



Paper presented at the UKCGE 7th International Conference  
on Professional & Practice-Based Doctorates

23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021

## Meeting the challenge of introducing Level 8 thinking in a diverse context: a new approach

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**M2M2 is a company specialising in professional development solutions for large corporate organisations and is working with NATO to support their transformation agenda. NATO identified a need for greater internal research capability and has collaborated with M2M2 to design an in-house Professional Development Programme (PDP) in research skills. There are now two cohorts of learners on the programme (n=40).**

The intent in the programme is to enhance learners' research ability and prepare them for DProf study. The learners on the programme include both civilian and military staff with extensive professional experience in roles ranging from financial control to military intelligence. Selection on to the programme was by application and as part of the process each learner had to outline a preferred research project that would contribute to NATO's transformational objectives. The PDP is comprised of three learning themes that focus on core research skills (literature searches, critical writing), transformational thinking (creativity, reflective practice) and critical thinking (research philosophy, design, and ethics). Delivery staff are drawn from a range of UK HEIs, and all have extensive experience of delivering DProf material.

### **Embedding the programme in the organisation has created three main benefits.**

Firstly, during the programme, PDP learners are utilising enhanced research skills within their primary role without further study.

Secondly, the individual learner can commence a DProf journey from within a 'known' environment rather than step across into academia immediately. In the early stage of their learning journey, they are working within a cohort of similar learners which has increased learner confidence.

Finally, the positioning of the PDP 'in-house' means it is independent from any specific HEI. M2M2 has constructed a network of supporting HEIs so learners can continue on to access a wide range of DProf structures (e.g., portfolio, thesis etc.) and subject specialisms. All of the network HEIs grant RPL for the taught elements of their DProf so work is not repeated whilst learners can access a DProf that is most applicable to their project.

Embedding a professional development programme in an organisation rather than an HEI has potential as a mechanism to encourage more organisations to systematically engage with L8 CPD.

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