Politics, Professionalism and Pragmatics: Teacher professional development and learning – perspectives from Wales and Scotland

JIM O’BRIEN, The University of Edinburgh
KEN JONES, Swansea Institute of Higher Education

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Politics, Professionalism and Pragmatics: Teacher professional development and learning – perspectives from Wales and Scotland

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ABSTRACT
The devolution settlement of the late 1990s and the establishment of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament has increased the potential for divergence of policy and practice within the differing educational systems in the UK. The established view of teacher professional development and learning historically has been that it is haphazard, rarely relevant and had little impact on professional learning. This paper focuses on the Welsh and Scottish approaches to teacher professional development and learning and includes a review of policies adopted since 1998 including consideration of their ‘political’ derivation – the issue of how you must do it; the ‘professional’ element – how you should do it and the ‘pragmatic alternative’ – how we will do it. These approaches are compared and contrasted with international examples of how similar issues associated with re-culturing the teaching profession and performance management are being addressed.

Introduction
Since the devolution settlement of the late 1990’s in the UK that re-established the Scottish Parliament and established an Assembly in Wales, there has been an increasing diversity between educational systems within the UK. Each system has determined its own priorities (eg. http://www.nationalpriorities.org.uk/index.html) and this despite the power and influence of the governing Labour Party at UK national level. The Westminster Parliament retains control over education in England, but the developing emphases, approach and priorities in England appear to increasingly reflect an agenda that is not welcome in the glens and valleys of Scotland and Wales. However the imperatives of professional re-culturing and greater impact by teachers on student attainment and achievement do exist in both Scottish and Welsh systems.

Experience of Teacher Professional Development and Learning in the UK
Until recently, for most Scottish teachers, the experience of ‘formal’ professional learning or development, involved familiarisation and preparation for the curricular reforms of the 1980s and 90s often supported by centrally produced materials (O’Brien and McGGettrick, 1996). School development planning promoted planned in-school activity usually associated with institutional aims and targets, informed by self- evaluation approaches (MacBeath, 1999; MacBeath and McGlynn, 2003). Such plans now have to take into consideration the new nationally declared educational priorities (http://www.nationalpriorities.org.uk/introduction.html) and local Education Authorities’ (EA) initiatives and policies. In-school or EA provided staff development has been complemented by national provision for appraisal (O’Brien and MacBeath, 1999), renamed “staff development and review” and extensive management training and by attendance at short courses and conferences ie. a traditional INSET model which might fairly be described as voluntary and spasmodic. The Sutherland Report (1997) on the education and training of teachers made recommendations to improve the quality of CPD for teachers. The report recognised that there was no agreed framework within which teachers could plan their career development. He argued for an encompassing national framework to include probation and induction, and the range, types and levels of CPD undertaken by teachers. In Scotland, committed to raising levels of attainment in schools, the new Labour government reaffirmed
its aim of making “schools and teachers more effective and efficient in order to raise standards of attainment by pupils” and endorsed Sutherland’s suggestions.

In the context of England and Wales, there has been significant progress in raising the profile of CPD but much still needs to be done to ensure consistent opportunity and effectiveness. Professor Michael Barber echoed the Scottish experience in a paper entitled ‘Labour’s vision’ (Barber, 2000), that:

‘For most teachers professional development has traditionally been haphazard, off-site, barely relevant, poorly provided and a chore at best.’

This comment mirrored the findings of a survey conducted for the Teacher Training Agency by the MORI polling organisation in 1995 (MORI, 1995). They found that professional development in schools generally operated on an ad hoc basis with no real linkages to school or personal development plans or teacher appraisal. The Times Educational Supplement reported that, in the MORI survey, only a quarter of teachers questioned claimed that professional development work had had an impact on their teaching, though few schools had any means of measuring its effectiveness: ‘If one assumes it is about improving the quality of teaching, CPD will need to change.’ (Merrick, 1995)

Anthea Millett, then chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), added to the findings by stating that there was insufficient planning, monitoring and follow-up of professional development activities to ensure they were having a direct impact on improving teaching and learning. Following the MORI survey, the TTA undertook an extensive consultation with schools, professional and subject associations, higher education institutions, OFSTED and other interested parties. Referring to this intervention, Gaunt (1997) reported that

‘the consultation identified weaknesses and variation in CPD particularly as resources were not being used to best effect, activities were not sufficiently targeted to meet needs and there was inadequate planning, evaluation and follow-up to ensure a direct impact on teaching and learning’ (p8)

The status and effectiveness of ‘staff development’ was again questioned indirectly in Macbeath’s (1999) study of criteria representing aspects of ‘good’ or ‘effective’ schools. He presented to groups of parents, teachers, governors, pupils/students and senior management twenty three criteria for school review used by OFSTED. One of the criteria was ‘staff development is motivating for staff’. The groups were asked to select the five most important and three least important of the twenty three criteria. The staff development criterion did not appear in the top five selection for any of the groups; more significantly it was fifth out of the ten lowest rated criteria (Macbeath, 1999:66). No explanation is offered by Macbeath of this low placement of staff development, but the exercise was replicated with a group of 24 primary teachers following a management development course in Wales and with a class of 30 in-service teachers (divided into six groups) taking a Masters qualification in New York State, USA, (both in 1999) (Jones). The results were similar: not only did staff development not appear in the most important category for any of the groups but, as in Macbeath’s study, it was selected amongst the least important criteria by four of the six groups.

The teachers engaged in this exercise were asked why they rated ‘staff development’ so low. A number of key issues emerged and a selection is given below (responses from the Welsh group are indicated (W); the New York group are indicated (US)):
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- Staff development was characterised by in-service days for whole staff in which they were talked to (or ‘at’) by invited speakers (US)
- Staff development activities were frequently poorly organised (W, US)
- In most cases, staff development was the responsibility of the principal and was frequently conducted as a bolt on to the year’s ‘real’ education programme (US)
- Staff development was used to launch an initiative generated by others outside the school and with a perceived limited life and purposefulness (US)
- Staff development issues were identified ‘top down’ within the school (‘top’ in some cases being ‘the government’ or ‘LEA’) (W)
- Many staff development sessions had little relevance for the classroom (W)
- School closure days were unstructured or overstructured (W)
- Activities were enjoyable and frequently interesting but little changed as a result (W)

The perceived effectiveness of professional development support for teachers in the USA fares no better in American literature. Brown and Moffett (1999) observed that

‘The inability of educators and the public to translate professional development research principles into the reality of schools represents the ultimate ‘dragon at the door’. Continued failure to use the professional development knowledge base to guide practice threatens our demise… For whatever reason, decision makers continue to ignore those aspects of professional development that research and practice have shown to be the critical elements in promoting and sustaining substantive behavior change’ (p.73).

Guskey (2000) contended that, in the USA:

‘Educators themselves frequently regard professional development as having little impact on their day-to-day responsibilities. Some even consider it a waste of their professional time. They participate in professional development primarily because of contractual obligations but often see it as something they must ‘get out of the way’ so that they can get back to the important work of educating students’ (p.4).

He added:

‘How can it be that something universally recognised as so important also can be regarded as so ineffective? … many of the professional development experiences in which educators engage are meaningless and wasteful. Many are not well planned or supported. Others focus on ideas that are faddish and not based on well documented research evidence … still others present ideas that may be valuable but are impractical to implement because of insufficient resources or a lack of structural support’ (p.4).

One of Guskey’s solutions was to improve the ways in which professional development is evaluated, but it is arguable that measuring the problem does not solve it. Why should the practice of professional development be so variable? There is a substantial literature relating to professional development in education that recounts the findings of research into the process and provides models of successful practice. The Journal of Staff Development in the USA and the Journal of In-service Education in the UK provide excellent sources of discussion and debate on the subject.
In the UK, politicians have long recognised the importance of professional development support for teachers. As far back as 1925 a department committee on the training of teachers for public elementary schools commented:

‘We look forward to a time when supplementary courses will have been formally adopted as national policy and when arrangements for all teachers to attend them at regular intervals of a few years will have become part of the national system of education’ (Board of Education, 1925, quoted in Henderson, 1978)

The James Report (DES, 1972) set the trend for a number of considered papers on INSET in the UK and recommended that:

‘All teachers in schools … should be entitled to release with pay for in-service education on a scale equivalent to not less than one school term (say, 12 weeks) in every seven years of service and, as soon as possible, the entitlement should be increased to one term in five years …’ (p.107)

At that time there was a clear political remit to provide this support in England and Wales but, following the bursting of the 1970’s economic bubble (see Jones, O’Sullivan and Reid, 1987) the political will to fund such support evaporated. Since then, although research into the management, effectiveness and professional perception of CPD in all its forms has been abundant, there is little evidence to show that there is widespread and consistent adoption in schools of the models of effective provision espoused by Joyce and Showers (1980), Bolam (1982), and, more recently, Harland and Kinder (1997) and Day (1999). The political will to build school improvement on such models of effective CPD has re-emerged in recent years.

In Scotland, for example, a framework of standards for teacher professional development (O’Brien and Draper, 2003) has been established and is now in alignment with the post McCrone requirements. The contractual requirement for teachers to undertake 35 hours of CPD each year came into effect in August 2003. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) has established the National Register of CPD Providers who are required to be approved. The standards framework encompasses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Programme/Qualification</th>
<th>Associated Standard</th>
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<tr>
<td>pre-service</td>
<td>Initial Teacher Education</td>
<td>The Standard for ITE in Scotland Benchmark Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>first year</td>
<td>Teacher Induction Scheme</td>
<td>The Standard for Full Registration</td>
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<td>established teacher</td>
<td>Chartered Teacher Programme leading to Chartered Teacher Status</td>
<td>Standard for Chartered Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>senior management</td>
<td>Scottish Qualification for Headship</td>
<td>The Standard for Headship</td>
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Details of the current Scottish CPD vision can be downloaded at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cpd03.pdf.

It is anticipated that the standards framework and professional learning and development possibilities it affords will lead to an improved education service.

Similarly, in England, a strategy for CPD was launched in 2001 (DfEE, 2001) and in Wales, the publication of the General Teaching Council for Wales advice to the Welsh Assembly Government entitled: ‘Continuing Professional Development, an entitlement for all’ (GTCW,
of CPD in Wales.

Of course, the concept of effectiveness is contentious. ‘Effective professional development’ can be reduced in a technicist sense to perceived impact on practice. It can be measured in terms of training outcomes (did the activity meet its intended objectives?). In its crudest sense it can be measured in terms of ‘value for money’ (usually indicated by the financial cost of the activity or process rather than by any clear interpretation of ‘value’) and by the achievement or performance of pupils in the areas for which professional development support (or training) was provided.

Already, the problem of language emerges. The terms INSET, staff development and professional development or continuing professional development (CPD) and increasingly professional learning are often used interchangeably. Their use has also changed over time, so that the use of the term ‘professional development’ in the year 2005 is not the same as its meaning in the 1970s. However, the key components of effectiveness have long been recognised. Joyce and Showers (1980) charted the level of impact of different ‘training methods’ and found that the greatest impact in terms of ‘application’ was ‘coaching / assistance on the job’. The lowest impact was that of ‘presentation (eg lecture) of new skills’). Similarly, Oldroyd and Hall (1988) identified a continuum of ‘effectiveness of INSET’ from ‘INSET as ritual’ through ‘INSET for knowing and doing’ to ‘INSET for using’.

In an influential study published in the then British Journal of In-service Education, Harland and Kinder (1997) developed a typology of ‘INSET outcomes’ derived from research into ‘a programme of staff development’ (it is obviously difficult to depart from the interchange of terminology). They identify nine ‘INSET outcomes’ and categorise them into first, second and third order outcomes. The first order outcomes are ‘value congruence, knowledge and skills’, the second order outcomes are ‘motivation, affective and institutional’ outcomes and the third order are ‘provisionary, information and new awareness’ (p.77). They argue that

‘CPD 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 challenge for those who manage the provision of CPD support in schools is to achieve cost effective development support which impacts on classroom and school practice in a professional way as well as in more quantifiable terms.

The role of the professional development co-ordinator in this is pivotal but problematic. The position of ‘professional tutor’ or ‘staff development officer’ or ‘professional development co-ordinator’ has been defined and valued (O’Brien and MacBeath, 1999), but evidence suggests that the role has become confused, frequently relegated in seniority and that incumbents often do not possess the conceptual underpinnings to engage in the promotion of professional development in their schools. Research by Adey and Jones (1997) confirms this and they list a number of concerns relating to the management of professional development in schools, mainly linked to the ambiguous or poorly defined role of the staff development co-ordinator. But why should this be? There were many excellent examples of effective practice in the management of staff development and clear definitions of the role from the decree of the James Report in 1972 that ‘Each school must have a member of staff nominated as a professional tutor …’ to the present day ‘mentor’, a requirement for schools in Wales receiving funding to support Newly Qualified Teachers.

The problem seems to lie in the gap between the pronouncement of the principles, the conceptualisation of the process, and the enactment of practice.

In other words, there are three elements in play:
• the ‘political’ element (this is how you must do it),
• the ‘professional’ element (‘this is how you should do it’), and
• the ‘pragmatic alternative’ (this is how we will do it)

(after O’Sullivan, Jones and Reid, 1988, p192).

The key to ensuring effective professional development in its broadest sense must be in ensuring that the ‘pragmatic alternative’ taken by those who manage professional development within schools is neither a short cut nor a major deviation from the political or professional elements.

The political model: CPD as obligation
The political model is characterised by a view of CPD as a professional duty. In many States in the USA, teachers are required to gain a Masters qualification within five years if they are to continue in post. In England and Wales, the new framework for the profession (DfEE 1998) includes a requirement that, after 2002, teachers must meet National Standards and gain the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) before moving into their first headship. The re-certification of teachers (a required continual updating, common in other professions such as Law and Medicine) has been discussed but not as yet proposed.

In Scotland the McCrone Inquiry (SEED, 2000) and the nature of the subsequent Agreement of the major players, teacher unions, GTCS and the Scottish Executive [government] could be seen as a political issue but much of McCrone was associated with increasing teacher professionalism and there are inherent tensions evident within this agreement. Additionally in time, political naivety on the part of a relatively inexperienced Scottish Executive may be the abiding verdict if professional re-culturing fails to materialise.

Since 1983 when Circular 3/83 and, later, circular 6/86 in England (DES, 1983; DES, 1986) identified areas for designated funding, the resources made available to teachers through TRIST, LEATGS, GEST and the Better Schools Fund in Wales arguably have mirrored political priorities as much as a professional agenda.

The appraisal scheme of the late 1980’s and more significantly, the approach to performance management (Reeves et al., 2002) in England and Wales had major implications for the nature of CPD within schools. Both schemes began with opposition from many elements of the teaching profession. Both had / have major implications for the ways in which professional development needs of individual teachers are identified and met within the school situation.

The political model is epitomised by section four of the application form for progression beyond the threshold in England and Wales (DfEE, 2000) that requires applicants for threshold promotion to indicate what professional development they have undertaken and, in an intriguing new step, what impact this CPD has had on pupils:

‘Please summarise evidence that you:
 take responsibility for your professional development and use the outcomes to improve your teaching and pupils’ learning’ (p.5)

In the same application form, the threshold applicant has to provide evidence about wider professional effectiveness. The supplementary sheet on ‘Threshold: prompts for teachers’ provides advice on how to complete these sections. It suggests the following:

‘Evidence about wider professional effectiveness…what have I personally done to pursue my own professional development (in the broadest sense)? What activities
increasing (if development). When the Pragmatic Alternative

If it is generally the case, why?

of the MORI survey and the TTA consultation exercise.

engage experience teachers?

How

teachers?

list easily school, partnership.

comparison The

themselves and learner evaluate teacher development with the 'job related' element of continuing professional development.

This 'post-technocratic model' of professional education by which

Day (1999:6) distinguishes between ‘being a professional’ and ‘behaving as a professional’. He quotes Hargreaves (1994) in identifying the emergence of a ‘new professionalism’ or ‘post-technocratic model’ of professional education by which

‘to improve schools, one must be prepared to invest in professional development; to improve teachers, their professional development must be set within the context of institutional development’ (p.9)

This is an important distinction and brings together the ‘job embedded’ element of staff development with the ‘job related’ element of continuing professional development.

The ‘professional model’ of CPD builds on the concept of the ‘reflective practitioner’. The teacher should engage in enquiry, be a lifelong learner, form critical friendships, network, evaluate and continually seek ways of improving practice. The ‘professional’ teacher as learner will maintain a professional development portfolio, set personal development targets, and support the development of others,. The professional learner will have extended themselves intellectually within the theory of the profession and will have followed or be following a Masters programme in Education.

The gap between the professional model of CPD and the reality of practice is illustrated by a comparison of what ‘should be’ and ‘what is’. Take, for example, the best practice relating to partnership. This may be considered at a number of levels: the individual, the team, the school, the LEA, HEIs and extended partnerships. A list of what ‘should’ be in place can be easily produced (see Table 1). However, when asked to identify which of the elements on the list are operational in their schools, few if any teachers will identify all and frequently teachers and school leaders will confess that the norm is that very few elements exist in practice.

How common are these elements of partnership in the professional experience of individual teachers? Informal questioning of teachers attending CPD activities suggests that the experience of most is patchy and frequently teachers do not engage or have the opportunity to engage in many of these activities. This would confirm Barber’s statement and the findings of the MORI survey and the TTA consultation exercise.

If it is generally the case, why?

The Pragmatic Alternative

When we consider the knowledge and understanding we have of continuing professional development, our research evidence which confirms which practices work best, the political (if not always resource) support in the last twenty years for in-service training, and the increasing tendency of higher education to support informed practice rather than espouse
sterile theory, we must ask why there is a gap between policy, professional understanding and implementation. Studies of the reasons for this ‘implementation gap’ have emerged in a number of disciplines. The study of change has highlighted reasons why some change takes root and other change fails to impact. In the field of political science, Michael Lipsky (1971) coined the phrase ‘street level bureaucrats’ to explain the role of ‘workers’ in the implementation of policy. He argued that

‘To understand how and why ... organisations often perform contrary to their own rules and goals, we need to know how the rules are experienced by workers in the organisation and to what other pressures they are subject’ (p.xii)

He contends that

‘... the decisions of street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out. ... public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers.’ (p.389-390)

He continues:

‘people often enter public employment, particularly street-level bureaucracies, with at least some commitment to service. Teachers, social workers, public interest lawyers, and police officers in part seek out these occupations because of their potential as socially useful roles. Yet the very nature of this work prevents them from coming even close to the ideal conception of their jobs. Large classes or huge caseloads and inadequate resources combine with the uncertainties of method and the unpredictability of clients to defeat their aspirations as service workers. ...

Ideally, and by training, street-level bureaucrats respond to the individual needs or characteristics of the people they serve or confront. In practice, they must deal with clients on a mass basis ... Teachers should respond to the needs of the individual child; in practice they must develop techniques to respond to children as a class’ (p.390).

Sabatier (1986) refers to ‘advocacy coalitions’. These are groups of people who set a dominant trend and influence the majority. If, for example, CPD is seen as a chore by most teachers, this can be a powerful and persuasive inhibitor of progress in introducing the professional, and even the political initiative. For example, even though teacher appraisal was contractual and therefore obligatory for schools, the process in England and Wales rarely made it beyond the first cycle. The street-level bureaucrats had influenced policy and by a mass process of non compliance rather than confrontation the successive cycles of appraisal failed to happen.

Elmore (1980) argued that change and adoption of policy relates to the belief systems of individuals and groups. The notion of inner core, outer core and peripheral belief systems is relevant here. CPD may be seen as vital to the profession and politically expedient, but are teachers totally committed to CPD? At best it may be peripheral to most. Arguably, the concept of professionalism is not a core belief for most teachers. They need to achieve targets rather than reflect on how children learn best unless this reflection on learning can translate directly and immediately into pupil performance and improved results.
Perhaps the crux of the issue lies in the conceptual gap between politicians (and civil servants), ‘educationists’ and practitioners. As we seek to improve our schools are we improving education or improving schooling; improving achievement or improving results?

In Wales, the political agenda to establish a professional development framework for teachers echoes the ‘professional’ view. Similarly, from a distance, the decision to increase funding allocated to the General Teaching Council for Wales to support CPD is a positive move. The GTCW rightly celebrates the fact that by March 2005, some 15,000 teachers in Wales had participated in CPD activities funded by the Council (GTCW, 2005). With 38,000 teachers in Wales this is arguably a reasonable proportion for the new initiative. However, this figure hides the fact that the distribution of take-up is unevenly spread throughout Wales (GTCW, 2003) with some authorities having very low take-up rates. Of equal concern, the report on non-participation found that ‘many older members (50+) of staff saw the schemes as not being relevant to them …’

The report found that ‘in order to maximise take-up rates in schools, three things needed to be in place: a pro-active head, a pro-active member of staff with responsibility for staff development/CPD, or good informal networks of supportive colleagues with experience of the schemes’. Disappointingly, in many schools the entitlement of teachers to effective CPD support is diminished or removed by a lack of pro-activity. This occurs when the political and professional agendas are outweighed by a pragmatic alternative.

Certainly in Scotland with the appointment of a national CPD Co-ordinator and a series of associated working/development groups there is a lot of activity on standards and related ‘fleshing out’ of the CPD framework, but there are concerns about process (Purdon, 2003). It will be interesting to observe whether the pragmatic alternative continues to inhibit a coherent approach to professional development in all schools.

Correspondence

Dr. Jim O’Brien, Centre for Educational Leadership, Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, EDINBURGH EH8 8AQ, United Kingdom (email: Jim.O’Brien@ed.ac.uk)
Ken Jones, Dean, Swansea Institute of HE, SWANSEA, United Kingdom (email: Ken.Jones@sihe.ac.uk)

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### Table 1: elements of professional practice – CPD as partnership

#### The individual
- needs are identified systematically
- appraisal informs CPD
- critical friendship is active and supported
- professional development portfolios are maintained
- the practice of teachers as researchers is encouraged
- achievement in all professional senses is celebrated

#### The Team
- leadership teams, curriculum teams, pastoral teams operate effectively
- team targets / development plans encompass a professional development element
- collaboration in professional learning exists
- team initiatives are supported
- teams are given opportunities to learn and celebrate achievement

#### The School
- all staff are informed of and involved in CPD activities
- effective use is made of non-contact days / directed time
- the staff development programme links with the School Development Plan
- responsibilities for CPD are clearly defined
- CPD is job embedded
- There is a focus on teaching and learning

#### The Cluster
- repertoire analysis is used to maximize effective networking
- exchange / collaborative working is encouraged and supported
- primary / secondary learning support is available
- sharing resources / experience is common

#### The LEA
- centralised resources are used efficiently
- teachers have an opportunity to influence the short course programme
- dissemination of good practice occurs
- GEST/the standards fund is managed effectively
- Networking is encouraged and facilitated
- Teachers have the opportunity to influence policy and serve on working groups

#### Higher Education
- student teachers are used as part of the CPD process
- CPD opportunities exist for teacher tutors
- in-service support is built into HEI programmes
- HEIs support teachers in looking at practice (school-based research)
- school- or cluster-based programmes are accredited where possible
- accreditation of learning and experience is encouraged

#### Extended Partnerships
- teachers are encouraged to network beyond the school
- membership of organizations is supported
- subscribing to journals (staff development library) is common
- Email and internet are used to network
- The principles of the Investors in People scheme are applied generally