which enjoyment of a day could bring, it was acknowledged that the relevance and usefulness of an NCD should not be sacrificed for entertainment value, as an INSET coordinator from a secondary school explained: '*... if they've been enjoyable, quite often I would question the value of what has happened. All too often the enjoyment comes from entertainment, and entertainment is not necessarily delivering quality training.*'

Indeed, whilst it was beneficial if days could be both enjoyable and useful, for some the latter was considered more important:

*I think it's got to be both, but it's more important to be useful. It's obviously better if it can be enjoyable, and I mean everybody works better then ... but if it was going to be a choice of the two, it would have to be useful because otherwise it's just a waste of time (Year 6 teacher, primary).*

### **The most and least successful days**

When interviewees were asked to identify the most and least useful NCDs they had experienced during the school year 1997–1998, their preferred days contained many of the elements which had been cited as features of successful provision. The most successful NCD for a headteacher from a secondary school, for example, had focused on the criteria OFSTED would use to assess the school in an upcoming inspection. The day had been relevant and well structured with clear aims, and had left staff feeling satisfied at the end of the day – all elements which were cited as part of a successful NCD:

*It was a well-structured day. People were clear about the aims and the outcomes were known well in advance. The critical factor was every single member of staff there saw the relevance of why they were there; they saw the relevance and the need to be at that session. At the end of the day people felt good about the process of education that they were involved in (headteacher, secondary).*

The format and input from an outside speaker had meant that a day on literacy was the preferred NCD of an NQT from a primary school: s/he had enjoyed the ‘*combination*’ of approaches – ‘*it was like going to a lecture when you were at university, but there was also a lot of practical things in it*’ – and the presentation by the speaker: ‘*she had it all set up and went through it like s/he would teach a class so was taking you through it one step at a time.*’ An NCD which was appreciated by a deputy head of year had practical and theoretical relevance, and had given staff an opportunity to work in their departments. The morning session on moral and spiritual development had been enjoyable, thought-provoking and had raised awareness, and the departmental time in the afternoon had been ‘*really practically focused – we really did achieve loads of things*’. The importance of good domestic arrangements on the day was evident again: a deputy headteacher felt that an NCD held off-site had been most productive and helped to boost staff morale following an OFSTED inspection.

What also emerged strongly from interviewees’ accounts of the most and least successful days was the wide difference in individual preference. At times the days/sessions which some interviewees described as the best they had experienced were described by others as the worst. Two heads of department from one secondary school, for example, expressed opposite views about an NCD shared with two other schools. Whereas one head of department had found this ‘*very useful*’ and had valued the chance to meet and explore issues with fellow subject specialists from the other schools, for his/her colleague, this has been the least useful NCD because ‘*people just tend to talk about anything and you’re not getting anything done*’. Such differences of opinion were also discernible across the schools. A head of department from a secondary school valued NCDs on educational theory most:

*They were enlightening where you could look at educational theory ... we’ve lost the time to look at educational theory and set our criteria ... we appreciate the time to do that as a group* (head of department, secondary).

By contrast, a headteacher from the primary school felt that on NCDs ‘*we haven’t got time for the intellectual thought – we need help with the practical*’, and a teacher from a secondary school preferred days which were practically focused, related to classroom practice and of direct benefit to pupils:

*It’s got to be related to the kids, always. I know we need an overview from time to time, but very much I think it’s got to be related to the kids, and even if you are sorting out your piles of papers, that’s much more directly related to them than sometimes talking about ideas* (teacher, secondary).

This gives some indication of how difficult it could be to make NCDs appealing to all staff; indeed, several INSET coordinators (and teachers) did state that ‘*you can’t please everyone every time*’. The above examples show that individuals clearly had diverse expectations of the days and found most value in different types of NCDs. This revisits the section earlier in this chapter which highlighted the wide range of benefits associated with the days themselves, suggesting that interviewees valued the days for different reasons. Individuals’ appreciation of different types of NCDs and the resulting difficulty in designing an NCD to appeal to all clearly have implications

for staff attitudes towards NCDs, which, though improved, are temperamental. It has been shown already that when in cases where NCDs did not meet staff expectations either in their purpose or execution, it impacts negatively on their views of the experience.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE EXTRINSIC WORTH OF NCDs: EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter explored teachers' perceptions of the intrinsic 'merit' of the five NCDs as process. In contrast, this chapter seeks to examine teachers' views on the extrinsic 'worth' of the activities undertaken during NCDs. To do this, it focuses on what teachers take away from the days, especially with regard to any impact they may have on classroom and management practices. Thus, it considers perceptions of the key effects and outcomes of the days, together with their perceived relevance to schools' and teachers' needs.

Senior managers and teachers were asked an open-ended question about their perceptions of the impact of NCDs in their respective schools, in terms of any effects in relation both to themselves and to other members of staff. Their responses were analysed through reference to a typology of INSET outcomes developed by Kinder *et al.* (1991). These researchers conducted a longitudinal study of the impact of a single multifaceted professional development initiative which resulted in the finding that, whether intended or not, INSET offers a range of outcomes which subsequently affect the practice of participating teachers in different ways and to different degrees. Nine distinct types of outcome were identified. In order to give an outline of these different outcomes, and their significance for practice, there follows a brief summary of the typology.

1. **Material and provisional outcomes** are the physical resources which result from participation in INSET activities. Their study indicates that such outcomes can have a positive influence on teachers' practice. However, their research suggests that achieving this usually requires other intermediary outcomes such as motivation and new knowledge and skills (see 6 and 7 below).
2. **Informational outcomes** are defined as the state of being briefed or cognisant of background facts and news about curriculum and management developments, including their implications for practice. These are distinct from new knowledge and skills (see 7 below) which are intended to imply more critical and deeper understanding.
3. **New awareness** is defined as a perceptual shift from previous assumptions of what constitutes the appropriate content and delivery of a particular curriculum area. However, the research evidence corroborates teachers' own assertions that changed awareness is no guarantee of changed practice. It generally requires the presence of the fourth outcome – value congruence.
4. **Value congruence outcomes** refer to the personalised versions of curriculum and classroom management which inform a practitioner's teaching, and how

far these individuated codes of practice come to coincide with INSET messages. Value congruence with the INSET message was a crucial factor in the manner and degree of subsequent classroom implementation.

5. **Affective outcomes** acknowledge there is an emotional experience inherent in any learning situation. It was found that initial positive affective outcomes could sometimes be shortlived without a sense of accompanying enhanced expertise.
6. **Motivational and attitudinal outcomes** refer to enhanced enthusiasm and motivation to implement the ideas received and developed during INSET experiences.
7. **Knowledge and skills** denote deeper levels of understanding, critical reflexivity and theoretical rationales, with regard to both curriculum content and teaching/learning processes.
8. **Institutional outcomes** acknowledge that INSET can have an important collective impact on groups of teachers and their practice.
9. **Impact on practice** recognises the ultimate intention to bring about changes in practice, either directly (e.g. by supporting the transfer of new skills to the teacher's repertoire in the classroom) or through the indirect route of other outcomes mentioned above.

Kinder *et al.* attempted to formulate the nine constituents of the typology into a tentative hierarchy of outcomes. Assuming that influencing classroom practice is the intended INSET goal, the following exploratory ordering of outcomes was proposed.

<b>I N S E T</b>	
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Order</b>	<b>PROVISIONARY; INFORMATION; NEW AWARENESS;</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Order</b>	<b>MOTIVATION; AFFECTIVE; INSTITUTIONAL;</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Order</b>	<b>VALUE CONGRUENCE; KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS;</b>
<b>IMPACT ON PRACTICE</b>	

Thus, the study suggested that INSET experiences which focus on (or are perceived as offering) only third-order outcomes are least likely to impact on practice, unless other higher-order outcomes are also achieved or already exist.

The interdependency or knock-on effect of some outcomes upon others was emphasised, with the presence of the two first-order outcomes ranking as the most



likely for INSET to achieve a substantial impact on practice. The idea that the ordered typology may represent a map of preconditions for affecting change in classroom practice was also mooted.

The analysis of teachers' and senior managers' perceptions collected in the present study attempts to uncover which of the outcomes identified by Kinder *et al.* apply to NCDs, and the extent to which they are believed to impact on practice in primary, middle, secondary and special schools. The effects of NCDs, both in general and in relation to the year in which the data was gathered, will be considered first. An examination of the 'most useful' days will then be followed by a brief summary of recognised benefits and drawbacks. The penultimate section considers whether NCDs meet teachers' perceived needs in terms of their long-term impact. The chapter ends with suggestions which emerged from the preceding analysis on how the long-term impact of NCDs, and their role within a programme of CPD, might be improved.

Before discussing the study's evidence on the outcomes of NCDs, it is worth stressing that previous studies (Fullan, 1982) have established that research into the processes of changing teachers' practice faces the difficulty that many changes only occur over a prolonged period of time. Such a caveat is certainly relevant to the present inquiry, which, for the most part, collected accounts from teachers during a one-off visit to schools and did not have the advantage of repeat interviews or observations over a period of time.

## **6.2 SENIOR MANAGEMENT VIEWS ON THE EFFECTS OF NCDs**

### **Whole-school institutional outcomes**

Senior managers, especially those in secondary schools, tended to perceive the effects and effectiveness of NCDs in terms of whole-school cohesion and collaboration, with 'institutional outcomes' as the important goals. Increased cohesion as an outcome was frequently nominated by senior managers. They placed considerable value on the opportunity afforded by NCDs for generating such 'institutional outcomes' through whole-school collaboration. A headteacher of a small secondary school stated that '*... for getting a collective vision ... a collective ideal, there's nothing better than having the whole-staff together and working on a particular project*'. The INSET coordinator at a primary school described the way NCDs '*enable you to come forward as a school*'. In some secondary schools, upper and lower school staff rarely met during the course of a working week spent on separate sites, and NCDs were particularly appreciated as whole-school events.

NCDs alleged to have been particularly effective by senior managers often seemed to be those where a particular whole-school initiative had been introduced and was felt to have been followed through. In one school, for example, the new headteacher was in no doubt that the first NCD of the year, on '*core values*', had been the most valuable because s/he had been able to establish a tone for the school. S/he felt that the school had shared that work over the year with parents, governors and students: '*... it sets the tone for the way the school runs; the impact of that particular day is immense ... will set the tone for years to come, I hope.*' Another senior teacher felt that the emphasis on core values introduced by the new headteacher at the beginning of the year now permeated the school: '*It underpins everything.*'

Elsewhere, a head of careers and PSE commented on the *'drastic improvement'* in the school compared with its situation five years before, with regard to positive attitudes in both staff and students. S/he appreciated the cumulative value of NCDs which were thematically linked. S/he reflected on the difficulty of discerning more than *'very small progression'* at any single point in the present, but was convinced by looking back *'to years gone by'* that the school had *'gone forward in big strides'*. S/he perceived the sustained focus on positive behaviour to have led to a more positive ethos across the school, which had in turn brought about the conspicuous improvement in the key stage 3 results. Alternatively, however, a number of teachers voiced concern that whole-school issues in NCDs were in danger of foreshadowing the immediate and persistent needs of their students as individuals both in and out of the classroom.

### **Impact on practice**

As senior managers tended to adopt a whole-school perspective on the effects of NCDs, 'impact on practice' as an outcome may perhaps have been taken for granted, as it was not necessarily identified as explicitly. When it was mentioned by senior managers, however, those NCDs which were perceived to have had the most conspicuous effect on the classroom tended to be those relating directly to classroom management and teaching and learning styles. The headteacher of a primary school referred to an NCD organised by the deputy head on setting standards in writing. S/he said it had been *'so well planned and thought out'* that *'it changed how we structured the days'* because it demonstrated the value of having a definite plan for each day. A deputy head in a middle school commented on the increasing use of drama across the curriculum; s/he perceived greater emphasis on this in schemes of work *'even in science and RE'* to have resulted from an NCD on teaching and learning styles the preceding year. S/he added that colleagues had also become *'much tighter on their assessment thinking and practices'* in response to the NCDs related to a recent OFSTED inspection.

It may be worth noting that these two examples from senior managers, while ostensibly citing instances of 'impact on practice', are actually referring to the more debatable impact of administrative changes. Revealingly, perhaps, the middle school deputy head qualified her/his assertion of any direct impact: s/he said that whilst staff *'haven't changed exactly what they've done, they've certainly become much more explicit within their paperwork as to how it's done, and where it's come from'*. S/he stressed the way changes were explicit on paper, as required by OFSTED, but did not confirm that the changes had been translated into practice.

Primary school headteachers' perceptions of impact often seemed more closely related to the classroom than those of their secondary counterparts. For example, in one large inner-city primary school, the INSET coordinator affirmed the cumulative impact of a series of NCDs on literacy; in February, they had invited an outside speaker in and had done some work involving newspapers and television; the staff had watched him/her teach it to their pupils and it had helped them *'actually go away and do it in the same way in the classroom – a whole literacy push for the school itself'*. At one junior and primary school, the intake was perceived to be very middle-class and the

staff to be very stable, and the headteacher seemed alert to the danger of complacency; s/he felt that the staff were unwilling to be adventurous in the classroom: *'... a lot of teachers are not very confident in art and they don't change what they do.'* S/he observed that an NCD spent as an art workshop had been particularly useful because it had offered *'something they can take back into the classroom ... new ideas'*. At a primary school, while the head identified an *'important'* effect of the year's NCDs as having *'... got to work as a team ... got to know each other quite well'*, s/he added: *'We've also started new things like independent learning and had the time to talk about it and see it through ... we've usually followed things up; the staff meeting tonight is on independent learning.'* The ability to be able to *'see things through'* was perceived as crucial in order for the initial *'new awareness'* and developing *'knowledge and skills'* to come to fruition.

### **Sustained and cumulative professional development**

This latter point raises one of the most striking features of the data: the frequency with which interviewees, both teachers and managers, across all types of schools, drew attention to the superior effectiveness of cumulative training over single one-off experiences. A coordinator in an inner-city comprehensive school highlighted the value of pursuing a single theme in NCDs throughout the year. S/he believed *'some of the best training is slow training'*. Accordingly, s/he had arranged for outside speakers on positive discipline to come in during NCDs in the autumn term, to complement the in-house training carried out during the current year. Positive discipline had been a major theme of recent CPD provision, and had featured in both NCDs and during other opportunities for staff development. The INSET coordinator in a girls' selective school observed there was *'a need to think about continuity, as we go into the future, that these are not one-offs – there needs to be some progression'*. Similarly, the head of a middle school commented on how the school had used NCDs to update the school's behaviour policy recently in response to a change in the nature of the school's intake towards more pupils with behaviour problems:

*We'll start on these days where we'll have a big bite and then we'll come back and follow it through the next few terms to see things through ... keeping the bubble bubbling* (headteacher, middle).

In a large inner-city primary school where as many as 40 per cent of the pupils had special needs, the INSET coordinator applauded the cumulative effect of a series of NCDs on literacy: *'Each of these little steps that you take makes your life a little bit easier ... a whole literacy push for the school itself.'*

Conversely, at schools where the importance of consolidation and review of training went unrecognised, NCDs were frequently seen to have little long-term effect. In a secondary school, for example, a teacher noted that *'a lot was started'* at a day on raising achievement for boys, but *'it had [never] been finished ... it just faded away'*. S/he seemed to suggest that both *'new awareness'* and *'motivational/attitudinal outcomes'* resulted from the experience of the day itself, but that the gathering momentum collapsed through the lack of any built-in opportunities for consolidation and development. A teacher of hearing-impaired students based in a mainstream school echoed this frustration:

*You listen and think that it is fantastic, that it is a really good idea, but there is no time or no back-up to say 'Right, this is how you develop it' (teacher, special).*

In terms of the Kinder *et al.* typology, their comments underline the need for any awakening 'new awareness' to be given time for evaluation in conjunction with a reappraisal of the individual's own values; specific opportunities would appear to be necessary for the acquisition of 'knowledge and skills' to take place at a deeper level, in order for any lasting 'impact on practice' to occur. Responses from several teachers confirmed that it can be counter-productive to arouse new awareness, but subsequently deny them the opportunity to assimilate and develop an idea and put it into practice; it becomes a source of frustration and can lead to a debilitating sense of inadequacy.

### **6.3 TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE EFFECTS OF NCDs**

#### **Impact on practice**

Although some teachers found it hard to remember the content of NCDs, let alone determine their effects (a telling indication of the nature of the particular NCDs they had experienced, perhaps), for the majority of those who could testify to their effectiveness, relevance to classroom practice was paramount. A teacher of RE and maths expressed a very widely held view:

*When they have been teacher-specific, they have helped us to think about what we are doing, and how we are doing it and why (RE teacher, secondary).*

The references to 'why', in addition to 'what' and 'how', suggest that in the case of this practitioner an underpinning theoretical relevance was also appreciated. For a secondary school teacher, the NCD to have most significantly affected practice was one during the preceding year on classroom management and teaching styles:

*I definitely used some ideas from that, within my teaching. ... we did some active things and I think that's why it stuck in my memory (teacher, secondary).*

A science teacher at a middle school was enthusiastic about the relevance of NCDs to practice: NCDs were '*... mainly a source of ideas. You go away from the day and you have ideas, and some of these become used in your teaching. It has influenced my teaching. In this job it's important to have ideas as it is continually changing.*' It was suggested that the NCDs provided an extended period of time which enabled reflection on the new 'knowledge and skills' which were presented, to evaluate them in relation to her/his individual professional repertoire (to assess their 'value congruence'), and ultimately to 'customise' them in order to achieve changes in classroom practice. At this school, NCDs were residential events; their effectiveness was widely appreciated for impact on practice by staff, who felt that they were much more willing to give their attention and concentration to new ideas in a residential setting.

A number of teachers drew attention to the benefits of NCDs spent acquiring or improving specific skills. These varied according to individual teachers' needs. An IT coordinator commented on the value of an NCD spent working through the school's software; the staff had had little confidence in IT but, following this experience, s/he said: *'I know that after that a lot of them actually did IT in the classroom, which they hadn't done before.'* A number of teachers elsewhere registered concern at their sense of inadequacy in IT.

A teacher of modern languages appreciated the NCDs on the beginnings and ends of lessons, and on teaching and learning styles, especially in relation to the lower-attaining pupils, who constituted a large proportion of their intake. S/he had implemented all of the strategies suggested and hoped this had improved both her/his teaching and *'perspective'*.

A teacher in a primary school found an NCD on literacy very helpful:

*I certainly went back into the classroom and had a good go at doing things the way they had done it. And I think we all did, because we've all been talking about how we've done our phonics, and how we've done our Literacy Hour in some form or other. There's definitely been something that we've all taken away (teacher, primary).*

Her colleague agreed that the recent NCD literacy day had been *'interesting'* and directly benefited practice. S/he said all staff had *'got some good phonic ideas from that, which we used in the classroom'*. A teacher of infants and juniors expressed appreciation of an NCD on PE where s/he had learnt the specific skills required for netball and then had been able to develop these skills with pupils.

In special schools, both senior managers and teachers tended to focus on NCDs which had provided training related to the specific demands of their everyday practice. One key stage 4 English teacher reflected:

*... it gave us some very practical specific strategies on how to cope with the behaviour, and I find that very, very positive. And I think as a school, that was quite good; it made us think about what we were actually doing, and what we could do to tackle the behaviour, especially the extreme behaviours (English teacher, special).*

At a school for children with severe learning difficulties, the resources manager reported that an NCD on behaviour management had resulted in establishing behaviour management programmes for individual pupils. Procedures generally had been *'tightened up'* so that staff had a clearer understanding of what they were being asked to do. The acting head of a service for the deaf in mainstream schools commented on the *'huge'* impact of an NCD on sign language: *'... the signing one has upgraded staff skills phenomenally.'* Pertinently, s/he particularly valued the long-term benefits of the current programme in language and communication because it was *'ongoing'* – *'signing is not to be learned in a day'*. At an inner-city primary school, where approximately 40 per cent of the pupils were on the SEN register, the INSET coordinator described an NCD on the care and restraint of very difficult children,

which was run by a member of the local behaviour modification unit. This had been very much appreciated by staff *'because people have been able to implement that directly with the children ... and that has seen positive benefits'*. S/he added that they were in constant need of *'special needs updates'*, and wished s/he could run *'permanent training sessions'* because there was *'so much need'*. S/he explained that all staff in this school had to be involved in the Individual Education Plan for each child with special needs, *'a huge job'*. They had to set individual targets for each of these children at the beginning of each term and review them at the end of each term. With regard to the importance of reinforcement and updating of training, the comments of the science teacher in this school are worth bearing in mind: s/he said that although s/he found the content of the behaviour management training very useful, s/he found it hard to remember exactly what to do: *'... when it comes to the situation – well – "how did they say to hold it?"'*

#### ***Outcomes arising from the preparation of NCDs***

Some teachers pointed out the individual benefits of having the responsibility for planning and preparing the content of an NCD. Having to meet a specific demand offered them an extended opportunity to clarify their own ideas. An English coordinator in a middle school, for example, had had to prepare for an NCD on the National Literacy Strategy and felt that it was *'very beneficial ... quite important'*. A language coordinator at a junior and primary school had led all the NCDs on English, following an OFSTED report identifying a need for training on handwriting and speaking. It had been *'a lot of extra work'* but it had ensured that s/he had assembled, evaluated, organised and disseminated a mass of information of considerable benefit to her/himself and the other staff. Although it seemed that the emphasis of the NCD for the school as a whole may have been on relatively low-order *'informational outcomes'*, it appeared in these particular instances that for the individual planners, the additional research required of them, and the concurrent opportunities for critical reflection, may have resulted in the acquisition of new *'knowledge and skills'* and, ultimately, in changes in practice.

#### **6.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TEACHERS**

In comparing the views of both teachers and senior managers, it is important to stress the extent to which perceptions were found to vary, both within and across schools, according to the specific concerns of individual schools and practitioners. To a certain extent, both teachers and senior managers valued similar outcomes from NCDs; there was clear recognition from most individuals that the pre-eminent aim of an NCD should be a development or improvement in classroom practice, while at the same time a considerable number of interviewees appreciated the opportunity offered by NCDs for meeting as a whole-school and sharing ideas with colleagues. However, conspicuous differences of emphasis emerged between the perceptions of management and those of practitioners.

The marked discrepancy in some schools between the priorities of teachers and those of senior management may be worth summarising. Members of many SMTs particularly valued NCDs as opportunities for promoting *'institutional outcomes'* through whole-school communication and cohesion. The value was perceived to lie,

not only in the experience of the day in its own right (the merit of the process – see preceding chapter), but in the most successful days, to extend into the long-term future. In terms of the typology, ‘motivational and attitudinal outcomes’ in the form of enhanced enthusiasm and motivation generated during a successful NCD were seen to precipitate institutional outcomes through a collective impact. Understandably perhaps, with regard to increasing external pressures for accountability, senior managers in many schools seemed particularly concerned with the development of formalised, written policies.

Teaching staff tended to assign more importance to direct improvements in practice, both within the classroom and also within departments, through personal and departmental professional development. Accordingly, although their main concerns were to enhance the learning experience of their particular pupils and to acquire strategies for classroom management, their priorities for CPD also included managerial and pastoral skills. While senior managers tended to value NCDs for the ‘institutional outcomes’ associated with the reinforcement of cohesion for the school as a whole, many teachers felt the opportunities for departmental/ team cohesion and development were more relevant and consequently more worthwhile.

As mentioned earlier, perceptions of the value of NCDs varied considerably across all types of schools, and within individual schools, both in SMTs and among teaching staff. There was a minority of teachers, particularly among older staff, who regarded NCDs as ‘stolen’ from their holidays and could not see the need for whole-school training days at all. One new INSET coordinator worked at an inner-city school beset with inner-city problems; many staff had been there for years and they were trying to come to terms with a very demoralising OFSTED inspection. S/he had tried to infect a spirit of regeneration into the school through NCDs over the past year, but felt it was very hard to tell whether any NCDs had actually had any effect there on the individual teachers in terms of *‘fundamentally changing the way they think or teach’*. A maths and science teacher at a small secondary school sounded equally despondent: *‘In the long term, I don’t know if it necessarily makes any great difference overall ... you end up doing what would have done anyway.’*

At times, it seemed that NCDs could actually be counter-productive, making staff feel inadequate by overwhelming them with a ‘new awareness’ of further responsibilities when they already felt overworked or, especially in the case of NQTs, they were finding their present experience particularly challenging. A deputy head at a primary school warned: *‘It depends on staff dynamics ... you need to think about group dynamics ... occasionally it can make a member of staff feel more inadequate than they did at the start.’* S/he acknowledged her/his own responsibility as INSET coordinator in making sure that this situation was avoided by giving staff adequate support.

In some schools, the arrival of a new headteacher, or new INSET coordinator, directly affected the impact of NCDs because of the changes introduced and the effects of these on teachers’ motivation. In some cases, a new style of management was perceived with mixed feelings. The new headteacher of one secondary school said s/he had spent this year’s NCDs working on the SDP, *‘bringing the school up to date’* and setting staff to produce *‘working documents to help move the school forward’*.

At another secondary school, some staff had found their new headteacher's changes in management style '*rather difficult, especially in terms of managing people*', according to the INSET coordinator. The new headteacher had used NCDs this year mainly for '*creating policies where policies didn't previously exist ... a less participative style of management ...*' which did not go down well with staff. The staff had '*really enjoyed*' an NCD on technical aspects of teaching because if had been of '*great practical benefit ... tips and hints which they could then put into practice ... a very effective piece of staff training*', but the other ones on whole-school policies had not been well received. Here, as in many other schools, the preference of teachers for NCDs which they perceived to be directly relevant to practice was again very evident.

At another inner-city school, the new INSET coordinator was perceived by the deputy head to have exerted a considerable influence on the impact of NCDs during the current year. This view was corroborated by the other teachers interviewed in the school; all three perceived the new coordinator to be more committed and better organised than her/his predecessors. They appreciated the interest in their professional needs as well as in those of the whole-school, and were consequently better motivated to translate the content of NCDs into practice in their classrooms. Significantly, they had both found the NCD on classroom management the most helpful during the current year. By contrast, a new INSET coordinator in another inner-city comprehensive was finding it extremely difficult to convert the staff to her/his conviction of the value of NCDs as opportunities for staff to consider changes affecting the school as a whole. S/he believed they preferred to meet in departments because it was '*more comfortable*', and her/his offers to meet staff individually to discuss training needs had been largely ignored.

## **6.5 THE IMPACT OF OFSTED ON THE EFFECTS OF NCDs**

According to a considerable number of teachers, the NCDs arising from OFSTED inspections, both those preceding and following the inspections, were felt to have been very effective in bringing about the changes required for OFSTED in their respective schools; but how far the impact of these NCDs permeated everyday practice is less easy to determine.

### **Pre-inspection**

As a typical illustration of this general conclusion, a PE teacher in a middle school observed that the most useful NCD this year had been one in anticipation of OFSTED, when they were given structured guidance on '*all the paperwork that was needed that we had to have in order*'. S/he added that '*a lot of the staff were quite stressed ... because of all the work they had to do*'. The effect of this NCD thus might be seen in terms of relatively short-term 'informational outcomes' which relieved staff stress ('affective outcomes') related to administrative preparation for OFSTED, rather than as having any long-term effect on classroom practice. A similar emphasis on immediate benefits, here relating to an NCD spent formalising policy in response to an impending inspection, emerged in the comments of an English teacher in a special school:



*I think because we got the policy out of it and were able to suggest ways forward, and I think because OFSTED is coming ... I think it was a good way of getting familiar with the policy ... it was nice to be there and know what's been done ... I found that very useful with OFSTED coming up, to sit down and get sorted (English teacher, special).*

One teacher in a comprehensive was unmistakably sceptical of the value of using NCDs as preparation for OFSTED, rather than for improving the 'day-to-day running of the school':

*I don't think things we do are valuable enough. We write these policies which are stuck in a file for OFSTED inspectors ... and yes, it's great that we are involved in writing the policy, but I find ... a lot of 'Let's get brainstorming ideas on paper' ... I am not sure what we personally as staff get out of them (teacher, secondary).*

However, the INSET coordinator in a large primary school where they had used NCDs during the last two years for planning, because they knew it was an OFSTED priority, alleged that this had been of long-term as well as short-term value. S/he said that planning was 'quite tight' now and that the school had benefited as a result. Similarly, in a secondary school, a head of art remarked that a pre-OFSTED 'mini-inspection' on the structuring of lessons was very much appreciated by staff. It gave them not only an idea of 'what was expected', but also something 'which will remain the same all through your teaching career'. In a special school for children with severe learning difficulties, a teacher of three-to-six-year-olds had appreciated a pre-inspection NCD with an adviser, because it had related the administrative tasks directly to the nature of everyday work: it showed staff 'how things were recorded, addressing the needs of the child', and s/he believed 'you could see the influence of it in the school afterwards'.

### **Post-inspection**

Reflections on NCDs following recently completed OFSTED inspections were equally diverse. An art teacher in a primary school remarked that since their OFSTED inspection two years ago, the recommendations of the inspection have 'definitely been weighted in what can we do – what must we do.' A less positive view was expressed by the headteacher, who said that 'OFSTED has actually held us up in a lot of ways because we could have used those training days for something else'.

In some schools, NCDs following OFSTED were seen to have had a chastening but necessary impact on staff morale. A combination of 'informational outcomes' and 'new awareness' was seen to have aroused 'motivational and attitudinal outcomes' which had propelled the staff into action. However, in at least one school, the INSET coordinator was dubious about any long-term impact. To her/him, it had all felt 'very active' this year – they had 'done a lot of work and generated a lot of data', but s/he was not sure how useful it had all been in the long term: 'Things seem to have happened very fast.' It is interesting that this was a school where 'institutional outcomes' appeared to be in short supply and, according to interviewees, there was a marked discrepancy between the perceived priorities of teachers and senior managers concerning NCDs. The insularity of the school as a whole, noted by this co-ordinator,

appeared to be reflected in the insularity of departments within it. In spite of reservations, however, s/he conceded that NCDs this year had '*raised staff awareness of what they really had to face*' post-OFSTED, and s/he thought there had been a '*culture shift*' towards current educational thinking, in terms of recognition of the need to be less inward-looking as a school. Staff were better informed about certain things that were expected of them, and were less inclined to '*sit on their laurels*' in terms of raising achievement and improving attendance.

His/her optimism in relation to 'informational outcomes' and 'new awareness' appeared to be justified by the head of history's admission: '*No one has come away from any of the NCDs full of enthusiasm this year because, as post-OFSTED events, they have been quite depressing ... [but] ... as a department, we have had time to take stock, and various issues on the action plan have progressed.*' In her/his own department, for example, s/he confirmed that an NCD on benchmarking had had a particularly salutary effect.

## **6.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF RELEVANCE TO PRACTICE**

The overwhelming impression to emerge from teachers' perceptions was their undeniable preference for NCDs with recognisable relevance to matters concerned with teaching and learning. Furthermore, many individuals also clearly appreciated the intellectual and theoretical underpinnings of these issues. A curriculum deputy stated that the '*most successful*' NCDs were those which offered:

*... a balance between something that the staff perceive as extremely relevant, but stuff that will also stimulate them – because they are educationalists: that's why we are here; they are interested in education. They are intelligent people and it's not patronising them; you have got to give them something that will feed and stimulate their minds, as well as something that they will see as highly relevant to their classroom practice (deputy head, secondary).*

S/he argued that the providers of NCDs should aim beyond merely 'informational outcomes'; the reference to 'feeding' teachers' minds affirms the potential of NCDs to encourage critical thinking, self-questioning and a deeper level of understanding in relation to new 'knowledge and skills'.

A number of interviewees, both NQTs and more experienced teachers, identified NCDs on classroom management as the most useful they had experienced in the current year. One INSET coordinator's observation crystallised the appeal of a presentation with immediate implications for classroom practice:

*I know the most popular one was the classroom management one ... because a lot of people went in feeling it was about stuff they already knew. But they came out feeling they'd picked up a lot of new things which they could use the next day ... everyday experiences and how you could do something about it now ... They could see the impact for them personally (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

An NQT in the school corroborated perceptions of the day's effectiveness: '*... if you go in other people's classrooms, you hear phrases that s/he told us to say.*'

Teachers frequently identified the most useful NCDs as those with a specific focus, where they were given an opportunity to improve or develop, particularly, skills. Since these could also be the least useful for some individuals, depending on personal expertise, it seems that some kind of optional system might be helpful in ensuring that this kind of NCD can continue. The head of art at one school had found a recent training day on boys and underachievement particularly useful. Individually, s/he had '*honed in on a lot of good practice*', and in the department they had adopted some of the examples and tested them out. S/he affirmed that this had been successful but added, significantly, '*Perhaps from time to time we would also need a refresher just to remind us*', here again highlighting the need for continuing reinforcement and review.

Both primary and secondary teachers found NCDs that were directly related to the concerns of everyday practice very useful. In one secondary school, however, although there were teachers who specifically appreciated the occasion NCDs provided for sharing ideas with those working in other curriculum areas, many individuals found the greatest practical relevance in NCDs which offered opportunities for working as separate departments. A head of Year 8 in a secondary school had found a departmental day on moderation for GCSE the most useful – because s/he had been '*quite worried about it*'. S/he had been on a previous course on moderation, but this day provided an opportunity to moderate her/his own pupils' work. A head of modern languages elsewhere accepted that a staff always needed part of an NCD as '*a period of time to be together to receive information*'. But s/he made it clear that s/he preferred to use NCDs to get on with departmental planning – '*the nitty-gritty of teaching*'. The school had recently spent an NCD on producing a handbook on monitoring, and s/he said s/he would '*welcome the day where we as a [departmental] group can actually sit and work on what we're going to teach, rather than policy*'.

One INSET coordinator questioned teachers' motives in this respect. S/he was convinced that teachers would say that departmental time was the most useful, but felt that this tended to perpetuate the status quo. S/he believed it was seen as a preferable alternative to any more challenging, whole-school training which might be perceived by some teachers as threatening to undermine an approach to practice that had become entrenched, sometimes over many years. S/he suspected that '*useful*' might mean '*happy and comfortable*'.

In primary schools, although senior managers were more likely to appreciate NCDs on whole-school concerns than teachers, they were often equally enthusiastic about NCDs focused on specific pedagogic concerns, because they frequently combined their management studies with classroom responsibilities. One headteacher contrasted the immediate relevance of practice-oriented NCDs with those which were determined by external imperatives. S/he regarded a recent NCD on IT the most useful, both for him/her personally and for other staff: they had learnt '*how IT can be used in more creative ways in the classroom ...*' and s/he felt all staff now were '*more competent with IT ... prepared to use it and try it in a way that they weren't before*'. By contrast, s/he had found a record keeping and planning day '*... a little frustrating ...*

*the constantly changing curriculum ... you work on a record sheet for English and then, lo and behold, after Christmas it's going to change with literacy again'.*

Similarly the deputy head of a primary school, who was also the language coordinator, singled out recent NCDs on independent learning and literacy as the most useful because they made the staff, '*... much more aware, and much more proactive to these areas*'. S/he asserted that the initial outcome of awareness-raising and enhanced motivation had had a noticeable impact on practice: '*It has made a significant change to approaches within the classroom.*'

In some schools, both teachers and senior managers were agreed on the most useful NCDs during the current year. In a special school, for example, the acting head prized the opportunities for meeting and exchanging ideas with colleagues from other schools. An English teacher described how the '*consciousness of the staff*' had been '*heightened*' as a result of sharing expertise, and had stimulated her/his own department to produce their '*own package*'. In this case it sounded as if a fusion of '*new awareness*' and '*motivational outcomes*' had generated a collective effort to experiment with new '*knowledge and skills*' in order to produce a tangible and permanent '*impact on practice*'.

In some schools, however, disagreement between senior managers and teachers on the most useful NCDs seemed to arise from different perceptions of '*relevance*'. In one primary school, for example, while the deputy head valued the NCDs on planning at the beginning of the academic year, which from a managerial point of view, had a direct and explicit impact on practice, the NQTs at this school thought planning days '*didn't mean anything at all*'. As one of them explained, there was so much to think about with everything being new, that planning was just '*an extra pressure ... a bit daunting ... thinking about what was going to be coming up in six months' time*'. Both the NQTs in this school found much greater relevance in recent NCDs related to interaction with pupils, where they had explored teaching strategies for science and for drugs awareness:

*... the best courses ... are those that can actually show you practical things to do in the classroom, that you can go away and use (NQT, primary).*

## **6.7 DO NCDS MEET STAFF'S PERCEIVED NEEDS IN TERMS OF IMPACT ON PRACTICE?**

In addition to the pressures of national initiatives, conflicting interests frequently emerged between the priorities of senior managers, departments and individual teachers. While senior managers often sought institutional outcomes through emphasis on a whole-school approach, in order to achieve consistency and permanence in the ultimate impact on practice of any NCD training, their staff frequently preferred to meet as departments in order to advance their own curriculum agenda. Many individual teachers also expressed acute concern relating to specific professional needs of their own, which they often perceived to be at least as urgent as those they shared with their colleagues.

In some schools, there were clear discrepancies between teachers' perceptions of training needs and those of senior management. Schools varied in the extent to which practitioners were satisfied that senior management were catering for their professional needs on training days. In some cases, staff were clearly resentful of the way they perceived the headteacher to use NCDs for moving forward on a whole-school policy they saw as irrelevant. In others, policy making was accepted as an appropriate activity for the staff as a whole on NCDs, and individual teachers were resigned to looking elsewhere for specific personal training. A teacher in a special school recognised the necessity for a recent NCD on behaviour policy: *'We are all involved in behaviour, so it's got to be a whole-school policy, and it's so rare that you can ever get together for a certain amount of time and thrash out problems.'*

Significantly, s/he seemed to imply that the process was as important, or even more important, than the product or a specifically intended outcome of an NCD. The very experience of cohesion, the sense that the staff were united in their motivation to improve the quality of education for their students, was here perceived to have an intangible impact on staff morale and an individual's sense of purpose which was of value *per se*: *'I do think every training day I have had, I have gone home and thought I have got something out of that. Even if it's only been something very small, I have actually thought "Oh that's clear in my mind now, I know what I am doing ...".'*

In some cases, however, teachers found even specifically practice-oriented NCDs unhelpful. One maths teacher, for example, referred to an NCD with cross-curricular emphasis which was advocated as an area for development by the senior management team. S/he said the maths department did not feel it was particularly helpful to mix with members of other departments, and had attended outside courses on numeracy and current thinking in her/his subject, by way of further CPD.

A number of INSET coordinators stressed the importance of consulting staff on the organisation of the day in order to ensure that it would be effective. One individual maintained that if the headteacher was not so insistent on introducing policies on NCDs s/he would prefer to *'put on six or seven different workshops where you could have staff sign up and opt in and then plan your day based on the response ... using the staff steering group ... to set the agenda for the day'*.

A head of department, at a school where recent NCDs had focused on policies, believed that the decisions on the content of NCDs were made at a level beyond her/him, and that if s/he could choose, s/he would like some time to explore new areas in her/his own subject. S/he added that because the time had to be accounted for, s/he thought there was a tendency to feel something specific had to be arranged, when many teachers might prefer to be left to decide how to spend the time improving aspects of their own work. A colleague at the same school was more forceful:

*The majority of staff don't feel they get anything out of INSET days. We have to come, we have to do discussions, whatever, and we don't see what it gives us – what that four or five hours give us at the end of it for the next day we are teaching. But if we spent it on something like IT, where everybody wants help, we could then go away and use it in the classroom, which should be the idea of INSET (teacher, secondary).*

## **Departmental needs**

The preference of many teachers for spending at least part of their NCDs working in their separate departments has been demonstrated already. A considerable number of heads of department and other teachers made it clear that this was how they perceived they could make the most valuable use of the time available. One upper school coordinator preferred departmental days because they were '*more specific*'. An art teacher explained that it gave the department a chance to do '*mundane things*' like sorting out the stock cupboard, putting up displays and working out marking schemes – all of which were perceived by teachers as having an indirectly beneficial impact on the learning experience of pupils in the classroom.

A PE teacher thought it would be very useful to have some departmental time together with departmental colleagues from other schools and relevant outside speakers: '*It would be quite nice to have somebody talking to you in your particular aspect of school life – a bit more departmental, somebody from outside.*' S/he felt there had been '*too much whole-school sitting down and talking and listening – it should be more practical*'.

## **Individual needs**

One secondary headteacher believed that present CPD opportunities within the teaching profession emphasised '*the whole body of staff*' at the expense of the individual. A committed advocate of professional development, s/he saw it as her/his responsibility to recognise and communicate every individual's own worth and ability to make their own specific contribution, and to ensure that everyone's individual needs were being catered for. S/he spoke of the '*joy of managing*' as '*empowering people to look at themselves, to look at their strengths and to think about what they might be able to contribute to the profession*'.

These comments suggest that this emphasis on the individual was the most effective way of generating a long-term impact which would permeate all areas of practice. According to the upper school coordinator in this school, the headteacher ran different courses on the same NCD to cater for different staff needs. Certainly, the staff seemed very appreciative of her/his attention. After a staff development interview, one maths teacher, for example, had recently given up management responsibilities to do more work with pupils in the classroom, because s/he felt her/his subject teaching was suffering. At another school, where staff were perceived to be currently apathetic, and NCDs were run very much as whole-school events, the new INSET coordinator said s/he intended to introduce staff development interviews as an annual opportunity for individuals to discuss their professional needs, and s/he intended to target INSET accordingly. In a third, another new staff development coordinator had found the staff very appreciative of her/his efforts to see them individually and to ensure that their needs were taken into account in working out the programme for NCDs over the following year.

During the interviews, teachers were specifically asked whether the training they received on NCDs addressed their professional needs and interests. Three different types of need could be identified in their responses: career development, personal professional development and time to plan within specific subject areas.

### ***Career development***

A number of teachers expressed their intention to apply for managerial posts and they all felt that specific training in developing managerial skills was something they needed at this stage in their careers. One art teacher had particularly appreciated departmental sessions during the year's NCDs: because s/he wanted to become a head of department, they had proved valuable opportunities for learning about administration.

### ***Personal professional development***

Professional development needs on NCDs could be particularly difficult to meet in primary schools when training involved classroom practice rather than whole-school issues. Several interviewees pointed out that the needs of Year 6 teachers were very different from those of reception teachers. In some primary schools, staff split into key stages for training in order to overcome the problem. One Year 1 teacher believed that very few speakers or advisers were infant specialists, which affected the quality of the training.

Many teachers were keenly aware that further training in specific skills would considerably enhance the learning experience they offered to their pupils. IT skills were frequently identified as an area urgently in need of improvement. One science coordinator expressed concern about dissemination; s/he would like training on how to communicate knowledge s/he gained from specialist courses to the rest of the staff: *'I think sometimes you are taught how to put it over to children, but maybe not how to put it over to adults.'* Funding for training emerged as a recurring problem throughout the interviews. Training staff to disseminate to colleagues the theory and practical application of courses they had attended, as some interviewees had been asked to do during recent NCDs, might be a worthwhile investment for senior managers. Some NCDs could then be used to maximise the impact of individual staff development on practice throughout the school.

### ***Time to plan and develop within one's own subject area***

As a subset of the previous type of individual need, many teachers expressed a heartfelt wish for more time to immerse themselves thoroughly in developments within their own curriculum area in order to extend their subject-oriented 'knowledge and skills'. One science and maths teacher, who wanted greater flexibility for staff in the use of NCDs, indicated the discrepancy between the needs of teachers and those in a position to make decisions: *'I think at the moment that people feel that if there is a non-contact day, it has to be directed time.'* An art teacher had found an NCD spent developing the school's art policy the most useful one of the year, *'looking for progression in different things ...'* and it had given a satisfying sense of achievement because s/he felt her/his work would have a direct impact on learning experiences in the classroom.

For a head of history, the ideal solution would be to put the five days together, *'rather like a sabbatical at university'* to which teachers were entitled after a set period of

service, in order to study something at length and in depth. S/he said s/he would really appreciate an opportunity to rewrite the history courses s/he taught, to reflect on current subject-related issues and to evaluate resources. S/he felt such immersion in new 'knowledge and skills' needed a block of time which was unattainable under the present system of staff development, particularly in a hard-pressed inner-city school.

## **6.8 LIMITATIONS ON THE LEVEL OF IMPACT**

### **Perceptions of limited worth**

Teachers in general found least useful those NCDs they perceived as least relevant to everyday classroom practice. Thus one coordinator expressed the attitude of the majority when s/he affirmed that NCDs on awareness-raising and practical application were more valuable than those where the staff were occupied in the '*rather passive activity*' of receiving information. The perception of teachers here of the limitations of NCDs with merely 'information outcomes' supports the earlier findings of Kinder *et al.* (1991).

Individuals in a number of schools identified specific NCDs which had been perceived to be of little worth for them personally. One secondary deputy head, for example, clearly resented the intrusion of an external agenda since s/he felt there was little to be gained from working with other schools: '*If [NCDs] have been a day that we have chosen to do ourselves, they have been of benefit. If they have been a day that's been chosen because it's a national issue, like primary/secondary liaison ... just largely a waste of time.*' A teacher based in a mainstream school, who worked for a service for the hearing impaired, referred to an NCD on music which s/he had found totally irrelevant, if enjoyable, because her/his pupils were profoundly deaf. For her, the most useful NCD had focused on a specific method for teaching English to deaf children because s/he could '*take from the actual INSET the things I had picked up in the classroom*'.

Again, there was evidence of disagreement between senior managers and teachers on the value of specific NCDs and on the interpretation of 'relevance'. One teacher in a special school described an NCD where they had watched a behaviour management video of teachers working with pupils. It was so obviously '*staged*' that staff felt it was unreal. This view was in marked contrast to that of the resources manager, who thought this NCD had been particularly helpful because it had resulted in '*tightening procedures*' and setting up programmes for individual pupils.

### **Tensions between national requirements and individual school priorities**

As demonstrated in Chapter Four in relation to the content of NCDs, some senior managers and teachers felt frustrated by the prescriptive requirements to spend some NCDs alerting staff to national initiatives rather than being free to use the time for what they considered to be higher-priority outcomes within their individual schools. One INSET coordinator resented '*being forced to do something somewhere else and not getting very much benefit from it ... when you could be spending a lot more time on your own priorities, whatever they are*'.



A deputy head in a middle school acknowledged that in the immediate future *'the training days are going to be hijacked by the Literacy Project and the year after they're going to be hijacked by the Numeracy Project'*. Although this school was weighted towards the upper ability range, s/he felt it was important to get *'the flavour'* of this national initiative because it was *'such a massive development'*. However, as s/he pointed out, the long-term impact of an increased emphasis on literacy had an effect on the breadth and balance of individual teachers' timetables in a middle school, which in turn had implications for training. Having gradually appointed more and more specialist teachers, s/he was now having to reduce the time they had to teach specialist areas in order to increase the time spent on literacy. The French teacher, for example, needed literacy training immediately because next year s/he would only teach two French lessons a week, and would have to teach English the rest of the time. The emphasis in this school, at least, seemed to be on externally instigated *'material'* and *'informational outcomes'* rather than new *'knowledge and skills'*. In consequence, it was felt there would be no time left to allow teachers to assimilate and subsequently discriminate between different approaches to their new responsibilities.

### **No built-in provision for the review and development of training**

It has already been noted that many teachers and senior managers believed that if NCDs were to have a long-term impact on practice, specific opportunities had to be provided for consolidation, development and review. The fact that such opportunities were so frequently unavailable, and the consequent experience of NCDs as *'one-off'* events, was perceived as a serious drawback to their potential effectiveness.

A deputy head at a primary school highlighted the importance of perpetuating the *'process'* in order for teachers to experience its long-term worth. *'They are valuable, but sometimes they are only valuable of themselves for that day, and we know we should be using more of it maybe, but we don't have the opportunity to then implement it back into the previous planning.'* S/he was referring to two recent NCDs on drugs awareness and the promotion of hands-on methods in science respectively, after which *'changes imposed on us'* – namely the pressure of the key stage tests, and the changes within individual subject curricula – had absorbed any extra time which might have been given to putting the NCD training into practice.

Another deputy head drew attention to the value of cumulative training in relation to cross-phase work with upper and primary schools, especially concerning literacy: *'From what I can gather, there's so much of it people could do with a block, rather than fragmenting it. People would then have an opportunity to try out one or two ideas, but, as you know, it's being driven faster than that.'*

A curriculum deputy, who was also an experienced trainer within the school's authority, stated the problem with unflinching honesty:

*One of the shortfalls ... is that you throw a grenade in or plant a seed on Baker days ... and sometimes you just haven't got the time ... to put those plans into action. Or, they take twice as long as you thought after that, and it's actually planning not to let that happen I find extremely hard (deputy head, secondary).*

A modern languages teacher agreed that there was just no *'time enough afterwards to try it for a wee bit and go back, maybe in six weeks, and review it'*. S/he felt staff meetings after school were not a good time for this as teachers were too tired by then, and too preoccupied with the next day's preparation.

### **Tendency to over emphasise lower-order outcomes**

Some indication has been given already of the different priorities held by teachers and senior managers concerning the use of NCDs. Although there were teachers who evidently appreciated being included in the process of formulating policy, the majority preferred to spend NCDs on matters more directly related to the improvement of everyday practice. Several new headteachers interviewed had used at least two of the current year's NCDs to introduce new policies. These tended to have been received with a marked lack of enthusiasm by the teaching staff, who attached little value to what they perceived to be mainly 'material and informational outcomes', 'institutional outcomes' or 'new awareness' of issues perceived as less important than pedagogic concerns. One teacher in an inner-city school deplored the way time had been spent evolving policies, when it could have been used to improve the quality of teaching:

*I think we should be given more time for personal development and personal preparation. There is ... week to week you have got your lesson plans and your schemes of work, but there's other things that need doing, and during a lesson I might think 'Oh I would love to do those with those kids, and get the time to produce everything' ... it doesn't happen because you are putting so much extra time in (teacher, secondary).*

The teacher quoted above expressed a view echoed elsewhere, particularly in hard-pressed inner-city schools where a large proportion of pupils were socio-economically disadvantaged. Paperwork and policies in these schools could be experienced as a particular source of irrelevance and irritation:

*The main aim we are here for is to teach the kids. At the minute that seems to be second priority – it's policies, it's paperwork, it's anything for files and to make us look good in OFSTED – and we are forgetting the real reason (teacher, secondary).*

The resentment expressed here seems to derive from a perceived emphasis on lower-level (material, provisionary and informational) outcomes. These were seen by a significant number of teachers to be promoted at the expense of higher-order outcomes – here, specifically, a more searching exploration of 'knowledge and skills', which might lead to an 'impact on practice' beneficial to students. An English teacher at another comprehensive school asserted that it was much more useful if NCDs *'directly related to the students'*. S/he felt that although teachers needed to be aware of a whole-school approach, *'sometimes we forget that we are here for the pupils'*. For many practitioners, as opposed to senior managers, 'institutional outcomes' were of secondary importance compared with those which affected the learning experience of pupils in the classroom.

## Timing

As suggested in the preceding chapter, a considerable number of interviewees were dissatisfied with the timing of NCDs and felt that this had serious implications for the impact of the training concerned on subsequent practice. Some teachers and senior managers objected to the imposition of specific dates for NCDs in accordance with regional or national requirements. An INSET coordinator in a school where the LEA determined the dates for three of the NCDs said this was unhelpful. S/he would much prefer to choose the dates for all five; s/he would then be able to put them together as necessary, in order for staff to benefit from the opportunity an extended training event would offer in terms of depth and continuity.

Various difficulties emerged from individual schools where injudicious timing was seen to have adversely affected the impact of the training in question. One headteacher regretted using the first day of term as a preparation for OFSTED with inspectors present: '*... it put the frighteners on everybody ... with hindsight I'd have changed the timing*'. A deputy head at a special school felt that a half-day on behavioural difficulties with a psychologist and inspector had been very well received but they had so much to cover that they had to organise a follow-up session after school, which disrupted the continuity.

## Negative perceptions of NCDs in the work outside education

Some interviewees appeared demoralised by negative responses to the concept of training days by people outside education, parents in particular. An English coordinator in a middle school asserted that: '*Parents see them as a chore where they have to look after their children. They view the care of their children as mainly our responsibility.*' A modern languages teacher thought parents disapproved of NCDs, and felt it was important to think of parents' problems in planning childcare when schools were arranging dates for NCDs. A teacher in a junior and infants' school said they deliberately had to plan their NCDs in advance '*because of asking governors' permission and letting parents know*'. S/he believed this in itself could be a drawback. During the current year, for example, because they had already planned their five days a year ahead, the school had had to ask the authority to let them bring one NCD forward from next year in order to fit in a literacy day before September, as required. They had therefore had six NCDs within a single year. The consideration of fitting in with parents was seen to be detrimental to the impact of NCDs in terms of compromising the school's preferred timing. More insidiously, the sense that they were engaging in an activity which seemed to be perceived outside educational circles as almost self-indulgent might well affect the degree to which teachers felt able to commit themselves to, and thus significantly benefit from, events which deliberately removed them from the responsibilities of the classroom.

## 6.9 WAYS OF IMPROVING IMPACT ON PRACTICE

According to the evidence of the interviews, a lasting impact on practice is most likely to be achieved through ensuring that the higher-order outcomes cited in the typology at the beginning of this chapter, especially new 'knowledge and skills', are likely to occur. Continuing support, through specific opportunities for consolidation, review and development, was seen to be of paramount importance, together with relevance to

practice. This seems to have been what one headteacher had in mind when summarising the purpose of all NCDs. S/he identified the importance of reflection in relation to the acquisition of knowledge and skills:

*Training days provide that opportunity to step back and be a little bit more objective, and one hopes that ... you're raising staff awareness of issues ... you're increasing staff expertise, you're enabling them hopefully to be more fulfilled within their own roles, that you are encouraging them to consider perhaps different approaches and methodologies in their teaching (headteacher, secondary).*

S/he also referred to the importance of raising teachers' awareness of their own potential as individuals, and the significance of this in building a momentum for 'value congruence' across the institution which would ensure that initiatives were driven forward:

*... you are perhaps providing greater consistency in approach to school policies, school objectives, approaches to marking, reading, spelling, whatever, that it's that sense of corporate identity and corporate responsibility that comes from the training days as well (headteacher, secondary).*

According to the comments of both senior managers and teachers interviewed here, the 'impact on practice' of NCDs might therefore be improved through the following ways.

### **A greater emphasis on flexibility**

Both senior managers and teachers sought greater flexibility: in external requirements, so that schools could adapt NCDs to suit their own priorities; and in internal organisation, in order to accommodate the needs of individual teachers.

### **Relevance to teachers' needs**

The importance of consultation with individual members of staff was underlined by several senior managers in schools where positive attitudes to NCDs prevailed. As one middle school headteacher confirmed, NCDs were valued by staff because '*they have all been in on it since the beginning and ... where appropriate have had an input into the programme*'. At one of the case-study schools, the senior managers attributed staff commitment to a combination of promoting a corporate 'team spirit' concurrently with a manifest consideration of individual needs, and a recognition that these were likely to change over time.

In another school, where both NQTs and more experienced staff had responded with equal enthusiasm to the efforts of a new INSET coordinator, it was agreed that '*... basically, it's got to be something which people feel will improve what they are doing ... quite directly and quite immediately, so that their jobs are more enjoyable and they can do their jobs better ... feel greater job satisfaction*'.

These comments set in sharp relief the frustration of a teacher elsewhere:

*You can have all the policies in the world that you like, but if you can't get the kids to do what they need to do, it falls around your ears ... INSET has got to be about the issues which are relevant to your school and how you are going to deal with them, and get the staff pulling together (teacher, secondary).*

According to her/his recommendation, the perception of relevance in CPD needs to be both individual and collective.

### **A greater emphasis on the needs of pupils**

The practitioner alluded to above was one of a number of teachers who expressed concern that NCDs were in danger of subordinating the needs of children, both in and out of the classroom, to management issues such as policies and internal organisation. They clearly perceived the concentration on 'informational outcomes' of such days to be inadequate or irrelevant for their definitive professional responsibility. For a substantial majority of interviewees, their insistence on 'relevance' unequivocally related to the learning experience of their students.

### **The importance of raising teachers' self-esteem**

The preceding chapter on perceptions of the merit of NCDs drew attention to the fact that many teachers appreciated a 'professional approach' to NCDs, in terms of a pleasant environment and enjoyable opportunities for discussion with colleagues during carefully organised lunch and coffee breaks. A number of interviewees referred to a collective decline in self-esteem in recent years; as one middle school teacher observed: *'In the last few years, teachers have been put down a lot and we're still down there somewhere. We are not valued.'* To have a day away from the incessant demands of their pupils, when they felt they were recognised as professionals in the same way as those who worked in other organisations or in industry, provided a welcome boost to staff morale. Such momentum had important 'motivational and attitudinal outcomes', as one primary headteacher was quick to point out: *'... if you want people to work together in a really professional way, and commit themselves over the odds ... we should be focusing on these days to say "You are valued" ... You have got to actually raise their status.'*

Treating teachers as professionals also involved a recognition of their potential as specialists in education. Many of them, as we have seen, while insisting on the pre-eminence of relevance to practice, relished the opportunity to explore pedagogic issues in a way which required them to intellectualise their professional experience and its interpretation. An inner-city modern languages teacher expressed the aspirations of other practitioners when s/he advocated more CPD in *'... the theories and psychologies, and the latest things happening in education ... you need time to stand back and be objective'*. In terms of outcomes, it seems that an extended opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding, both of their own approach, and of its alternatives, may be crucial to planning NCDs, in order to ensure that any new 'knowledge and skills' can be permanently integrated into practice.

### **Involving teachers in the organisation and preparation for NCDs**

Of those teachers who had been directly involved in the preparation for an NCD, through researching a particular topic and/or disseminating information on the day itself, the majority agreed that it had been a very useful professional development experience. In some cases, interviewees had been asked to consider whole-school issues, such as literacy, while in others their responsibility had been subject-based. The preparation had offered a valuable opportunity for exploring an area of immediate relevance in more depth than would have been possible otherwise. Pertinently, at least one interviewee believed that teachers needed training to be able to teach other practitioners, as opposed to pupils. However, a minority of individuals clearly resented any addition to an already heavy workload.

### **Funding**

As pointed out in Chapter Two with regard to planning, funding for NCDs may originate from a variety of sources, and considerable differences emerged between schools in the amount of funding allocated to professional development. Funding was perceived by many individuals to affect the nature of outcomes following an NCD, both directly and indirectly. In one primary school, the INSET coordinator would prefer to be able to afford to 'buy in' those outside speakers s/he felt would be most appropriate for the staff's professional development needs, rather than be dependent on those within the authority, who were 'free'. A headteacher in a primary school observed that in terms of continuity between NCDs, planning '*... would be easier if everything ran from the same timescale ... if the budget ran September to September it would be a lot simpler as far as we're concerned.*'

In many small schools, it was felt that the only way to meet the cost of NCDs was through collaborating with other institutions in order to pool resources. This necessity was, however, frequently seen to have advantages. Regular collaboration was perceived as a valuable safeguard against insularity in some schools, and the majority of interviewees, particularly those from special schools (where the need for a range of imaginative and varied approaches may be especially important), appreciated the opportunities for comparing professional experience, sharing specific expertise and considering alternative points of view.

### **Access to accredited professional trainers**

The importance of competent and experienced speakers for NCDs was pointed out in Chapter Five, in relation to teachers' perceptions of the intrinsic value of the day. As in the case of material resources, it seemed that outside speakers could produce an indirect impact on practice through 'motivational and attitudinal outcomes'. INSET coordinators frequently associated a successful NCD with the provision of a competent speaker, sensitive to teachers' expectations, and recognised as having something relevant and intellectually stimulating to contribute. The headteacher at one school advocated a balance between theory and a practical approach, and the deputy head, the INSET coordinator, further explained:

*If you are talking about ideas and philosophy and motivating staff, it's got to be a very effective, entertaining keynote speaker, with the opportunity then for the staff to develop their own ideas ... Informative, followed by relevant ... focused discussion leading to an action plan, rather than just ... great ideas for the day ... see you in another three years ... People need to take away and follow up in each staff group (INSET coordinator, secondary).*

Some INSET coordinators felt there was a strong case for assembling a register of professional accredited trainers who could be contacted to deliver a training day on particular subjects: *'There's lots of good practice out there; it's getting to know where the good practice is.'* It was suggested that such a register would serve the dual purpose of accrediting good-quality speakers and streamlining their accessibility for schools.

### **Importance of continuity in professional development provision**

The cumulative impact and superior momentum of thematically linked NCDs over a period of time recurred throughout the data. Although many schools were said to link NCDs with their SDP, this did not always seem to involve a progressive approach to a particular issue throughout the year. In schools where an effort had been made to follow up the content of NCDs, by building in a series of opportunities for assimilation, reflection and reappraisal of new ideas and approaches, teachers were almost unanimous in acknowledging a discernible impact on practice. One coordinator's epigram – *'Some of the best training is slow training'* – might neatly epitomise one of the most urgent messages to emerge from the data.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

To return to the central question posed by the research, namely how do schools use their five NCDs, the evidence presented here would suggest that a typical pattern is for about 30 per cent of the time to be spent on administrative tasks, with the remaining 70 per cent devoted to CPD. Such a ratio, for example, was evident in many schools' accounts of the tacit trade-off whereby between one and two days are given over to administrative work in return for three or four days with a staff development focus. Although considerable variations between schools were apparent, this estimate of the overall ratio between administration and CPD is broadly in line with the results of analyses of the focuses of NCDs (see Chapter Four). Notwithstanding the acknowledged tendency for these analyses to underestimate the amount of time allocated to non-CPD activities, this found that approximately a quarter of the NCDs (as a proportion of the classifiable activities) were spent on the categories of reorientation and personal preparation. By way of illustration, administrative tasks included staff meetings, preparing displays in classrooms, preparing materials, examination moderation and writing policy documents. There was no clear consensus among teachers as to whether such activities were legitimate or the most beneficial ways of using NCDs.

With regard to the use of the days for CPD purposes, the predominant form of INSET offered – both in terms of substantive focuses and format – was top-down or centre-out. When not prescribed externally by national or local government, the content was generally driven by school managers and frequently reflected the imperatives of OFSTED inspections and current initiatives. Adopting a largely managerialist agenda, NCDs constituted an important tool and opportunity for headteachers to promote their vision or strategic plan for the school. In addition, the format of the days tended to accentuate transmissive modes of learning, with strong emphases on engaging quality external and internal speakers. In keeping with these characteristics, the most frequently reported effects centred on 'informational outcomes' and 'institutional outcomes' (e.g. team building, cohesion, common policies and practices). In these respects, there was evidence that fewer teachers were now openly hostile to the days and that more appreciated the value of NCDs as key contributors to whole-school development and improvement. Moreover, there was general agreement that over recent years, NCDs had become more rigorously planned, more structured, more focused and more relevant.

In spite of these strengths, the findings demonstrated that NCDs have their limitations as vehicles for effective CPD – at least, as far as they are currently conceived and typically implemented. There were, for instance, few signs that the staff development activities provided through NCDs were associated with higher-order developments in teachers' professional repertoire and practice. Testimonies to major gains in professional 'knowledge and skills', shifts in values and beliefs, and significant changes in classroom practices were in short supply, even when the focus was deemed to have direct practical relevance. Most importantly, the vast majority of teachers felt

that NCDs were not meeting their own individual CPD needs (e.g. for updating subject knowledge, IT competencies and specific teaching skills). Clearly, this finding challenges any complacency that may spring from the misguided notion that teachers' in-service professional development needs are being met through the provision of NCDs.

While the study has highlighted certain approaches to the use and organisation of the days which were perceived to improve their chances of impacting on practices (e.g. sustained CPD provision, relevance, differentiation and training for INSET coordinators), NCDs seem to possess certain fixed qualities which may make them too cumbersome and unresponsive to be a major force in improving practice. Such qualities may include the limited resources to support the days and the fact that all staff have to be released on the same day, thus making differentiation according to particular needs very difficult to achieve. Ironically, the absence of any contact with pupils on 'non-contact' days may also be another structural limitation: a number of studies have shown that it is support and training 'on-the-job', namely in the classroom interface between teachers and pupils, that is an essential, yet frequently overlooked, feature of high-quality and effective CPD. In view of these structural limitations, it may be pertinent to ask whether some of the massive amount of teacher release resources currently tied up in NCDs could not be more successfully deployed in alternative forms of provision (e.g. dissemination/support networks, shadowing, distance learning, vacation courses or short teacher secondments coupled with on-the-job feedback and support).

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## Thank you for the days? How schools use their non-contact days

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Ever since their introduction in schools over ten years ago, 'training days' or, perhaps more accurately, 'non-contact days' (NCDs) have given rise to doubts about whether or not they were being used to good effect. Do they facilitate effective forms of continuing professional development (CPD) or are they used for lesson preparation and the mounting of classroom displays? As a contribution to this debate, the research reported here sets out to answer:

- how are the days being used, in terms of both format and content?
- what merit do teachers see in the five days?
- whose needs do they meet?
- what impact do they have on policy and practice in schools, especially on improving the quality of teaching and learning?

Examining evidence collected from visits to 66 schools, the report includes such findings as:

- a typical pattern across many schools was for about three-quarters of the NCDs to be spent on professional development;
- fewer teachers were now openly hostile to the days and more appreciated the value of NCDs;
- the most frequently reported effects centred on gaining information and whole school developments (e.g. cohesion, common policies and practices);
- however, most teachers felt that NCDs were not meeting their own individual CPD needs (e.g. for updating subject knowledge and specific teaching skills);
- and there was little evidence that NCDs were affecting significant changes in classroom practices.

The report should be of interest to anyone engaged in the process of managing, coordinating, providing or evaluating teachers' continuing professional development. The research was funded by the LGA Educational Research Programme.

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