Professional development to enable a transformation in the student learning experience.

Dr Nigel V Russell PFHEA, Professional Development Manager for Learning and Teaching.

CiLT is a 60-credit M-Level programme accredited to FHEA. It is a structured route to meeting the probationary requirement for learning and teaching. Both modules include a workshop week and a series of activities that engage participants in aspects of developing good practice within their own disciplinary teaching field and beyond.

Teaching observations are at the heart of the first module: reciprocal observations with CiLT peers to build confidence, three observing departmental colleagues before a reciprocal observation with a departmental colleague and an observation of someone who has been identified as a good teacher anywhere within the university. This leads to the formal observation in Module 2. Participants are all members of a community of learning which meets regularly without supervision to share experiences and learn from each other.

CiLT has been deliberately designed to encourage on the job development. Activities require participants to have discussions with colleagues on learning and teaching strategic themes; to look for and to attend CPD events within the university and externally; and to engage with a significant piece of work commissioned by their departments focussing on an area of learning and teaching interest. This work has led to a number of Early Career Senate Awards for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and some former participants have been accelerated to positions of influence in learning and teaching within their departments and faculties.

For both modules, CiLT requires all participants to reflect, or evaluate, their own teaching practice through a series of assignments that are submitted in a portfolio. Following successful assessment, these enable participants to proceed to an end of module viva: an hour’s one-to-one developmental discussion with their tutor using the portfolio as the basis. This is hugely valued by participants and has been highlighted by the external examiner as something that is unique in her experience and an example of excellent practice.

CiLT encourages participants:
- to engage with their own teaching practice, having control over how their teaching informs their students’ learning experiences;
- to explore opportunities and possibilities to enhance their students’ learning experiences by considering teaching practices new to them and/or their disciplines;
- to experiment with new and different activities that enhance their students’ opportunities for learning;
- to develop a positive attitude towards learning and teaching, making a positive contribution to learning and teaching development in their department, faculty, and the university;
- to develop their confidence and self-belief as they grow throughout their teaching careers.

Lindsay’s framework provides a useful tool to contextualise programmes such as CiLT which are not only continuing professional education and development, but also provide a platform for developing skills that will grow throughout participants’ careers enabling them to transform their students’ learning experiences.

Prior to 2012 CiLT was compulsory for probationary academics, had become induction-focussed, was taught through long intensive PowerPoint workshops, and was biased towards learners skilled in reflective practice. Was this an approach that would give learners the best experience and inspire them in their teaching practices?

Following a review, CiLT was redesigned to develop the competent professional by including:
- Less time-intensive Workshop Weeks with engagement beginning a semi-flipped approach;
- An interactive and peer-supported approach to workshops;
- The removal of induction-type information sessions from the workshop weeks;
- A multidisciplinary ‘friendly’ approach to assessment requirements;
- On-going staged assessment including links to CPD provision and developmental viva voice discussions;
- Clear communication to departments and other stakeholders about the nature and value of CiLT.