Preparation for Education and Training – The Professional Role and Responsibilities of the Further Education Teacher

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ABSTRACT

When embarking on a teacher training course, a trainee teacher is required to critically evaluate the role and responsibilities of the teacher in the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector in their first module, identifying key legislation, core values, skills and knowledge. This requires trainees to focus on the practical and theoretical challenges involved in planning and preparing to teach. This article is an examination of the current roles and responsibilities of the teacher in the FE and Skills Sector.

Keywords
Further education | Initial teacher training | Professionalism | Responsibilities | Teacher

INTRODUCTION

One of the first things a trainee teacher is often required to do when embarking any Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course for the Further Education (FE) and Skills Sector, is to critically evaluate the role and responsibilities of the teacher. The FE and Skills Sector is large and diverse and incorporates: community learning, FE and Sixth Form Colleges, employers and apprenticeships, independent training providers, offender learning, public services, charities and the voluntary sector.

One of the the first modules trainees might tackle on the course is Preparation for Education and Training (PET). This explores the professional values and practice of the FE and Skills teacher, examining: a teacher’s role and responsibilities; analysing the statutory requirements and codes of conduct a teacher must adhere to; and identifying the organisational systems and processes for recording learner information (University of Bolton, 2017).

At first glance for a trainee teacher, a surface exploration might consider the basic key roles of the teacher, administrator, educator and pastoral mentor. However, when further examining the skills and knowledge required of the FE teacher in the light of the sector professional standards (Education and Training Foundation, 2014), and when exploring the requirements of the teacher cited in government law, policy and educational literature, it is evident that the role of the FE teacher is a very diverse one, some aspects of which a new trainee teacher embarking on a course, might not have initially anticipated or considered.

Key responsibilities to be identified from the taught module are not exclusively the plan-
ning of lessons and preparation of resources for teaching and learning; but also, the embedding of equality and diversity to meet the diverse needs of learners through the creation of an inclusive learning environment. Trainees are required to highlight the importance of effective communication skills including listening and questioning techniques; the promotion of positive learner behaviour and values; and the evaluation of their own professional practice. In addition, they are required to describe the process of assessment in learning, explaining how assessment and feedback can be used as a tool to measure learning and progression. They must also identify the various forms of assessment records and the importance of requirements of specific learning programmes and awarding bodies. This fundamental understanding of responsibilities comes before a more detailed examination of the professional recognition of an FE and Skills teacher.

The Regulation and Deregulation of the FE Professional

A trainee teacher researching the history of the role of the FE teacher in the 'Cinderella' sector (Baker, 1989), is likely to discover a professional role that has been ‘regulated’ and subsequently ‘deregulated’ in recent years. It is one which is subject to a flux and change in an FE landscape that is constantly shifting. A summary of all the key changes in the last 20 years, undoubtedly indicates a high degree of fluidity, reform and uncertainty. An interesting point to start examining the role of the FE teacher is to begin with the ITT reforms in 2007 (UK Government, 2007), when new regulations came into force regarding FE teaching qualifications in England (Associate Teacher, Learning and Skills (ATLS), Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTTLS), Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTTLS). The available qualifications (FE Advice, 2017) have been since redefined and renamed (e.g., Award in Education and Training (AET), Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET), Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS)). In 2008 a first attempt was made to define the roles and responsibilities of the 'Full' and 'Associate' FE teacher in England (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008). The QTLS qualification of the FE teachers was finally crowned with status and etiquette towards professionalism with the eligibility to work in schools (UK Government, 2014c, Society for Education and Training, 2016).

However, this 'professional qualified role' of the FE teacher no longer required an official qualification, allowing the FE and Skill Sector to employ more people directly from industry and other disciplines, without the need for a professional teacher training qualification.

In spite of this ‘deprofessionalisation’ of the FE teacher, in 2014 a set of FE professional standards were published (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) together with a dedicated code of professional practice (Society for Education and Training, 2016) to guide ITT, employability and appraisal criteria for training providers and teachers alike. However, it is interesting to note that there is no mandatory legal standing behind these professional standards thus rendering them with little professional recognition or ‘bite’. Rather the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) view them as an ‘aspirational’ set of standards for FE teachers to aim for in their practice.

The professional role of the FE Teacher is still however subject to government scrutiny. In 2014, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) released a report for FE and Skills, summarising features and factors that contribute to outstanding teaching, learning and assessments. This was followed by the Common Inspection Framework guidance (OFSTED, 2015) where a common set of criteria and judgements is applied across education from FE to early years. In 2016, all responsibility for FE moved from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Tu et al., 2016) to the Department for Education (DfE).

For the time being, the role of the FE teacher remains bound to government education policies and codes of practice, whilst the legislation framework remains largely in the remit and interpretation of individual institutions and training providers. Unlike compulsory education, the large size and diversity of the FE and Skills Sector (providing currently 13,000 qualifications through 14-16 full time education, 16-19 study programmes, apprenticeships, traineeships and high needs learners' provision (Belgutay, 2017a, 2017b) makes it difficult to decide whether a ‘one-size fits all’ for teachers is ever possible when it comes to roles and responsibilities. As a result, it can be argued that a lack of standardisation dominates the sector. In the absence of a current unifying, explicit and comprehensive identity for the FE teacher holding QTLS status, the teaching roles and responsibilities have been grouped in context of the ‘broader educational profession’ and legislation into the following categories: teaching; mathematics, English and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) promotion; planning; behaviour management; assessment; professional and personal conduct compliance; record keeping; pastoral; and continuous learning.
Teaching

One of the key roles of a teacher that trainees first identify is that of teaching and delivering lessons. Teaching in the 21st century has evolved to a mutual learning journey for students and teachers alike. As the role of the teacher in the FE and Skills Sector has become more demanding and diverse than ever before it dictates an inherent grit and resilience (Dweck, 1999) in the face of changing policies and new curricula. In addition to this a teacher must demonstrate a passion for teaching and learning in their role as a ‘dual professional’ (Education and Training Foundation, 2014).

In their professional role an FE teacher will come across students of all levels, with diverse ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 1992), varied life experiences, and ranges of abilities, whose backgrounds and origins are affected by social, political, economic and cultural factors. Hence, many students move into the sector with a chequered past, and some see it as their second and last chance before they give up on education altogether (OFSTED, 2014).

Therefore, it can be argued that it is a pivotal part of the teacher’s role to treat everyone with respect and dignity, engaging them as is necessary in their situation. In the FE and skills sector every educator’s role should therefore include supporting learners’ future economic prosperity besides promoting fundamental human values, inclusive learning, celebrating cultures and differences, and challenging discrimination and inequality (Education and Training Foundation, 2014; OFSTED, 2014; OFSTED, 2015; Human Rights Act 1998; Equality Act 2010; UK Government, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

At its core, a basic role of the teacher is to provide clear direction and development to students looking to acquire new skills and knowledge (OFSTED, 2015; OFSTED, 2014; Gravells, 2012; Lifelong Learning UK, 2008; Department for Education, 2011; Education and Training Foundation, 2014). An essential part of a teacher’s role is to provide high quality teaching in order for learners to achieve their goals, with FE teachers holding the power and responsibility to help teenagers and young adults (of all ages and backgrounds) to grow their confidence in learning and feel empowered and autonomous to positively transform their lives and citizenship (Education and Training Foundation, 2014).

A teacher’s enthusiasm for their specialist subject can, therefore, become a true catalyst for change by helping learners unlock unknown capabilities and talents. To do this the teacher needs to believe in every student’s potential to achieve measurable, and of high expectations, learning goals, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities and dispositions (Pirard, 2013; Dweck, 1999; OFSTED, 2015; Education and Training Foundation, 2014; Gravells, 2012). Interventions that change mindsets can boost achievement and reduce discrepancies. Students must be challenged appropriately and taught to enjoy hard work, effort and the inevitable mistakes (Dweck, 1999). An essential part of a teacher’s role is knowing how and when to differentiate, individualise and / or personalise appropriately (Stedke, 2017). This includes anticipating risks and obstacles and adapting teaching to changing circumstances to inform the application of engaging and innovative interventions enhancing the learning experience for all students (Education and Training Foundation, 2014). It should be noted that a key fundamental of a teacher’s role is in demonstrating why it is worth knowing a subject and how it aligns with learners’ future goals (i.e., relevance). Only then can the teacher hold learners’ full attention and engagement (Frymier and Schulman, 1995; Ormrod, 2006; Wilson and Sperber, 2004).

Mathematics, English and ICT Promotion

A role of the teacher that trainees rarely identify, is that of promotor of Maths, English and ICT. Not only must FE teachers be experts in their subject areas, but they must also have the ability to embed the relevant areas of Maths, English and ICT within their practice. Research has shown a striking basic skills’ (below level 2) deficit amongst young people in England (approximately 30% of the 16-19-year-olds) as compared with 5-10% in other developed countries such as Japan, Korea, Finland and the Netherlands (Kuczera et al., 2016). These findings are consistent with OFSTED’s FE survey in 2014, where outstanding practice in the teaching of Maths and English was relatively scarce (OFSTED, 2014).

Part of a teacher’s role, therefore, is to prepare learners for employment success by embedding these key basic skills where relevant in FE and Skills curriculum areas (OFSTED, 2015). As such, specialist and vocational teachers need to work together to devise suitable learning strategies to integrate these skills into every subject, learning programme and provision type (OFSTED, 2014, Education and Training Foundation, 2014). Such strategies might include formative assessments, family literacy and numeracy programmes, using a ‘contextualised’, digital learning technology (Kuczera et al., 2016).

Planning

Planning is a key role of the teacher which most trainees readily identify. To enable effective teaching, it is essential to plan and organise well-structured programmes underpinned by curricula, syllabuses, schemes of work and lesson plans. Differentiated, individualised and personalised activities
should be included in the plan (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) and a good prior understanding of students’ backgrounds and preferences is key towards this (Gravells, 2012). Bloom’s taxonomy, a planning tool of choice for many educators, ensures all thinking levels (low to high) can be incorporated (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). Learning objectives, built in learning programmes, must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART) to ensure the fair assessment of individuals (Doran, 1970; Gravells, 2012; Education and Training Foundation, 2014). The plan must also be designed to ensure delivery in a safe and inclusive environment (Health and Safety Act 1974, Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998, Education and Training Foundation, 2014) and in line with values, behaviours, procedures and mission statements that are set to warrant high quality educational provision and have been agreed with all stakeholders; learners, employers, teachers, parents, management (OFSTED, 2014; OFSTED, 2015).

Plans by design should include allowances for contingencies within a session (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008). Planning must also extend to outline a supportive learning environment (classroom/ workshop/ laboratory/ field) where teachers and students can utilise their practical, creative, artistic and interior design skills appropriate to the area of expertise through displays, posters, experiments etc. (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008).

Behaviour Management

Behaviour management is not always anticipated as an important key skill by new trainee teachers, especially before they enter the classroom for teaching practice. Traditionally students in post-compulsory education attended Higher Education (HE) or FE by choice, but recent changes in government policy for England (UK Government, 2015) have raised the age of compulsory education to 18 years old, resulting in a dramatic increase of younger age group students (14+) in the FE sector. Many of these students have had a negative experience of high school education or have been rejected by secondary schools, often because of disruptive behaviour and lack of achievement. In addition, benefit sanctions for unemployed individuals over the age of 16 indirectly pushes them into the FE route. Some of these younger and older learners can face FE with apprehension and compulsion. Currently, problematic behaviour reported in FE is higher than ever before. If not appropriately addressed by a teacher, it can compromise others’ learning, even threaten personal security and well-being. Here, the role of the teacher in classroom and behaviour management is key in establishing a positive learning and safe environment where students can exercise their right to learn, and teachers can teach (University and College Union, 2013; Human Rights Act 1998; Equality Act 2010; Health and Safety Act 1974; Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006; Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015; Education and Training Foundation, 2017a; Education and Training Foundation, 2014; OFSTED, 2015; Department for Education, 2011; Lifelong Learning UK, 2008).

Critically therefore, educators should be excellent role-models, in full compliance with their professional code of conduct and standards (Department for Education, 2011; Education and Training Foundation, 2014; Society for Education and Training, 2016). Students will naturally look to them to demonstrate the positive attitudes, values and behaviours which are expected of all.

Teachers must also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of legislation and policy which is pertinent to behaviour management in the FE Education and Skills Sector, demonstrating awareness of safeguarding policy and new initiatives such as Prevent (UK Government, 2016) and British Values (UK Government, 2014a). To minimise unacceptable behaviour in formal and informal education settings, approaches should promote safeguarding (UK Government, 2014b; Society for Education and Training, 2016; Education and Training Foundation, 2014) via effective listening, exploring patterns of disruptive behaviour and using sequential, consistent and fair consequences and sanctions. Embedding British Values into teaching highlights the importance of valuing other’s opinions, treating everyone with respect, fairly and equally, including all students in the design of rules and regulations, reinforcing positive and responsible behaviour. This involves teachers collaborating with other staff in seeking solutions, applying appropriate authority, recording incidents, concerns, referrals etc. (Gravells, 2012; University and College Union, 2013; Department for Education, 2011; Lifelong Learning UK, 2008; OFSTED, 2015). The multifaceted approach of embedding values is captured successfully under the following statement; ‘Values won’t be assumed because schools demand they are, particularly if they’re very different from those at home. They must be arrived at through mutual exploration and understanding’ (Young Citizens, 2017).

Since 2015, teachers are required to abide by the Prevent duty (UK Government, 2014d; UK Government, 2016) which forms part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and includes staff and learners of all ages. Educators must encourage students to respect others regarding the nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) set out in the Equality Act 2010 with ‘due regard to the need to prevent
people from being drawn into terrorism’ (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Education and Training Foundation, 2017a). Moreover, the recent guidance endorses into teaching the British Values; democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (UK Government, 2014a; UK Government, 2014d).

Assessment

Most trainee teachers are aware of the teacher’s role regarding assessment, but often not of their accountability with regard to student results in attainment, success, and retention. It is an important part of an FE teacher’s role to measure and monitor their teaching effectiveness by regularly and frequently assessing students’ progress versus agreed learning objectives and goals. Many different assessment tactics must be used by a teacher to accommodate individual education needs, motivation and links to career aims (OFSTED, 2015; Gravells, 2012; Education and Training Foundation, 2014). Creativity is an essential quality required by teachers if assessments are to be interesting and relevant (Burton et al., 1986), appropriately challenging learners of different abilities. Formative assessment includes high quality questioning discourse, collaborative activities, interpretive and evaluative listening, observation and balanced feedback that can successfully facilitate the mapping of students’ performance at each session and over a learning period. It is the teacher’s duty to create a non-judgemental environment that inspires confidence and safety to express and explore ideas. Assessments need to be fair and inclusive for all (Equality Act 2010; Education and Training Foundation 2014; OFSTED, 2014, 2015) and educators must value challenge-seeking, hard work, and learning from mistakes versus easy, low-effort successes (Dweck, 2008).

Feedback is also a key component of a teacher’s role and should be balanced, constructive and timely (Cimpian et al., 2007; Education and Training Foundation 2014). New teachers must be aware of several assessment types currently employed in FE education, namely ‘initial’, ‘diagnostic’, ‘formative’ and summative. ‘Initial’ assessment provides information about the learner as an individual, whereas ‘diagnostic’ helps identify current level of skills, knowledge and understanding towards a specific subject (Gravells, 2015). In ‘formative’, being the assessment for learning, the outcomes are used to inform teaching and learning as well as records of progress; research evidences the efficacy of formative assessment as impressive (Hodgen et al., 2009). In ‘summative’, on the other hand work from all stages of the process contributes towards the overall assessment of learning. Thus, learning standards can be raised (Hodgen et al., 2009; Black and William, 1998; Black et al., 2003).

Professional and Personal Conduct

Compliance

When researching the role of the teacher in more depth, the role of professional and personal compliance is key with regard to government policy and legislation. There are many legal requirements which give rights to, and place duties on, FE teachers. As FE teachers are working with children and potentially vulnerable adults, their work is classed as ‘regulated activity’ (Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974). Thus, they must provide a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate and suitable references. Teachers must also demonstrate compliance with procedures, regulations and policies in their school or college. In 2014 the ETF released the FE Professional Standards to support teachers in their teaching and learning conduct and consequently improve learners’ experience and outcomes. These are supplemented by the Society for Education and Training (SET) Code of Practice (Society for Education and Training, 2016). SET members can gain QTLS status by successfully completing the professional formation process that enables FE teachers to demonstrate the effective use of skills and knowledge in their professional practice. For an FE teacher in the school sector the Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education, 2011) apply and are legally binding.

Record Keeping

The role of record keeping, or paper work is often grossly underestimated by trainee teachers. However, collecting data and ‘evidence’ about the work FE teachers perform and their learners’ journey through training, is important to drive decision-making and improvement of practice and learning effectiveness. Good record keeping is essential to satisfy parents, students, funding bodies, stakeholders, regulators, management, auditors, inspectors and quality assurance. The records teachers keep and feed into their organisation must equally be accurate, clear, honest, timely and carefully presented (Education and Training Foundation, 2014). As per the Equality Act 2010, nothing written should be interpreted as being prejudiced, insulting, abusive, ageist, racist, sexist, or in any way discriminatory. A teacher must comply with the Data Protection Act (2018) that enshrines the General Data Protection Regulation in British law (Cooney, 2018), and the organisation’s requirements for record keeping. Therefore, the teacher must know how to use the information systems, trackers and record templates in the workplace and be careful not to share any passwords given to enable access to organisational systems. Teachers must ensure that personal
Pastoral
A teacher’s role is merely fulfilled by simply passing on information and lecturing. A teacher must also provide regular learning support on a one-to-one basis, listening, coaching, and mentoring as appropriate. One-to-one support has been shown to be one of the most effective educational interventions (Bloom, 1984). The teacher in this role can explore ways with students to effectively meet their personal, social (wellbeing) and academic needs. Understanding students’ concerns, motivations and what determines their behaviours will enable the professional and the learner to get better clarity on capability gaps and other barriers to learning. This understanding will not only inform the design and implementation of strategies to suit individual learning styles and abilities in an inclusive manner, it will also motivate and empower learners to set personal goals, agree and complete action plans to meet important requirements and solve key problems that could impede progress (Petty, 2014). A teacher should be receptive to students’ feedback to ensure their voices are part of the conversation shaping education, whether to address academic performance or social and emotional learning.

Integral to this role is the concept of relatedness. For the students to respect, trust, listen to, learn from and potentially identify with the teacher, they must feel (a degree of) closeness towards them (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The interpersonal qualities of the tutor are very important in making students feel valued, appreciated, listened to, respected, inspired and motivated to succeed and drive positive changes in their lives. However, teachers must recognise their professional boundaries in providing pastoral care and must refer students onwards to the institution’s specialist services as required (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008; Education and Training Foundation 2014).

Continuous Professional Development
Finally, it can be argued that the role of the FE teacher is one that is subject to continuous professional development (CPD). With globalisation and increasing technological advances, coupled with the ever-shifting landscape of politics and cultural exchanges, education is swiftly evolving. It is the responsibility of all FE teachers to not only maintain their teaching qualifications but also keep up to date with ongoing progress, best practices in their field and legislative provisions (Society for Education and Training, 2016; Education and Training Foundation 2014). Continuous learning is a self-governing journey that can be supported by employers and professional bodies (Education and Training Foundation 2014; Society for Education and Training, 2016). Evidence-based practice development can occur via the processes of reflecting, evaluation, educational research and an innovative and active mindset that ensures the employment of successful teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Common learning routes include training courses, observations, mentoring and coaching for self and peers, online learning, participating actively in a teaching-related board or committee and researching (Petty, 2014; Gravells, 2012).

CPD describes the range of activities which professional teachers need to undertake and reflect upon to continuously improve their teaching skills, performance and career development (Petty, 2014; Gravells, 2012). Although it is good practice to keep an annual record of training and learning undertaken towards CPD this is no longer a legal requirement for FE teachers (UK Government, 2012). Currently maintaining a CPD log could satisfy a specific FE employment requirement and/or the conditions of SET annual membership (Society for Education and Training, 2016).

CONCLUSION
The roles and responsibilities of the teacher in the FE and Skills Sector carry high expectations of a diverse and varied set of professional skills and knowledge that surely deserve the recognition of professional standing of a legally regulated sector. In the last decade there has been a considerable effort to professionalise the adult learning sector with the gaining of QTLS status. On the other hand, deregulation raises questions about the standing and status of non-compulsory education teachers. Building on its recommendation that the ETF professional standards are used ‘as a basis for promoting consistently good or better practice across the adult and further education sector’ in 2014 (Ofsted, 2014 p. 8) OFSTED goes one step further and publishes the Common Inspection Framework one year later which looks to standardise criteria for quality across education from the early years to adulthood.

Some would suggest that the standardisation of teachers’ roles and responsibilities across sectors is one of the most positive initiatives so far. It can form the basis of improvement strategies and education policies in all sectors from Early Years to Higher Education. FE teachers should represent no less and no more that same undertaking that drives all teachers’ mission in every educational establishment. Unmistakably, this is the promotion of learning and the positive transfor-
mation of human lives. The most important differentiator to quality teaching, beyond the teachers themselves, will be dictated by the role of leadership across the system. With leadership lies the responsibility to outline the culture in the sector and then translate it all the way down to the individual training providers.

**OFSTED (2014, p. 6)** stated that all staff in the FE and Skills sector 'must have a clear understanding, and take full responsibility for, their roles and accountabilities in ensuring and sustaining quality'. This is a fine ambition, but the relative lack of regulation in the FE sector undermines the ability of a cohesive system leadership to define, drive and embed the necessary culture across education. Henry Ford - as far back as 1923 - ingeniously said, "Quality is doing it right when no one is looking." As was the case for Mr Ford, there is still some way to go for the FE and Skills Sector teacher.

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The authors confirm being the sole contributors of this work and approved it for publication.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.