

What impact have the new professional standards, notions of professionalism and the new qualifications framework had on the entrants to the Post Compulsory sector? An initial study

Rowena Smith & Val Butcher

Programme Leaders (PCET) Manchester Metropolitan University June 2008

Introduction

A key indicator of the changing focus and role of the Post Compulsory sector is reflected in the range of nomenclature associated with it. While many teachers see themselves as employed by a Further Education (FE) college, the teacher training qualifications that they gain are labelled as Post Compulsory or Post Compulsory Education & Training. The sector skills council relates to the Lifelong Learning sector and the current key strategy and funding body leads the Learning & Skills sector. For consistency, within this study the term Post Compulsory is used throughout.

The reform agenda for teacher training in the sector initiated by the government in 2004 followed a period of review. In 2001, for example, teachers working in the sector were required to have a teaching qualification, based on the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards current at the time.

This 'early' attempt to raise professionalism within the sector gained impetus in 2002 when the government outlined its strategy to 'transform' the learning and skills sector in England in "Success for All" (DfES, 2002). The continuing need to 'transform' and 'reform' the sector has been driven by social and economic factors and as such, the strategy is part of a wider agenda of reform.

The post-compulsory sector was (and is) seen as central to that government reform and in order to ensure success, the quality of those delivering the teaching and training in the sector - the post-16 teachers, trainers and assessors – gained increasing attention. The ensuing DfES policy document '*Equipping our Teachers for the Future: Reforming Initial Teacher Training for the Learning and Skills Sector*' (DfES 2004) concerns itself with the notion of 'upskilling' lecturers and 'professionalising' the workforce.

Key features identified within the strategy included:

- creation of a Sector Skills Council - Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)
- development of new professional teaching standards by LLUK
- introduction of QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) status
- introduction of a new professional body for teachers in the sector , the Institute for Learning (IfL)
- professional status maintained by continuing professional development (CPD) a notional 30 hours per year recorded for/by each full time teacher and managed by the IfL.

The debate surrounding the nature of professionalism of teachers is not new. (Erault 1994). Within the Post Compulsory sector the FE Reform Act 1988 led to sweeping reform of the governance, financing, management and accountability of colleges; this in turn led to changes in the concept of professionalism within colleges (Briggs 2002). Clow (2001) also concluded that there was great diversity of constructions of professionalism within the Further Education sector and that “these different perspectives made it difficult for FE teachers to organise themselves to enjoy the benefits of professionalism” (p407). Hayes (2001) highlighted the external pressure of a ‘top down’ imposed professionalism on teachers across all sectors that demands compliance. This professionalism, he argues demands “an increase in formal teaching competence at the expense of professional empowerment” (p48)

Gleeson & James (2007) argue that the ‘culture of learning’ in which the FE teachers are employed and practice “simultaneously enhance and restrict their professional room for manoeuvre” (p451). Their analysis of learning cultures concludes that amidst the extensive reforms of the sector only “the narrowest notions of professionalism, accountability and control will continue to prevail” (p464). A wider study concludes that the policy rhetoric of FE as a vocational route enabling greater social justice and inclusion, (as identified above) is juxtaposed with the reality as experienced by professionals in their daily lives (Gleeson et al 2005) Underpinning this tension is the teachers *own* understanding of their role, *their* motivation and the values they bring into teaching. Bathmaker & Avis (2005) argue that if we ignore these and the day to day reality for teachers then we will not find common ground on which to construct new forms of professionalism.

Into this arena the LLUK published the new Professional Standards for teachers in the Lifelong Learning sector in January 2007. This University (along with all other awarding bodies in England) responded by introducing new professional programmes to meet the new requirements for September 2007.

This small study aims, through the collection and analysis of qualitative data, to capture the 'student voice' relating to professionalism and professional standards at this early stage of implementation of workforce reform in the sector.

Methodology

At the end of the first academic year (June 2008) feedback from students was invited to assess the impact of the framework and Professional Standards, and in particular to measure the emergence of understanding of what it *means* to be a professional in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

Discussions (focus groups) with current students were conducted in order to capture their perceptions and understanding of professionalism in the sector at this early stage of their career.

For the pre-service PGCE cohort, based at the University, this was undertaken as part of an end of year programme evaluation. The group were divided into 4 groups of 4/5 participants and each provided with a selection of a set of open questions (App X) and a tape recorder. Each group was asked to share their ideas -independent of tutor supervision. The aim was to encourage honesty in contributions and to avoid tutor direction within the conversation. Inevitably the conversations occasionally wandered from the initial question, hindering analysis of the subject matter. However, as argued by Kitzinger (1995) :

“The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way....group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview” (Kitzinger 1995 p299)

For the in-service cohorts, (Cert Ed & Prof Graduate Cert Ed) 2 Partner-colleges and 4 student groups were visited, consisting of 35 students in total. Cohorts were briefed and divided into smaller groups 4/5 and each provided with 2 questions and writing space. (Questions were the same as above although re-worded because these students have not yet completed the programme) While the quality and the depth of discussion may not have been captured to the same extent as the audio recordings, the methodology enabled key points to be collated in a brief space of time.

Audio recordings were transcribed and written responses collated and sorted by question.

Discussion of trainee responses

Professional Standards

The new framework and units of assessment locate professionalism and professional standards as the starting point for teacher training. Indeed the first learning outcome of the introductory unit of Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) states:

Assessment Criteria 1.1 Review own role and responsibilities, and boundaries of own role as a teacher. (1.1 represents coverage of the 6 domains which make up the overarching professional standards) (LLUK 2007)

It was, therefore, important to consider the trainees response to these ‘overarching’ professional standards. The responses to the question -

What impact have the Professional Standards for teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector had on your development to date?

raised some useful points about the relevance and centrality of an external set of Standards

Some trainees suggest that the Standards are important to measure themselves against

“..what you’d expect anyway. Need for a benchmark to assess yourself”

A point of contact to confirm expectations

Raised awareness particularly for assignments and observations

Provides a useful framework for reference

While others are more sceptical:

“they’re very generic aren’t they?...some of them are less relevant” (agreement)

Too much information to make it really useful – needs to be bullet point summary

Seems to be bureaucratic exercise without much practical help

“Despite having awareness of the existence of the standards booklet, it has had very little impact as none of us have read it to any significant degree.”

In terms of relating standards to their experience in the workplace one trainee remarked about the teachers he had met on placement:

“you might have all these standards but the reality is you have all these different personalities, these different characters who care or don’t care or who are indifferent”

And another -

“you’ve got your own professional standards haven’t you? As a teacher you have got your own”

Perhaps the most significant in terms of a response to an external set of standards:

“my mentor has taken a dim view of them”

“comes down to personal values and how those values link up with standards – you can force the link if you like ...”

“[it’s a] dilemma...because it’s like a tick box exercise...professional standards don’t go out of the window but your role as a teacher is more important”

It is interesting to note that for many of the pre-service trainees their own internalised concepts of professional standards and their role as a teacher still seem to be more important to them than any externally created framework. For our in service trainees, who are perhaps more in tune with external measurement and accountability through their working practice there is greater acknowledgement of their use as a measurement tool.

Professionalism

As the concept of a professional and professionalism is central to the new framework it was important to find out what our trainees understanding and perceptions were. Below are responses to the question:

What does Professionalism mean to you now at the end of the programme?

In some instances the pre-service trainees referred to their previous employment experiences:

"...[it's] the difference between putting a suit on and having a job and putting an attitude on and having a belief"

"[in previous jobs]... do your job keep your head down but the bar is higher in teaching you have to be a role model"

They also demonstrate a growing understanding of how professionalism relates to their role as a teacher:

"its not quite like all strict rules, it is quite a flexible concept to me now ; the person you are, the teacher you are and being good at your job"

"[You become].more aware of certain things, more involved, adapting to a certain approach"

"a teaching self" "things you need to be"

"we do it without even realising it I expect – that's professionalism to a certain extent" – (agreement)

Furthermore comments emphasising that teaching is more than a job:

A trainee in one of the groups related watching a film recently and thinking how he could use it with students *"you end up applying everything to your career" –*

"not something you can subscribe to and say 'yeah I'm a professional now'"

"it's an ideal state"

Perhaps as a consequence of being on placement in the Sector rather than employed in it, the trainees did not refer to their status or role within organisations or in terms of how they were perceived by management. Their discussions centred more around their own identities and their role with students. No trainees mentioned membership of a professional body (IfL) even though all had been advised about membership at various stages of the programme.

It is interesting to note that the in-service teachers had a much more pragmatic and outcome focussed approach to this question as can be seen from the group notes from discussions below:

Group A

Exemplary subject knowledge

always plan

Keep updated on articles / initiatives / impact on learning skills sector

embrace reflective, inclusive practice

honesty of limitations

and

Group B

Remaining unbiased and diplomatic in my approach when teaching

Equality and diversity

Differentiation

Giving learners the opportunity to set their own goals and fulfil own potential

Understanding importance of paperwork e.g. lesson plans, scheme of work, tracking sheets

etc

And a group who were seeking to create their own statement of professionalism (layout of feedback retained to highlight group thinking)

Group C

Consistent approach to teaching

– all learners will find us always approachable

- all peers will find us respectful

- confidence in everything we do

Methodology used in teaching –

is based in research

is based in successful experience

we are organised in what we do

we include feedback into our day to day work –

from lessons-

from peers-

from assignments –

from management

Take active interest in latest research in teaching and teaching area.

Dual Professionalism and Continuing Professional Development

The new framework places subject specialism (Domain C) and subject pedagogy in a much more prominent position than ever before. The Institute for Learning has highlighted the concept of a dual professionalism. This is central to their notions of professional development :

“.... relating to subject specialism and teaching and learning approaches leading to improvement in professional practice, as well as keeping pace with changing occupational and business needs. .(www.ifl.ac.uk).

To explore the awareness of this amongst trainees the following question was asked:

How would you interpret the term “Dual Professionalism” when applied to teachers in the Learning & Skills Sector?

Over half the responses made some reference to subject specialism and teaching, for example:

Dual Professionalism means to be professional in your own subject and within the teaching area

..continually upgrading knowledge of subject and also keeping up to date with contemporary teaching methods and strategies; registering with relevant bodies; updating qualifications.

Again, the ideas of their own professional identity emerged

Professional to your self standards and keeping yourself up to date and professional in the classroom as well

In some cases the trainees reviewed their original ideas about their professional role

“I thought I could breeze in with my subject knowledge and that would be enough and just bolt some teachery bit onto that”

“I thought it was subject knowledge that was important – ..[but I realise] they come hand in hand [with teaching]”

Furthermore some other interesting interpretations arose

“Delivering teaching, and being involved in tutorial type counselling “

“... it was thought that the “dual professionalism” would apply to academic professionalism, where tutors gained a teaching qualification thereby bestowing a professional air of respect from students and peers; and also the professionalism of an experienced tutor, who may not have an academic qualification, but will have gained professional status from life and skills experience.”

And an example of a professional who has reflected on her own expertise and recognised gaps in her subject specialist knowledge

“...from experience I am much happier teaching the practical aspects of my subject...and teaching theory, I thought that would be easy because I have done that at uni, but knowing how to apply and knowing them inside out to teach them is different. So I have found that in theory lessons I have had to be more of a teacher in the sense of having to plan to the nth degree as I’ve been not confident in the subject”

And finally in contrast, an example of where the trainees have been influenced by their own teachers and where the concept of dual professionalism is challenged

““as one of the tutors said right at the beginning we are ‘teachers first, subject teachers second’ ”

In order to gauge how well the message on Continuing Professional Development had been heard the trainees were asked the following question:

In what way can you continue your professional development once you have completed your Cert Ed / PGCE?

The responses from the in-service trainees highlight that CPD is still seen as quite narrow and subject based:

Continuing with further qualifications relevant to subject area (i.e. Masters, PhD)

Conducting independent research to keep up to date with subject.

Broadening your subject area.

The pre-service trainees take a broader view:

doing some IT Assessor's course
sign language or something else another MA but not for a year or 2 at least
more work on my own subject numeracy as well
explore ways of making learning fun (reference to taking ESOL learners to a restaurant)

Preparation for working in the Sector

As Teacher Education lecturers we have sought to develop programmes that embed practice into theory and theory into practice at every stage; the trainees' responses tell a different story.

They were asked to consider :

To what extent does the PGCE prepare you to teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector?

and

What was not included on the PGCE programme that would have been useful and improved your opportunities for employment in the sector?

"Coming into university ... the models and theory .not sure how well that prepares you"

"I don't see myself actively implementing theory"

"People you meet on placement don't appear to have any knowledge of these theories and models"

"the pain to me has been all the policies, the Government side of it, the quality essay...I think that shrouds the training completely"

"We came here because we are creative and we've got one hand tied behind our backs"

"You have a greater appreciation of Government hold – it's a bit depressing"

Almost exclusively from both pre- and in-service trainees the responses to improvements related to practical skills and 'how to',

"More practical less theory" "more on classroom management"

How to tackle challenging behaviour, we learn the theories that explain behaviour but not what to do!

Practical “in the classroom” tips and hints about the realities of teaching

There is a clear message from the pre- service trainees that the placement experience provides the best preparation for teaching within the sector; not only the classroom teaching but the contact with practitioners and managers.

“Placement is the most preparation”

“The observation of the actual teachers was what kind of moulded me into the way I am now with them [students]”

“You come into contact with live managers, and it gives you an appreciation of wider aspects”

However, to place the comments in a wider context:

“It is: interesting, fast-paced, challenging, rewarding, hard work”

“You need to be committed, motivated, enthusiastic, have desire to succeed”

“Maybe we just don’t appreciate it yet and several years down the line we will have this great ‘Ah Ha’ moment”

“I don’t think we are going to appreciate the programme until we’re gone”

Summative comments

The early formation of ‘teacher identity’ and ‘professional identity’ seems to focus on competence and the teacher’s role with students rather than on any sense of being part of a wider national social and economic agenda. Furthermore there is little discussion of empowerment or notions of judgement and autonomy.

Trainees, while grappling with their personal understanding of professionalism, are also seeking to be given the ‘correct answer’ and they have an idea that somehow the programme and the tutors are hiding the ‘secret tricks’ from them! The implication of this, when related to professionalism, is important. This ‘tell me how to do it and I will do it’ mindset provides a very limited or ‘restricted’ view of professionalism. This echoes the discussion of the studies referred to above. The debate raises two questions: what sort of teachers do we want and are we preparing different types of teachers via the pre and in-service routes? Collectively, the notion of the *‘teacher as a machine’* (Stronach et al 2002) is something to be guarded against, particularly when we consider the demands of working with 14 year olds in colleges - an agenda requiring creative, free-thinking teachers.

The early impact of a set of overarching Professional Standards appears to be limited. The general theme that emerged indicates that these have not been internalised but are seen as an external framework. To some extent this is no surprise, as new teachers have no ownership of these standards that are ‘out there’. Trainees with more experience identify more clearly with these standards as potential measures of accountability. There is a suggestion that such standards have little impact on the working lives of the teachers that they encountered while on placement. This again echoes findings from earlier studies; that the reality of the workplace has to be recognised within a set of standards to have value; and that professionalism, as encountered on a daily basis, must be recognised.

It is significant to note that the IfL “Code of Professional Practice” that came into force on 1 April 2008 does not refer to the LLUK overarching Professional Standards. Is there some implication here that the standards are for measuring initial entrants to the profession against but thereafter do not have the same relevance or status? In the current climate where product is valued over process it is not unexpected that trainees primarily see CPD as

undertaking some form of qualification. The challenge for the IfL is to change the perceptions of teachers and employers as to what constitutes professional development.

The national agenda to 'professionalise' the workforce to expedite wider social and economic reform sees future teachers as *agents of change*. Whether this notion of agency is fully realised within the new professional standards and framework for initial teacher training qualifications is yet to be seen.

This small study shows that new entrants to the sector do have some concept of entering a profession. However, their concepts of what that *means* and their evolving identity as professionals is limited and constrained by their experiences within the sector. The research indicates that currently, the external professional standards as articulated by LLUK, have had a limited impact on their professional development to date.

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Appendix 1



Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PCET) Research Study Discussion questions May/June 2008

Please start recording and, at the beginning of the discussion, if you are agreeable, identify yourselves by name.

- What does '**Professionalism**' mean to you now at the end of the programme?
- How would you interpret the term '**Dual Professionalism**' when applied to teachers in the Learning and Skills sector?
- To what extent does the **PGCE programme** prepare you to teach in the Lifelong Learning and Skills Sector?
- What impact have the "**Professional Standards for teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector**" had on your development to date?
- What was not included on the **PGCE programme** that would have been useful and improved your opportunities for employment in the sector?
- In what ways can you continue your **professional development** once you have achieved PGCE?
- Any other issues relating to the qualification and the professional standards you would like to record?

At the end of the discussion please stop the recording.

Finally, thank you for participating in this study.

The study report and findings will be available later in the year through the Westminster CETT .

Rowena Smith & Val Butcher May 08

4 groups each asked 3 of above questions

Appendix 1



Certificate in Education & Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PCET) Research Study

Discussion questions May/June 2008

Groups of 3/4 students each given 2 questions from below to discuss and note comments

- What does Professionalism mean to you now at the end of the first year of the programme?
- How would you interpret the term 'Dual Professionalism' when applied to teachers in the Learning and Skills sector?
- To what extent does the Cert Ed/ PGCE programme to date prepare you to teach in the LLS?
- What impact have the "Professional Standards for teachers in the LLS" had on your development to date?
- What has not been included on the Cert ED/ PGCE programme yet that would be useful and improve your employment opportunities in the sector?
- In what ways can you continue your professional development once you have completed Cert ED/ PGCE ?

Finally, thank you for participating in this study.

The study report and findings will be available later in the year through the Westminster CETT .

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