Becoming a professional in the lifelong learning sector – roles, responsibilities and boundaries

Chapter overview

When you have worked through this chapter on becoming a professional you will be able to:

- Describe what is meant by the ‘lifelong learning sector’
- Explain the current drive towards professionalism in the lifelong learning sector and its implications for those working in it
- Review the roles, responsibilities and boundaries of professionals in the sector
- Identify other points of referral to meet the potential needs of learners
- Recognise key aspects of relevant current legislative requirements and codes of practice relevant to your own context

Teaching in the lifelong learning sector

If you are reading this book we expect that you are preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector and may well be interested in gaining the PTLLS Award.

So what does this lifelong learning sector look like? It is a sector that covers all publicly funded post-16 education outside universities; this takes place in a wide range of institutions including Further Education (FE) colleges, adult and community education, private training providers of work-based learning, libraries, archives and information services and prisons. Some interesting facts about the lifelong learning sector emerge:
1 Three-quarters of learners are 19+ and part-time
2 There are more 16–19-year-olds in colleges of FE than in sixth forms in secondary schools
3 Learners range from those who cannot read, write or communicate to those at post-degree level
4 There are more students in FE colleges than in universities
5 One in five adults are currently learning, with 42% of adults having participated in some learning activity during the past three years
6 Over £19 billion was spent on this sector in 2008
7 The majority of the workforce is female
8 Part-time teaching staff in FE outnumber full-time teaching staff by almost 2:1

Is this a picture that you recognise? The role of a professional in the lifelong learning sector is thus extremely diverse; you may be called a lecturer, a tutor, a trainer, an instructor, an assessor, a work-based learning or an apprentice supervisor, a learning manager or a prison education officer. Some of you may have gained skills and experience through another trade or profession, for example as an engineer, hairdresser or bricklayer. What you are likely to have in common is that you will all have a teaching or training function with learners aged 16 and above. For the purpose of this book we will use the term ‘teacher’ generically to apply to all these various roles and ‘learner’ to apply to those who you may also call students, pupils or apprentices.

Professional teachers in the lifelong learning sector also share in the common purpose of serving the needs of learners, employers and the community. They face the challenges of working in a context which is diverse and rapidly changing. The past decade has seen significant change for the sector; the next decade will be marked by the emergence of new funding bodies taking over from the Learning and Skills Council and local authorities taking on enhanced responsibilities for 14–19 planning and funding.

The government is convinced that the lifelong learning sector has never been more crucial in raising the overall level of skills and ensuring the UK remains competitive in the world economy. You will be expected to play a role in helping to meet current key targets; these include ensuring all adults are functionally literate and numerate, all 19 year olds have a Level 2 or equivalent (5 GCSEs at Grade A* to C) and that learners are qualified to meet vital skills shortages. It is expected that 50% of 18–30-year-olds will progress to university by 2010. In order to meet these targets more young people will need to remain in education and training and more will need to succeed; lifelong learning professionals are accountable for such performance.

The move towards Qualified Teacher status – Learning and Skills

A new framework of teacher qualifications for the Learning and Skills sector was introduced in England in September 2007. From now on all teachers, trainers and tutors offered jobs in colleges and other publicly funded organisations will need to
have an appropriate teaching qualification. This followed various reports indicating that some learners were not being taught by properly qualified and experienced staff. The government sees a professional workforce as a key element in realising its aim to raise standards, to get rid of poor performance in colleges and to enable colleges to respond more effectively to employers’ needs.

If you are preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector it is therefore likely that you will take a qualification that is part of the Qualified Teacher – Learning and Skills (QTLS) framework. The first qualification is called Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), the ‘threshold licence to teach’ for all new teachers in the FE sector. This book focuses on helping you to achieve the PTLLS Award.

The success of learners depends, to a great extent, on the commitment and skills of the teaching staff. Setting PTLLS as the basic minimum standard for all new entrants to the profession should ensure all students in the lifelong learning sector are taught by teachers and trainers who are both experienced in their subject and skilled in teaching.

Roles and responsibilities of teachers in the lifelong learning sector

In this section we will begin to consider your work in the lifelong learning sector. As we have seen above, it is a much more diverse sector than the school sector. We will focus on the following two questions:

1 What roles are you expected to fulfil?
2 What are the specific responsibilities and boundaries associated with these roles?

When we talk about a ‘role’ most people instantly think of playing a part, or acting in some capacity. A role involves some idea of expected behaviour associated with a position. You will have expectations of the learners or students that you will teach, train, assess or tutor. These may include an expectation that they will study and undergo assessments.

When we look at the role of a teacher, trainer, assessor or tutor we find that there is body of agreed expectations associated with these roles.

Activity 1.1

What do you expect someone who is a lecturer, teacher, trainer, assessor or tutor in the lifelong learning sector to do?
Now look at these three examples of a typical day of a lifelong learning professional:

**Case study 1 Assessor in the workplace**

- Travel to employer premises
- Review a portfolio
- Meet an NVQ candidate and check underpinning knowledge
- Discuss learner progress with another assessor
- Attend an internal verification meeting
- Lunch
- Identify key skills needs of a candidate
- Candidate is having problems gaining experience to demonstrate their competence.
- Talk to workplace supervisor
- Fill out travel expenses claim form
- Check the latest sector skills council briefing

**Case study 2 FE lecturer**

- Arrive at college, check pigeon-hole
- Check preparation for first lesson, last-minute photocopying
- Give first part of lesson
- Break – check college emails
- Give second part of lesson
- Lesson finished – deal with related administration
- Give new part-time colleague advice on initial assessment
- Get lunch from canteen
- Discuss discipline problem with a colleague
- Answer two telephone calls relating to course enquiries
- Eat (now cold) lunch
- Help a tutee with personal statement and UCAS form
- Accept sick note from tutee, and mark register/tutorial notes
Scan internal memos
Prepare mark sheet for exam
Teach lesson
Mark assignments ready for tutorial
Review learner minimum grade expectations on college intranet
Give tutorial
Share resources with colleague

Case study 3 Voluntary sector worker

Organise a room for a briefing session with volunteer tutors
Plan an introductory session
Take the register
Conduct an ice-breaker
Explain the volunteer role
Discuss volunteer placements
Complete learner records
Telephone a volunteer who missed the session
Meet a volunteer who is having problems relating to an autistic learner
Fill out an application for funding for a future course
Check charity website for publicity on Volunteer Training programme

Activity 1.2

What do these three roles have in common?

The first thing that will probably strike you is that a lot of time is spent in activities that are not directly concerned with imparting knowledge or skills. You will probably come to the conclusion that the role of a teacher has many sub-roles and so equally do other roles in the lifelong learning sector.
These may include any or all of the following:

- Evaluator
- Verifier
- Subject leader
- Interviewer
- Manager of learning resources
- Curriculum developer
- Record keeper
- Liaison with external bodies
- Peer reviewer
- Administrator
- Personal tutor
- Information and advice giver
- Assessor

### Activity 1.3

Thinking of your own context, what roles do you expect to play? Looking at the sub-roles we have identified, tick any you think you will have. If any have been overlooked, add these to the list.

Which of these do you consider to be your core ‘professional’ roles?

With each of these sub-roles come associated responsibilities; these will be shaped by national legislation (for example, health and safety), institutional requirements (for example, the responsibility to ensure a policy on lateness is consistently carried out) and situational requirements (for example, responsibility to ensure no eating or drinking in a computer room). These associated responsibilities imply dependability, conscientiousness and trustworthiness on the part of the teacher.
A key responsibility of a teacher in the lifelong learning sector, for example, is the checking and reporting of learner attendance and achievement. This is necessary for monitoring progress of learners and in order for the organisation to report accurately to funding and inspection bodies. Largely, however, the responsibilities of a lifelong learning professional involve ‘doing a proper job’ by, for example:

- Treating all learners fairly and with equal respect (Equality and diversity)
- Giving learners the opportunity to participate on equal terms and with an equal expectation of success (Equality)
- Engaging all learners, involving all learners in relevant activities (inclusion)
- Acknowledging and celebrating the diversity in a group of learners (Differentiation)
- Planning to meet the needs and styles of individual learners (Personalisation)
- Keeping up to date with subject developments
- Being well prepared
- Returning marked work in a reasonable time

Current legislative requirements

The lifelong learning professional also has responsibilities to ensure that current legislative requirements are met. Whilst some legislation and codes of practice are at least in part subject-related, there is a considerable body of legislation that applies within the lifelong learning sector as a whole. ‘Every Child Matters: Change for Children’ (ECM) and the related provisions in the Children Act 2004 provide an example of this. In the wake of the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (2003), the government sought a strategy that would promote the well-being of children and young people aged 0–19. It aimed to ensure that agencies and institutions that provide services for children would work together in new ways to avoid a repetition of such tragedies. The five outcomes sought by ECM are:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

Although ‘child’ figures in the title, all institutions within the lifelong learning sector that deal with learners up to the age of 19 have to comply with ECM and it is one of the criteria against which the inspectorate OFSTED judges the performance of FE colleges. Allied to this is the Protection of Children Act 1999 whereby teachers who come into contact with children or vulnerable adults are subject to the Enhanced Disclosure check by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB).
These are merely two examples of legislation to be aware of. The list below provides other examples:

1 Legislation relating to **Health and Safety** – the responsibility to provide a safe environment, both physical and psychological:
   - Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
   - RIDDOR – Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
   - Management of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1999
   - COSHH – Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

2 Legislation relating to **Disability** – the responsibility to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for learners:
   - DDA Part 4 Code of Practice 1995
   - SENDA – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

3 Legislation relating to **Human Rights** – including the responsibility to ensure no discrimination on the basis of gender/ethnicity/disability/age/religion/sexual orientation:
   - Sex Discrimination Act 1975
   - Race Relations Act 1976 (amended 2000)
   - Human Rights Act 1998
   - Equal Opportunities Act 2004

In more general terms legislation such as The Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988 and The Data Protection Act 1998 also impact on working life and habits within the sector. In your role in lifelong learning you will therefore need to adhere to legislation outlined above and have particular awareness of any legislative responsibilities relevant to the teaching of your subject.

**Establishing professional and personal boundaries**

If we perform the roles required of us, with the associated responsibilities, we will exemplify what we call ‘professionalism’ in the lifelong learning sector. Professionalism requires us to maintain appropriate standards and fulfil our responsibilities to learners, institutions and colleagues.

In April, 2008, a Code of Professional Practice was introduced covering the activities of teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector. The Institute for Learning (IfL) is responsible for enforcing the code which is based around the six areas of:
- Professional Integrity
- Respect for others
- Care of learners
- Continuing professional development
- Disclosure of criminal offence
- Responsibility towards Ifl

Full details can be found at www.ifl.ac.uk/services/docs/1269/CodeofProfessionalPractice.pdf

Teachers in the lifelong learning sector work with a range of other professionals and support staff. The way in which we perform our role can be influenced by others: for example, learners or line managers. Together these other roles make up your role set, the group with whom you relate in your role as a teacher and who can have an impact on how you act as a teacher.

Activity 1.4

Think about your own professional context and your role set. In each box below name one role that you come into contact with; add more boxes if you need them.

The role set that you drew up above is particular to your own situation. It may have included management, support staff – librarians, technicians, reprographic staff – administrators, finance, counsellors, union representatives and governors. Those who make up your role set can often place conflicting demands on you as a teacher, pulling you in different directions; this is known as role strain.
Activity 1.5

If you look at your role set above, what two roles might expect you to act in two different ways? What kind of role strain might develop?

Some tutors in adult and community education find a considerable strain results from the caretaker imposing demands about room layout and getting students out of the class promptly at the end of the evening. This may make it difficult for you to meet expectations from your line manager that you will resolve an issue with an individual learner when you still need five minutes to find a way forward.

Because individuals with whom you work may place what you consider to be unacceptable demands on you, it is necessary to have a clear idea as to how you see your role and what you should do in order to fulfil it. In part, this requires the setting of professional and personal boundaries and is an important aspect of professionalism. In this context a boundary is a limit on the extent of involvement.

Activity 1.6

If a learner presents the following problem, do you consider it falls within your role and responsibilities as a teacher in the lifelong learning sector? If not, to whom could you refer this issue? Fill out the columns below:

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<th>Yes/No</th>
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<td>Abuse</td>
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<td>Bereavement</td>
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<td>Bullying</td>
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<td>Career issues</td>
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<td>Diet</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
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<td>Drug/alcohol problems</td>
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<td>Failing</td>
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Making use of internal and external support

In Activity 1.6 you will have identified areas that you consider to be outside your professional boundaries. Either you think it is inappropriate to deal with these or feel that you do not have the necessary skills or expertise. Support from someone else will be needed and it is important that you can identify who this might be. Institutions have a range of support systems and you should check out your organisational structure chart and see what is available internally to supplement your work with learners.

### Activity 1.7

Which of the following support roles does your own institution provide?

- A counsellor
- Financial advice
- Career guidance
- Leisure activities
- A tutorial system
- Crèche facilities
- Additional Learning Support
- A learning resource centre

Learners can present a variety of problems which may prevent them from making progress with their studies or life plans. You will be better able to help them if you are fully aware of internal and external support mechanisms which are available to them.

In this chapter we have focused on your role as a professional in the lifelong learning sector. In the following chapters we will explore different aspects of this

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<td>Grant problems</td>
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<td>Harassment</td>
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<td>Illness</td>
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<td>Marital breakdown</td>
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<td>Prolonged absence</td>
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<td>Racial conflict or tensions</td>
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<td>Stress</td>
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<td>Study skills</td>
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role and associated responsibilities, starting with the responsibility as a teacher to create an appropriate environment in which learning can take place.

Chapter summary

The main points covered in this chapter are:

- Lifelong learning encompasses a range of different types of provision
- The role of the teacher in the lifelong learning sector is not confined to imparting knowledge and skills but covers a multiplicity of different tasks
- Roles are accompanied by responsibilities and these contribute to the adoption of a professional approach to work in the lifelong learning sector
- A professional approach involves being aware of and upholding current legislation and codes of practice
- The relationship between your role and that of others with whom you work may sometimes lead to tensions or ‘role strain’
- Teachers in the lifelong learning sector need to be aware of both professional boundaries and their own personal limitations, knowing when and to whom to refer learners for further support

Further reading


Chapter 3 of this book directly addresses the role of the post-compulsory teacher, outlining a wide variety of sub-roles with appropriate background.


Chapter 2 examines the purpose of the lifelong sector and how this impacts upon the professional role, with particular reference to accountability. Chapter 3 looks at the reasons behind codes of practice and how they impact upon role.

Useful websites

Lifelong Learning UK

http://www.lluk.org/

Further Education Teacher’s Qualifications


Role of FE teacher

http://www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/helpwithyourcareer/jobprofiles/profiles/profile405/

Institute for Learning (IfL)

http://www.ifl.ac.uk