8 The Challenges of Professional Development in the European Higher Education Area: Targeting Success in Writing, Research, Learning and Teaching

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In this chapter we report on an element of a European COST Action which set out to explore centralised models of professional learning for higher education staff across writing, research, learning and teaching. Specifically, we report on our examination of three things: the provision of professional support across writing, research, learning and teaching; the factors which influence the research participants' engagement in writing, research, learning and teaching; the sort of professional support that the research participants found either effective or desirable in terms of writing, research, learning and teaching. Based on analysis of the data, in the context of the COST Action, we suggest three themes to be considered with regard to the provision of professional learning for higher education colleagues across these four areas, namely, character, community and context. In our discussion and concluding remarks we

> emphasize the importance of the human component of higher
> education and the need for collaborative approaches which are
> meaningful and context sensitive.

The work underpinning this chapter began with a conversation between colleagues from teaching and learning/academic/educational/faculty development backgrounds, and colleagues from composition and rhetoric/writing traditions. When we met, we discovered that we were often talking about the same or related matters but that we were coming at them from different directions. We found that we could identify strong links in the nature of the work we were doing and similar challenges. The common thread of enquiry which ran through our work, and our being situated in higher education, meant that we all had experience of four key areas within that sector, namely, writing, research, learning, and teaching. We realised that our professional trajectories had necessitated that we develop across these four areas. In some instances, this development was mapped carefully and strategically to a career plan, more often, however, it was haphazard and responsive in nature. Similarly, we observed that the professional development support we were offered by our institutions, and the support we offered within our institutions in our professional roles or as colleagues had both distinctive threads and woven patterns.

With the benefit of our combined years of experience, we reflected on whether we could make more of the common ground between writing and research, learning, and teaching, and, in turn on whether our institutions could provide support for their staff which would capitalise on this common ground. We decided to try to explore this idea by writing a bid for European Union (EU) funding through a mechanism called COST – European Cooperation in Science and Technology. COST is a "funding organisation for research and innovation networks" (COST, n.d.). COST supports networking by providing funding which facilitates co-enquiry and collaboration between colleagues from across Europe and beyond. The work these colleagues do is called an Action; according to the COST Association, "Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and beyond and enable researchers and innovators to grow their ideas in any science and technology field by sharing them with their peers. COST Actions are bottom-up networks with a duration of four years that boost research, innovation and careers" (COST, n.d.). Our COST Action was called *We ReLaTe* or COST Action 15221. In our Action we examined the challenge of creating synergy among centralised institutional supports for staff across the four key areas of writing, research, learning, and teaching (COST Action 15221, n.d., a). Practically, we knew that our institutions provided, to varying degrees and with different institutional emphases, professional devel-

opment support for staff in their roles as writers and researchers, as learners and teachers but we were unsure about the extent of support in each of these spaces and we wondered if these supports did, or could, complement each other. Our Action allowed us to find out more about this challenge and in this chapter, we present a portion of the findings of our Action work.

As part of the Action, we conducted research with colleagues across Europe about the personal (internal) and contextual (external) factors that contribute to success in teaching, learning, research and writing. Specifically, we wanted to do two things:

1. To capture the knowledge, skills, values, motivations and processes that have led to success, effectiveness and/or productivity in each of the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching.
2. To explore what institutions can and/or should do to support effectiveness and/or productivity in each of the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching.

Prior to presenting our findings we situate this chapter in the COST Action. We then locate our work in literature which has helped us to understand the contemporary higher education context and the place of professional development therein. Next, we present our methodology and our findings. Finally, we present a discussion of our findings and some concluding remarks.

Situating This Chapter in the COST Action

A full description of the COST Action from which the findings discussed in this chapter are drawn is available in the Memorandum of Understanding (COST, 2016)[1] between the Action and COST. That document states the Action's rationale which is summarised here:

- There is a need for a global conversation about professional development across writing, research, learning and teaching which will take place "alongside, and building on, the 'disciplining' approach that has predominated [and] . . . will offer an alternative for consideration in a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary space" (COST, 2016, p. 1).
- This conversation is needed because of three key factors in the higher education landscape:
  1. the massification of higher education in terms of growth in student numbers and diversity of the student population (Altbach et al., 2009; Arum & Roksa, 2011; Barber et al., 2013; European Commis-

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1   http://www.werelate.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MoU-.pdf

> sion, 2013; Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007; OECD, 2012, 2014; Shavit et al., 2007)
>
> 2. neoliberal, managerial approaches in higher education including an ever-growing range of stakeholder demands, a transactional approach to the higher education experience and the need for alternative models (Barnett, 2012; Lynch et al., 2012)
>
> 3. the growing use of technology in higher education (Conole, 2013; Laurillard, 2012; Wheeler & Gerver, 2015) (COST, 2016, pp. 1-2).
>
> - These, and other factors mean that higher education is changing in a range of ways.
> - These factors combined, or even taken separately, mean that scaffolding and enhancing the staff and student experience of teaching, learning, research and writing has become ever more complex in terms of institutional organisation and professional and student support (COST, 2016, p. 2).
> - New models and frameworks that identify synergies across the four areas of writing, research, learning, and teaching could help us to re-image central supports for these four areas which would focus on effectiveness, success and productivity, and would serve to capitalise on commonalities and synergies.

COST Actions facilitate co-enquiry and collaboration. In terms of partnership, our Action began with a small group of proposers from 16 countries. Over its lifetime from October 2016 to April 2021, the Action grew to include colleagues from 41 countries (COST Action 15221, n.d., b; Appendix 1).

Contemporary Higher Education and the Need for Professional Learning

More and more is being required of higher education and the environment in which it is operating is becoming more complex; Barnett suggests it is a modern world of supercomplexity (2000). In addition, higher education is increasingly required to demonstrate where the return on the investment in it might be observed particularly in publicly funded higher education which is subject to greater demands for accountability and improved efficiency, more competition, and a requirement for ever more sophisticated reporting mechanisms (Torres, 2011). This tendency is identified as part of the "neoliberal" move in higher education about which much has been written (readers are directed to Malcolm Tight's article entitled "The neoliberal turn in Higher Education" which traces the use and evolution of the term in this space).

Whether we see neoliberalism in higher education as a "fright term" (Tight, 2019, p. 273) or as what Giroux has suggested is the cause of "bare pedagogy" (Giroux, 2010, p. 185) there is no questioning its prevalence in the discourse around higher education. Neither can one deny the inclination towards greater accountability and transparency and their associated tools in this sector. Van Vught and Ziegele define transparency tools as "instruments that aim to provide information to stakeholders about the efforts and performance of higher education and research institutions" (2011, p. 25). Gunn, with reference to Neave, makes a useful distinction in his work in this area between quality assurance and transparency tools; he notes

> In origin, quality assurance comes from within the higher education community whereas transparency tools tend to be imposed from outside. Quality assurance is rooted in an ethos of institutional autonomy and the principles of peer review undertaken by self-regulating professionals. It is focused on assurance, and increasingly concerned with enhancement, rather than performance measurement and comparison (Neave 2014). Transparency tools, alternatively, may serve agendas and stakeholders outside the academic community, and they typically have characteristics more akin to external audit and public scrutiny. (2018, pp. 505-506)

Both of these elements are broadly associated with demonstrating some impact of the combined efforts associated with higher education.

Higher education is a human endeavour. As such demonstrating its impact will depend in no small part on higher education staff. The growing complexity of, the relentless demands on, and the increasing changes in, higher education mean that the staff working within it need support including professional development as higher education continues to evolve. Reflecting the growth and increased complexity of the field, research into higher education itself has grown exponentially especially in the past 50 years (Tight, 2017). Our chapter is concerned with writing, research, learning and teaching (WRLT) and so it connects with research into higher education which considers all four of these areas, against the bigger higher education landscape. As we note in the COST MoU, there is an abundance of work which explores these four individual areas specifically—we refer to but a few in that document including: Åkerlind, 2005; Bain, 2004; Geller & Eodice, 2013; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sorcinelli et al., 2006; Stefani, 2011; Thaiss et al., 2012; Trowler et al., 2012 (COST, 2016). Strands of the higher education research into writing, research, learning and teaching (WRLT) are concerned with professional development

or professional learning for higher education staff. The professional learning for higher education staff in their role as teachers has been categorised variously and under broad headings such as simply "teaching and learning in higher education," as educational development, as academic development, as faculty development, as the scholarship of teaching and learning, etc. The absence of an agreed nomenclature points to the fluid and expansive nature of this work. At the outset, work in this space sought to establish a research and evidence basis, and practical guidance for academics in terms of their teaching practice in higher education. Sutherland notes that the "field of 'academic development' (or educational, faculty, or instructional development as it is variously known internationally) has had a clear focus on supporting academics in their teaching endeavours" (2018, p. 262). In her editorial for a special issue of the *International Journal for Academic Development*, Sutherland sketches the development of this field and concludes that "the focus of most academic development literature . . . is still clearly on the development of teaching" (2018, p. 263). However, she also remarks that "Around the same time as academic development as a field of research was emerging, organisational development was becoming more prominent in universities worldwide" (2018, p. 263). And that subsequently "researcher development" emerged as "a more recent phenomenon" but one which shares an ambiguity with academic development in that "its definition is as slippery as academic development's appears to be" (Sutherland, 2018, p. 264). In turn, educational development and researcher development might both overlap with research into supporting colleagues as writers. Part of the work of our Action was to find out more about, and from, colleagues who have been clearly successful across the four areas writing, research, learning and teaching (WRLT) and to decipher their professional purposes (goals-motivations), their processes, their knowledge and skills, and their values. We believed that if we could learn more about these experts, or as we titled them "stellar" colleagues, we could extrapolate from that data the sort of support that might be beneficial for other colleagues who were seeking to succeed in a similar way. We also asked these key informants about the sorts of supports that they considered most beneficial.

Methodology

The primary partners in a COST Action are the Management Committee (MC). There can be two MC members from each partner country. In our Action the MC identified stellar colleagues in their countries using agreed criteria (COST Action 15221, 2018). MC members identified stellar colleagues either within their home institutions or from other institutions in their home country. All of these colleagues were working in COST member countries

(there are 38 European COST member countries and one cooperating member country, namely Israel). These stellar colleagues became the key informants for the Action's data gathering. Working with our key informants, we tried to learn about professional learning, including institutional models of professional learning, through an individual lens.

Our data gathering included a two-stage process starting with the creation of focus groups composed of multilingual and multicultural colleagues selected by the Management Committee. Six online focus groups were held with a total of 16 participants involved. The data from the focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis and reported in Carmody (2019). The findings from the focus groups informed the design of a questionnaire, which was the second stage of data gathering. The questionnaire was designed by colleagues who had participated in one of the Action's training schools and by MC members. It was piloted with a small group of colleagues known to MC members. Following feedback from the pilot group the questionnaire was refined. Once the questionnaire was finalised, MC members invited colleagues, by email, to complete it. In total, 252 colleagues, from across 31 countries answered the questionnaire which considered the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching (WRLT). Across the sections that considered support and development there were 16 Likert scale questions and four open text questions. The quantitative results of the questionnaire (minus the open text questions) were analysed by co-author of this chapter Erika Melonashi (2020), and it is that data that we concentrate on in this chapter.

Findings

As noted at the outset of this chapter, in our Action we were examining professional learning across the research participant settings. We asked about the factors which influence engagement with writing, research, learning and teaching, the provision or lack thereof of centralised professional support across writing, research, learning and teaching, and the sort of professional support participants found either effective or desirable across the four areas. We report our findings here under the headings of internal (personal) and external (contextual) factors.

Internal Factors—Personal: Character, Personal Traits and Motivation

As a result of our focus groups, we discovered that a key determinator of success across WRLT was the academic disposition. Because we began to see a pattern from the focus group data about the importance of individual,

personal characteristics in our key informants, we decided to explore this to a greater extent in the questionnaire.

In order to assess personal traits, participants were asked "To what extent have the following personal traits/dispositions influenced your success across the four areas of writing, research, teaching and learning where five is most influential, and one is least influential." Table 8.1 shows means and standard deviations for 13 personal traits. They are ranked in descending order of mean values from most influential to least influential. As can be seen in the table, the top six traits rated as most influential by participants included: Curiosity, Openness to New Experiences, Optimism, Freedom, Determination/Persistence, and Ability to Problem Solve.

Table 8.1. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for Personal Traits

Personal Traits	Mean*	SD
1. Curiosity	4.59	.65
2. Openness to new experiences	4.47	.74
3. Optimism, positive attitude	4.45	.76
4. Freedom	4.43	.79
5. Determination/persistence	4.42	.73
6. Ability to problem solve	4.42	.70
7. Openness to collaboration	4.33	.85
8. Sound values – respect, equality, fairness, integrity	4.20	.93
9. Imagination	4.09	.92
10. Strategic thinking and planning	3.97	1.05
11. Willingness to travel for work	3.89	1.18
12. Kindness and compassion	3.83	1.05
13. Willingness to take risks	3.73	1.05
14. Willingness to live and work overseas	3.33	1.41

Range of values 1-5.

Motivation was investigated across two dimensions: "Motivation for Writing" and "Motivation for research." Table 8.2 shows means and standard deviations for nine items assessing "Motivation for writing," ranking them from strongest (higher means) to weakest (lower means) motivating factors. It is clearly noticed that "Passion for your discipline" was rated as the strongest motive, followed by "The wish to advance my career," "Desire to share your work," "Wish to be recognized in the field," and "Desire to learn more about my work" (See Table 8.2).

Table 8.2. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for "Motivation for Writing"

Motivation for Writing	Mean*	SD
1. Passion for your discipline	4.02	1.16
2. The wish to advance my career	3.78	1.27
3. Desire to share your work	3.76	1.25
4. The wish to be recognized in the field	3.72	1.22
5. Desire to learn more about my work	3.66	1.14
6. Belief that your writing can make a difference	3.62	1.16
7. The obligation to publish as a requirement around funding secured	3.39	1.26
8. The opportunity to co-author	3.32	1.33
9. The support of colleagues	3.05	1.32

* Range of values 1-5.

Table 8.3 shows means and standard deviations for the twelve items regarding motivation for research, in descending order. It can be noted that "Intrinsic motivation" is at the top of the list, followed by "Desire to learn more," "Desire to progress the field," "Connectedness," "Desire to improve the quality of my teaching." The weakest motive was "Industry needs."

Table 8.3. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for "Motivation for Research"

Motivation for Research	Mean*	SD
1. Intrinsic motivation	4.70	.62
2. Desire to learn more	4.37	.81
3. Desire to progress the field	4.31	.86
4. Connectedness	4.05	1.08
5. Desire to improve the quality of my teaching	3.98	1.08
6. The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues	3.95	1.04
7. Mobility – the opportunity to travel	3.84	1.21
8. Recognition by my institution	3.55	1.11
9. Institutional demands	3.47	1.06
10. Job security	3.44	1.17
11. Sense of competition within my field	3.22	1.26
12. Industry needs	2.69	1.30

* Range of values 1-5.

## 5.2 External Factors – Context

In addition to the asking key informants about personal traits, colleagues were asked about centralised support that was offered to them by their institutions, and about what enables or creates barriers to success and development. By centralised support we meant an office or centre, which is managed by dedicated staff, whose primary role is to provide institution-wide support for writing, research, learning and teaching. We present the findings in answer to these questions as

1. Presence/existence of support for teaching, learning, research and writing
2. The most useful types of support and or enablers across all four dimensions

Figure 8.1 show participants' answers on the existence of support for staff at their institutions. As can be noticed, the presence of support is poorest for writing; only 23% of participants reported having support for writing at their institutions. The most extensive support was reported for research, as 38% of the sample reported this type of support at their institutions. Additionally, teaching and learning support was reported by 31.6% of the sample, while professional development by 35% of the sample. To be noted is the percentage of individuals who answer "Difficult to say," which varies from 1/5 to 1/3 of the sample reporting so across the different areas, suggesting perhaps a lack of information or confusion regarding the specific types of support.

It should be highlighted that this question did ask specifically about centralised support for these areas. We know from our work across the Action, and from our own experience, that professional learning can take many guises outside of that which is offered by institutions centrally. Hence, while support for centralized support for writing was reported as low that is not to say that there were no other forms of support that participants may have been availing of, or indeed extending to, colleagues.

One interesting finding is that cross-tabulation between supports across different areas indicated that institutions providing one type of support, e.g., writing support, were also more likely to provide other types of support too, e.g., research support, teaching and learning, etc. (Chi Square value was significant at p<.001.) Tables 8.4-8.9 provide more detailed information for the cross-tabulations; for instance, Table 8.4 suggests that participants who answered "yes" to "teaching and learning support" were also more likely to answer "yes" on "writing support" and vice versa.
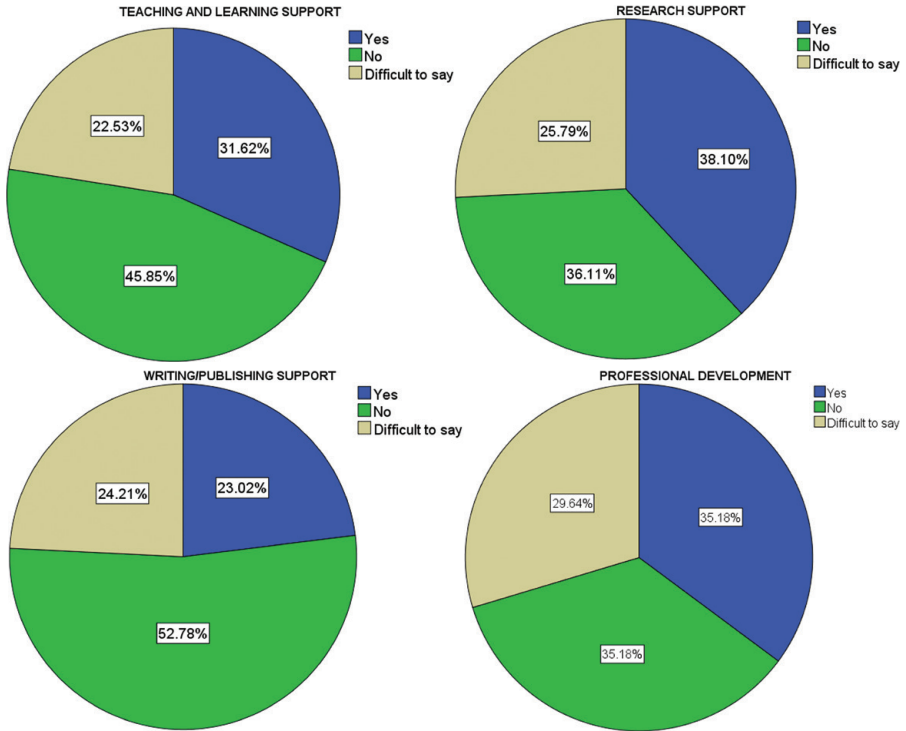
*Figure 8.1. Percentages of respondents who answered "yes," "no,"
or "difficult to say" in answer to the question of the provision by their
institution of centralised support for teaching and learning (support
for staff in their role as teachers), research, professional development
(or staff training/development) and writing/publishing for staff.*

Similar patterns are discernible across the cross-tabulations reported in Tables 8.5-8.9. In the cases of cross tabulation between "writing/publishing support for staff" and "research support for staff" (Table 8.5) and between "writing/publishing support for staff" and "professional development and/or staff training" (Table 8.6), we can see that in both instances the numbers reported for "no" support in either area are higher than reported support for each area. The gap between the provision of two supports closes as we move through the cross-tabulation tables. In Tables 8.7 and 8.8, respectively, there is slightly greater provision of support across "research support" and "teaching and learning support," and nearly identical provision and no provision numbers in the cross-tabulation between "research support for staff" and "professional development and/or staff training." In Table 8.9 again those answering "yes" to "professional development and/or staff training" are more likely to answer "yes" to

"teaching and learning support"; those answering "no" to one are more likely to answer "no" to the other. The cross-tabulated "difficult to say" numbers remain relatively stable throughout the tables all of them within a range of 24 and 35.

Table 8.4. Cross-tabulations: Overlap between Writing/Publishing Support for Staff? x Teaching and Learning Support

		Teaching and learning support (for example through a teaching and learning centre which aims primarily to support staff as teachers)?			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	To-tal
Writing/publishing support for staff?	Yes	*42*	6	10	58
	No	19	*91*	23	133
	Difficult to say	18	19	**24**	61
Total		79	116	57	252

Table 8.5. Cross-tabulations: Writing/Publishing Support for Staff? x Research Support for Staff?

		Research support for staff?			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total
Writing/publishing support for staff?	Yes	**44**	5	9	58
	No	29	**78**	26	133
	Difficult to say	22	8	**30**	60
Total		95	91	65	251

Table 8.6. Cross-tabulation: Writing/Publishing Support for Staff? x Professional Development and/or Staff Training

		Professional development and/or staff training and development?			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total
Writing/publishing support for staff?	Yes	**39**	5	14	58
	No	26	**71**	36	133
	Difficult to say	23	13	25	61
Total		88	89	75	252

Table 8.7. Cross-tabulation: Research Support for Staff? x Teaching and Learning Support

		Teaching and learning support			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total
Research support for staff?	Yes	**50**	28	18	96
	No	10	**67**	14	91
	Difficult to say	20	21	**24**	65
Total		80	116	56	252

Table 8.8. Cross-tabulation: Research Support x Professional Development

Yes		Professional development and/or staff training and development?			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total
Research support for staff?	Yes	**57**	19	20	96
	No	13	**58**	20	91
	Difficult to say	18	12	**35**	65
Total		88	89	75	252

Table 8.9. Cross-tabulation: Teaching and Learning Support x Professional Development and/or Staff Training and Development?

Yes		Professional development and/or staff training and development?			
		Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total
Teaching and learning support?*	Yes	**52**	9	19	80
	No	21	**68**	27	116
	Difficult to say	16	12	29	57
Total		89	89	75	253

For example through a teaching and learning centre which aims primarily to support staff as teachers.

With regard types of support which colleagues find mostly useful, Table 8.10 indicates opinions on writing supports. As can be observed from the table: "Access to relevant literature" ranks first (highest reported mean), followed by "Dedicated long blocks," "Mentoring," "Editor corrections/services," and "English language support." Media related items are rated last.

Table 8.10. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for Types of Writing Supports

Types of Writing Support	Mean*	SD
1. Access to relevant literature	4.28	.91
2. Dedicated long blocks	3.73	1.23
3. Mentoring	3.72	1.21
4. Editor corrections/services	3.70	1.19
5. English language support	3.60	1.35
6. Writing workshops, courses, lectures	3.52	1.28
7. Training in supervising others	3.42	1.18
8. Training in working as part of an editorial board	3.38	1.19
9. Dedicated short blocks	3.37	1.17
10. Training in publishing	3.36	1.21
11. Reading circles	2.91	1.20
12. Tailored support in writing for mainstream	2.83	1.24
14. Communications/media skills training	2.61	1.30
13. Social media writing training	2.54	1.29

Range of values 1–5.

Tables 8.11 and 8.12 indicate participants' answers on institutional support for teaching. More specifically Table 8.11 shows frequencies and percentages for initial support, first year support, ongoing support and teaching qualifications. Table 8.12 indicates mean values and standard deviations for types of teaching supports and important factors regarding teaching development, in descending order. Student related items including "Feedback from students" and "Student performance/learning" are top ranked. Colleague-related items are also rated highly "Informal professional conversations" and "Feedback from colleagues." Interestingly, "Awards and recognitions" are ranked last.

Table 8.11. Frequencies and Percentages for Institutional Support for Teaching

Institutional Support		Frequency	Percent
Initial teacher training	Yes	68	27.1
	No	154	61.4
	Somewhat	29	11.6

Support during the first year	Yes	49	19.6
	No	167	66.8
	Somewhat	34	13.6
Ongoing Institutional Support	Yes	79	31.7
	No	99	39.8
	Somewhat	71	28.5
Formal teaching qualification	Yes	138	54.8
	No	79	31.3
	Somewhat	35	13.9

Table 8.12. Mean Values and Standard Deviations for Types of Teaching Supports

Types of Teaching Support	Mean*	SD
1. Feedback from students	4.28	.79
2. Student performance – student learning	3.92	1.14
3. Informal professional conversations	3.82	1.13
4. Feedback from colleagues	3.72	1.13
5. International teaching opportunities	3.63	1.38
6. Engaging with the scholarship of teaching and learning	3.53	1.30
7. Researching your teaching	3.51	1.35
8. Team-teaching (co-teaching) opportunities	3.45	1.29
9. Attending teaching and learning workshops	3.42	1.37
10. Mentoring other colleagues	3.38	1.24
11. Contributing to teaching and learning workshops	3.35	1.35
12. Awards and recognition	3.04	1.38

Range of values 1–5.

Table 8.13 shows mean values and standard deviations for professional learning supports. "Support on engaging in EU/international projects" and "Conference attendance" are reported as the strongest types of support, followed by "Disciplinary related research support," "Support on building collaborations and networks," and "Cross-disciplinary research support." "Financial training" is rated as the least useful."

**Table 8.13. Mean Values and Standard Deviations
for Types of Learning Supports**

Types of Learning Supports	Mean*	SD
1. Support on engaging in EU/international projects	4.13	1.03
2. Conference/event attendance	4.00	1.00
3. Disciplinary related research support	3.99	1.03
4. Support on building collaborations and networks	3.96	1.06
5. Cross-disciplinary research support	3.87	1.08
6. Teaching and learning workshops	3.79	1.15
7. Project management	3.66	1.19
8. Teaching and learning programmes	3.59	1.21
9. People management	3.49	1.18
10. Time management	3.48	1.31
11. ICT (technology) training	3.45	1.26
12. Managing teams	3.45	1.17
13. Work-life balance support/training	3.43	1.31
14. Leadership training	3.38	1.25
15. Negotiating institutional systems and processes	3.26	1.27
16. Career planning	3.24	1.33
17. Recruiting staff	3.21	1.25
18. Financial training	3.18	1.27

Range of values 1–5

Table 8.14 shows participants' answers on the types of research support they find useful. Frequencies indicate the number of participants checking in the specific supports. As can be noted the largest number of the sample reported "Grant funding" (reported by 66.5% of the sample), followed closely by "Presenting research results and international events" (64.6% of the sample). "Opportunities to collaborate" and "Attending research-oriented events" were also checked by more than half of the sample. "Workshops/professional development" was the less relevant item checked by only 1/3 of the sample.

Table 8.15 shows mean values and standard deviations for participants' answers regarding continuous professional development (CDP). Items are ranked in descending order of relevance for CPD as reported by participants. The three top ranked factors are: Personal interest in further learning, Time, and Funding.

Table 8.14. Frequencies and Percentages of Research Supports

Research Supports	Frequency	Percent
1. Grant funding	175	66.5
2. Presenting research results at international events	170	64.6
3. Opportunities to collaborate	152	57.8.
4. Attending research-oriented event	149	56.7
5. Flexibility to adjust commitment	120	45.6
6. Release time to conduct research	116	44.1
7. International professional development opportunities	109	41.4
8. Workshops/professional development	86	32.7

Table 8.15. Means and Standard Deviations for Factors relevant to CPD

Factors Related to CPD	Mean*	SD
1. Personal interest in further professional learning	4.41	.85
2. Time	4.21	1.00
3. Funding from my institution/university for CPD	3.69	1.33
4. A clear framework for continuing professional development	3.63	1.21
5. Institutional recognition of further professional learning	3.62	1.11
6. The availability of CPD opportunities in my institution/university	3.60	1.28
7. Institutional commitment to CPD for staff	3.47	1.29
8. Institutional requirement for CPD for staff	3.27	1.25

* Range of values 1–5

Discussion of Findings

The higher education experience globally over 2020 and well into 2021 has been fraught with uncertainty, change, and challenges. One of the many effects of the sudden move to online/remote/blended teaching, learning, and assessment was the necessity for staff to extend and improve their digital capabilities and to engage in other pedagogy-related professional learning. The need for on-going professional learning for all those who teach and research is unlikely to diminish in the near future not least where engagement in professional learning by the individual, and support for staff professional learning support by the institution, are indicators of ongoing commitment to the enhancement of T&L practice and research. In this discussion of findings, we suggest factors which might be considered in the provision of impactful professional learning.

The Self

Our findings suggest that the academic's character is central to success where the character refers both to professional disposition and individual practice. It reflects the fact that, as Sorcinelli suggests, "individual practice is the core site of learning" in the roles of writer, researcher, learner and teacher (in conversation, 2020). It echoes the Irish *National Professional Development Framework for all Staff Who Teach in Higher Education* (2016) which identifies "The Self" as Domain 1. In our data, certain personal and professional characteristics were overwhelmingly shared by our key informants. The patterns that predominate in the findings suggest that intrinsic motivation is at the core of academic behaviour, e.g., the most significant factor with regard to continuous professional development was "personal interest in further professional learning." The importance of the self which emerged in this work echoes Matheson's research into teaching excellence where, drawing on Parker's work (2014), she highlights the importance of personal attributes suggesting that "teaching excellence lies within the individual" (2019, p. 15). Similarly, it resonates with Harland and Wald's research where work with their participants suggested to them that "teaching quality depended first and foremost on intrinsic motivation and pride in the job" (2017, p. 427). In turn, it echoes King's work where writing in 2019, she builds on her own work published in 2004 about what CPD academics engage in; her title has shifted from the 2004 version, "Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education: What Do Academics Do?" to "Continuing Professional Development: What Do Award-Winning Academics Do?" in the 2019 article. In the latter she talks about researching "expert" teachers in higher education; we see links with our work with "stellar colleagues" here. She suggests that CPD might be defined as "a self-determined and purposeful process of evolution of teaching and learning approaches, informed by evidence gathered from a range of activities" (2019, p. 4). The centrality of the self echoes our findings as does the emphasis on change—"evolution." She also mentions the idea of "Artistry" in teaching, which is in harmony with the idea of the "craft of teaching" which emerged in our conversations for this chapter.

Community, Connection, and Collaboration

In addition to the significance of professional disposition, community, connection and collaboration matter to our key informants. Colleagues noted that community-related aspects such as partnerships, relationships, mobility, mentoring, professional conversations, etc. were important supports. The

findings show that academics as researchers want to collaborate and that connectedness and relationships emerge as important in teaching also; three of the four most relevant supports for teaching involved interacting with others, either students or staff. The data suggest that our key informants value professional collaboration and conversations with colleagues, and meaningful feedback from students as part of professional learning. These findings resonate with the work of Roxå and Mårtensson who make connections between the individual work of the teacher, the microculture to which they belong, and the context in which they exist. They note that "academic teaching is an extremely context-dependent practice . . . Teaching is easier to perform for the individual teacher if the microculture to which he or she belongs supports learning about this practice through continuous adjustment to reality and through constructive sharing of new insights among colleagues" (2015, p. 202). In turn, there is potential to build on the importance that key informants placed on meaningful feedback from students towards the development of student partnership. O'Leary and Cui argue for such a "reconceptualisation" of teaching and learning in higher education, one which shifts "from a performative focus to one that foregrounds the importance of collaborative, educational inquiry to understand the situated realities of T & L" (2020, p. 153). They suggest that "meaningful improvements to the quality of T & L in HE require substantive collaboration between students and staff that provide opportunities for both to generate situated, reciprocal understanding of T & L in the context of their programmes" (2020, p. 153).

Context

While we have identified many similarities in terms of the responses from our key informants, one of the striking things about the key informants is the difference that we know exists in terms of context, particularly in terms of their institutional and national settings. We know from our own experience that there is variety across higher education provision in national settings. That variety appears to be amplified when one looks across Europe and to our near neighbours. It is certainly the case that the provision of centralised support varies greatly across our data and that any goals and aspirations we have about models of support need to be particularly mindful of context including policy, resources and infrastructure, but also values and principles. As Skelton notes, within the higher education professional setting there can be a clash of values, and this can occur at the micro, meso, and macro level. These "value conflicts" can lead to "personal and professional discomfort" but they can be "potent sites for professional development" (2012, p. 264). Because our

work is situated, it is influenced by the context. Recognising the relational nature of higher education, Bass et al. (2019) take an "ecosystemic approach" to professional learning and educational development. Bass and colleagues suggest a "new learning compact" as a way "to strategically and effectively link change in individual practice with essential issues of community, institutional structure and systemic policy" (2019, p. 5). They suggest that "Transformational change requires an ecosystemic approach that links processes of individual change with institutional culture and structure, and individual institutions with networks and systems, through the involvement of external stakeholders and change initiatives" (2019, p. 4). Their framework is characterised by integrating strategy, a strong research base, a humane and respectful perspective, and a systems-thinking, inquiry- and action-focused approach (2019).

Our key informants had shared values which included collegiality, freedom, quality, ethics and integrity, respect, creativity, openness, and diversity. These values are ones which are often reflected in the strategic plans of higher education institutions. These values are also reflected in the characteristics and inclinations of our participants who display curiosity, optimism/positive attitude, freedom, imagination, determination/persistence, openness and problem solving, and a very strong desire to connect, share and collaborate. Our similarities emphasize the human factor of higher education which can be easily forgotten and/or neglected in the policies and strategies, the "KPIs" and the accountability and transparency measures. The similarities we see reinforce the utterly essential human component of higher education. We suggest that support for academics should recognise this human component in the importance of the self and should seek to tap into the well of intrinsic motivation that academic colleagues bring to their work. A strong inclusion of "bottom up" and collaborative approaches would be practical ways to enact this commitment.

Holistic Approach

In the field of educational development, since our Action began in 2016, other perspectives have begun to seep into the professional learning fabric and we see other researchers writing about the connections across all professional learning as "holistic academic development." This topic was addressed in the previously mentioned 2018 special edition of the *International Journal for Academic Development* where Sutherland notes that "Practitioners and researchers . . . could be reading and talking to each other a lot more, and working together more closely to provide holistic programmes of support and development for academics. Such programmes would address the *whole of the*

academic role, the *whole* institution, and the *whole person.*" (p. 265, emphasis in original). Austin and Sorcinelli had anticipated this move in 2013 when they observed that the profession of "faculty development" will require "new thinking about ideal structures for faculty development and ways of operating organizationally" as well as approaching its work "as collaborative, community work within and beyond the institution" (p. 96).

Based on our findings we suggest that a holistic approach to professional learning across writing, research, learning and teaching which considers character, community, and context; we propose this approach as a 3Cs Professional Learning Framework in the Action's final report (COST Action 15221, 2021). This approach is reflective of King's broader recommendations which note along with the necessity for an emphasis on the individual's CPD, the need for collaboration and interaction, and for alignment with "institutional structures and reward policies" (2019, p. 4). We assert that support for WRLT should aim to capitalise on the intrinsic motivation of staff and to strongly recognise, endorse and practically support community and collaborative approaches in and across these areas. We acknowledge that context matters and that identical provision, across higher education, nationally or indeed internationally would be neither desirable nor effective. Rather, provision should be context sensitive and reflective of the specific goals of the institutional learning community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented our findings about what personal (internal) and contextual (external) factors contribute to success for academic staff in writing, research, learning and teaching. These findings are part of the broader work of our COST Action around trying to identify the sorts of supports that might be useful for academics in terms of writing, research, learning and teaching, and the possible intersections between those supports. All the work across the Action has enabled us to explore the challenges that readers might recognise in their daily writing, research, learning, and practices. In this vein, as to professional development in the EHEA, we have discovered a distinctive and emerging "human factor" among our key informants.

The approach of our COST Action and the broader COST model itself, which supported the work communicated in this chapter, resonates with what we have learned in our research. Though COST as an organisation operates at a macro level, with a clear international dimension, it deliberately nurtures "bottom up" networks of colleagues who will work together to address a challenge while also learning and connecting. In many ways, the COST approach

encapsulates what we have discovered matters in terms of supporting academics; it facilitates individual career development and learning, within community building and nurturing, in a context sensitive and supportive manner.

Higher education is expanding and changing, and as colleagues working in higher education we need, and want, to continue to learn and develop. Based on our research, we suggest starting with the people, as individuals and communities, who work in a particular context, and trying to identify, understand and offer that which could work best in their setting towards a "feasible utopia" (Barnett, 2019, p. 54). Such a human and humane approach might go some way to counteracting the dystopian facets of contemporary higher education including the frenetic pace, the competition, the burn out, the lack of support, publish or perish mentality, excessive accountability, etc. As part of the antidote to these everyday higher education challenges, professional learning ought to be nurturing and could echo the intentions captured in the *Slow Professor manifesto*: "to alleviate work stress, preserve humanistic education, and resist the corporate university" (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. ix). We see the conversation as ongoing and we remain hopeful in the present and about the future.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix 1: Partners in COST Action 15221

COST Countries

Albania	Hungary	Poland
Austria	Iceland	Portugal
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ireland	Romania
Bulgaria	Israel	Serbia
Croatia	Italy	Slovakia
Cyprus	Latvia	Slovenia
Czech Republic	Lithuania	Spain
Denmark	Luxembourg	Sweden
Estonia	Malta	Turkey
France	Montenegro	United Kingdom
Germany	Netherlands	
Greece	North Macedonia	

COST Near Neighbour Countries

Ukraine	Morocco	Lebanon
Georgia	Belarus	Russian Federation

COST International Partner Countries

United States of America