

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

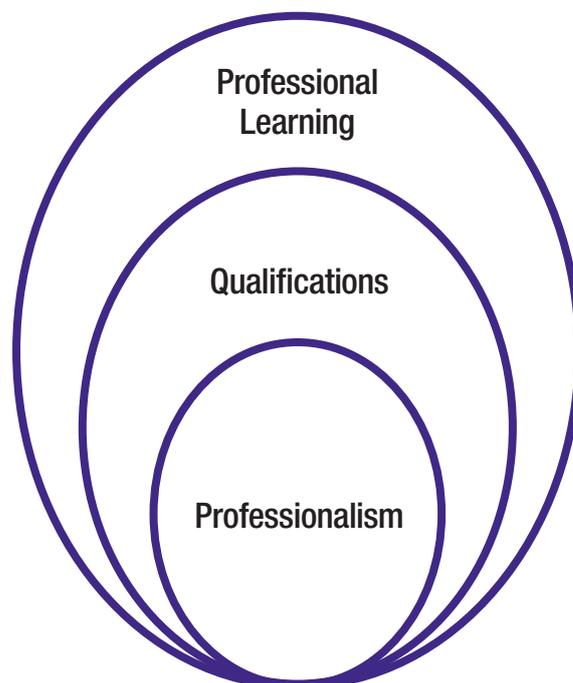
This study will use CDN's Virtual College Expo 2021 round table discussion titled '**Professional Learning**', which took place in June 2021, as the initial focal point of current expert thinking within the college sector in Scotland. Prior discussion identified Professional Learning as one of four key themes that the sector required to analyse in terms of identifying what if any, changes may be required to form a new perspective on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Background

Professional Learning can be considered to be the process of growth, when focusing on the knowledge and skills of a professional. There is not one particular way to do this that is more effective than another, a blend of *types* of professional learning is recognised as being the most appropriate method to progress one's knowledge and skills. However, at the centre of professional learning is the person, the professional. Each professional's currency of knowledge and skills has a tangible impact on their own professional identity, professional values and therefore the accompanying professional behaviour. All of these have an effect on professionalism and consequently, the experience of college students.

Professionalism of college lecturers is a topic that is experiencing much national interest. In November 2020 three Scottish colleges were involved in the pilot of the national roll out of the registration and regulation of all college lecturers by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

Subsequently, the full national roll out of registration for all college lecturers in Scotland was due to begin in August 2021. What it means to be a professional lecturer is a central element of the registration and regulation process. The training, qualifications and level of qualifications required by a lecturer as a professional are a core component of registration, whereas professional learning relating to the Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges (2019), where it is owned and led by the individual lecturer can be seen as a main component of the associated professional update. The areas of professionalism, training, qualifications and professional learning collectively have an impact on lecturers, which in turn will affect the student experience. Most of the literature has separated the teacher training element from career



long professional learning (Lucas and Unwin, 2009) therefore, there has been limited research which focuses on professional learning throughout the whole career of the lecturer. Furthermore, there is a notable dearth of literature with regards to lecturers in Scottish colleges.

As colleges begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic there are numerous areas to reflect on, and several lessons to be learned where working and delivering remotely are concerned. During the initial lockdown many staff within colleges began working from home and colleges supported them, as best they could, in doing this. It is therefore imperative that time and effort is dedicated to reflecting on the processes and training that were implemented, with a view to identifying best practice which in turn will inform the future training of staff.

1. Professionalism¹

The purpose of this area of research is to allow for a wide conversation to be had around professionalism. There is currently much talk that encompasses professionalism in the college sector however, it is noted that much of the discourse is happening with those directly involved with the registration process. Expanding the dialogue to include a variety of thoughts and opinions, particularly from lecturers, will provide meaningful and useful information around people's current understanding and perceptions about what it means to be a professional lecturer. At the heart of

¹ A comprehensive literature review is currently being written for the GTCS, which is based on the professionalism of lecturers. It is anticipated that the findings of the RQ would complement the review when it is published later this year.

professional learning is the professional therefore, due diligence is needed with regards to how they are, and feel they are, situated in the ever-evolving college landscape. It is anticipated that the results from RQ1 will help to inform RQ2 and RQ3 as all are inextricably linked. The GTCS is rolling out registration and regulation of lecturers within the sector soon and it is therefore an ideal and timely opportunity to consider many opinions about professionalism by exploring the following question.



RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What does it mean to be a professional lecturer in the college sector in Scotland?

2. Lecturer Qualifications (excluding TQFE)

Scottish colleges have a unique in-service, teaching and assessing qualifications route for most of their lecturing staff. This may include Teaching in Colleges Today, PDA Teaching in Scotland's Colleges (or equivalent), L&D9DI and other qualifications that are used to prepare lecturers for teaching and for entry to TQFE. With the current focus on professionalism and all it entails, there is a real need to consider the normally pre-TQFE qualifications that lecturers often need to undertake.



RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

To what extent do the current lecturing qualifications fulfil the requirements of colleges and lecturers, and how could they be improved in the future?

3. High Impact Professional Learning for Lecturers

There has never been more focus on the need for quality professional learning for college lecturers than in the past few years, particularly with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges it has brought for all. The scope of professional learning in colleges is vast, and it is uniquely different to working in industry as there is a need for lecturers to expand their pedagogical knowledge, stay current with the subject they deliver as well as being aware of wider areas that can affect education such as mental health, sustainability and equality and diversity to name but a few. From the TQFE to college led professional learning sessions, from networking with sector colleagues to being asked to deliver to peers – all types of professional learning have value, but where is professional learning/professional development considered to be of most value?



RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

Which professional learning opportunities are considered to have had the most impact for new and existing lecturers, and what are the reasons behind these?

4. Training for Digital Skills

Colleges are actively planning to have their workforce become more agile and for some, maintaining an element of working from home. Consideration is needed around not only the level of digital skills required by college staff but crucially around what training methods are the most effective.



RESEARCH QUESTION 4:

What methods of training have been used to upskill staff for future ways of working, and which of these have been the most effective?

References

College Development Network, (2019). Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges. Strling: College Development Network. Available: <https://www.cdn.ac.uk/professional-standards/> [Date Accessed: 10th July 2021].

Lucas, N., and Unwin, L. (2009). Developing Teacher Expertise at Work: In-Service Trainee Teachers in Colleges of Further Education in England. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. 33(4). Pp423 – 433.



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