


International Journal of Applied HRM

Volume 2 Issue 3

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**Human Resources Management and the
Teaching Profession in Further Education:
The Reformation and Redefinition of a Profession**

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ISSN 1742-2604

Abstract

The teaching profession working in further education has undergone many changes since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE), the incorporation of many colleges and the creation of sixth form colleges. The teachers involved in this study reported that certain key factors had influenced a reformation and redefinition of the teaching profession within Further Education.

The study goes on to discuss how this change process has affected the teaching profession in this area and how teachers have reacted to the changes. Some suggestions are made as to how the changes can be used to support the teaching profession in finding a higher level of status than it held before the change process started and what steps might be taken to ensure further change has a more positive affect on individual teaching staff.

Introduction

Teacher's work in the UK Further Education (FE) sector is undergoing reconstruction through processes of marketisation and managerial control (Randle and Brady, 1997). With reductions in public funding to FE and increased competition between institutions for students, many lecturers have experienced reductions in their pay, security, academic freedom and job satisfaction accompanied by an increases in their workload (Ozga, 1995). This fact coupled with widespread college insolvency and sporadic strike action and financial mismanagement has in a short period turned FE into an industrial relations battlefield (Seddon and Brown, 1996). A reported 15,000 lecturers (a fifth of the entire workforce) have been made redundant or retired early since colleges left local Authority control (TES 12/09/98); yet, FE remains unexplored terrain (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Randle and Brady 1997; Elliot 1996a) when compared with empirical research on schools. This is despite the fact that it may exhibit in heightened and dramatic form, the processes of redefinition or re-ordering of professional work that have attracted the researchers in schools (Mac An Ghail 1992; Ball 1994; Hargreaves 1994; Ozga 1995; Troman 1997; Menter et al 1997).

This paper focuses specifically on FE to examine the impact of changing conditions of academic work for teachers in this sector. It draws on preliminary analysis of data from the ESRC funded Changing Teaching and Managerial Cultures in FE (CTMC) project at keele. This project investigates at the impact of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) on teaching and managerial cultures in the FE sector through a local study of four colleges and seeks to understand the how the changes taking place in the structure and funding of FE impact on teachers work and their professional work identities (Gerwitz, 1997; Kennedy, 1997).

School based research on changing teachers work has so far revealed ambiguous and contradictory conclusions with assertions that professionalism under managerial conditions is redefined in ways that work for teachers or that that we are entering a 'new age' of professionalism in a post-modern world (Hargreaves 1994). Other researchers discuss the complexity of change that simultaneously changes teachers identities (Mac An Ghail 1992; Menter et al 1997). Though limited in scope, the available research also draws on different conceptualisations of professionalism. Randle and Brady (1997) argue that although teaching in FE is being deskilled and deprofessionalised, teachers retain a commitment to 'public service' values of altruism and teacher autonomy that are fundamentally opposed to managerialism. Elliott (1996) on the other hand rejects professionalism in favour of a concept of the

'reflective practitioner' for understanding teachers work, while Hodkinson (1995) argues for the retention of professionalism without accepting the exclusivity of a profession. He explores the uses and limitations of competence attributes towards a redefinition of professionalism based on notions of 'personal effectiveness', 'critical autonomy' and community (Hoyle, 1995).

Drawing on research from Terri Seddon (1997) a complex analytical framework for understanding the changing conditions of teaching work in managerial contexts can be used that draws on a conceptualisation of professionalism as a constitutive and regulatory discourse, or a culture and a social practice of organising individuals and institution.

Public sector notions of teacher professionalism, in this framework, are that the workforce is committed to notions of service to community but this ideal and teacher autonomy are challenged by market liberal reform (McGinty and Fish, 1993). Privatisation and deregulation work in ways that suggest deprofessionalisation proceeds alongside reprofessionalisation as part of an ongoing politics of knowledge, power and social organisation (Seddon and Brown, 1996).

A clearer picture of the trends towards reprofessionalisation/deprofessionalisation in FE can be obtained by examining the process within both managerial and competitive contexts as informed by recent work that has explored the re-definition of professionalism in the managerial state (Clarke and Newman 1997; Seddon 1997).

The Changing Context of Further Education

The 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act granted FE institutions their independent corporate status. Colleges are now corporations governed by non elected boards drawn mainly from business and industry (Fergusson, 1994). The FEFC was set up by Government with the task of ensuring the 'adequacy' and 'sufficiency' of provision in the sector. It assumed responsibility for Inspections previously performed by HMI, and for the funding and strategic control (though not curriculum) of colleges, previously the domain of the LEA (McFarlane 1993). Despite an increase in autonomy, FE colleges are in reality controlled by central government, now principally through the LSC's funding mechanism (Randle and Brady 1997). The new funding formula, based on the principle of 'more for less', means that funds may be 'clawed back', if colleges fail to meet targets, retain students or if students fail to successfully complete courses. The Learning and Skills Councils and Adult Learning Inspectorate both nationally and regionally have acted as the crucial agency in the new management of FE, inspection and quality control (FENow, 1998).

Teachers Work and New Management Cultures in Further Education - Changing conditions of Work

A number of features of teachers work have been highlighted by critics of reform as posing a threat to teacher's autonomy and control of the teaching process (Randle and Brady 1997; Elliott 1996). These include:

- Competence based assessment that reconstructs the lecturer as trainer or assessor. Its over prescriptive nature has been argued to introduce new forms of control over teacher (Hodkinson 1995; Randle and Brady 1997);

- The re-definition of quality from one based on process to outcome, measured by performance indicators or outcomes such as retention rates and exam results;
- Increased monitoring and surveillance of teachers through internal and external control mechanisms including LSC/ALI inspections, self assessment, teacher appraisal, observation, increasingly through student evaluation forms- this has a greater impact on FE than schools because FE lecturers were much more autonomous than teachers in schools;
- the reconstruction of student as customer - last year a media studies lecturer who was accused of gender bias in a student evaluation form was investigated by the college and her lectures observed by another member of staff for evidence of such bias.

Methodology used in the Study

A total of 100 teaching staff across 5 colleges were given a written questionnaire to complete, which identified the key factors in the literature referred to above as being indicative of changes in the nature and form of teaching professionalism. They were allowed time to report on their individual view of the importance of each of the factors on a 5 point scale ranging from very important to not important. Teachers were asked to indicate their willingness for a short interview both as a group in each college and as individuals to allow the researcher to question more closely their individual view on the factors as forces for change.

The group of respondents were selected at random but were representative of the total teacher population of the colleges in terms of age, gender, experience and tenure in teaching and the colleges. All had been teaching at least 10 years and experienced recent changes in the FE structure, culture, funding and inspection regimes.

The Survey Group

The group of teachers responding to this survey come from 5 colleges providing further education for adults as well as sixth form students. In total, the number of teachers approached numbered one hundred of whom seventy-five responded providing a seventy-five per cent responses rate. The teachers consisted of both, basic grade, front-line, teaching staff and those with managerial responsibility who still retained a number of teaching sessions per week. The respondents were selected at random from the colleges approached, their agreement to participation having been agreed with their line manager, prior to the questionnaire being issued and interviews being booked. A total of 25 teachers gave semi-structured interviews.

Factor in Teacher Changing Professionalism	Very Important (In Per Cent)	Important (In Per Cent)	Of Some Importance (In Per Cent)	Little Importance (In Per Cent)	Not Important (In Per Cent)
Student as Customer	39	29	22	6	4
Teacher Assessment based on student results and other outcomes	75	19	3	1	2
Teaching Performance based on Competence	51	35	10	2	2
Impact of internal and external inspection and evaluation of Performance	76	16	4	1	3
Increasing workload and intensification of work impact on teaching performance	67	25	4	1	2
Increasing managerialisation of teachers work	41	34	19	4	2
Greater use of information technology 'systemising' teaching	51	35	10	2	2

The results show that the survey group of teachers recognise the impact and importance of key factors in shifting their perspective of their professional identities. Assessment based on student results, recruitment and retention has had almost as big a perceived impact as new internal and external inspection including classroom observation, which once was almost prohibited in colleges by staff unions, has now formed part of continual review processes and the appraisal and development

process for many teachers. The increased documentation was also a significant factor in changing the teacher's role and professional identity with the creation of reporting mechanisms on student progress and the increased amount of documentation relating to the actual teaching of students combining to provide staff with an intensification of their workload. Managers in colleges are still wary of measuring teacher performance though, mostly because many managers, being teachers themselves, are loath to criticise their professional peers. The interviewees believe that this situation will change as the new performance culture in colleges is assimilated into the teaching profession and as 'weak' managers are removed by restructuring and capability exercises. The low score on increased managerialisation is reflective of the teaching professions belief that they can resist much of the penetration made by managers into their classroom autonomy.

Discussion – Change in Further Education

A range of research studies referred to above suggest that teachers do not simply receive change policies without comment but rather that they filter policies of reform and change through their existing experience and professional ideologies and perspectives. This produces different strategies or adaptations in the teacher workforce that range from willing compliance with new policy to resistance and rejection.

A small group of the lecturers involved in this study were extremely critical of the new reforms in FE. They found it difficult to identify any positive aspect of Incorporation. Rejecting markets and competition they expressed a wish to return to the old days of FE. Change was then filtered through an existing commitment to 'old' public sector professionalism. This discourse enabled them draw on key values (reward for expertise; FE as a public service, adequately resourced; professional autonomy) as a defence against changed rules of the organisation. The anger and frustration of this group at the change process was aimed against managers who can be viewed as the buffer between the state led changes and FE teachers. The interviewees commented that new teacher recruits were actively discouraged from enjoying the teaching experience in FE. Those who had recently joined were upset by the dissatisfaction of teaching staff who found new ways of expressing their resistance to ongoing change through disrupting the induction of new staff.

The attitude of new staff was very different from longer serving teachers and the difference in expectations and ideas of teacher professionalism helped reinforce some experienced staff in their professional self-image and for others the injection of new ideas and enthusiasm helped them recreate their identities as FE teachers. The long service staff were criticised by newer lecturers who had entered into FE post-incorporation as being less competent and complacent in their attitude to 'managing' student performance and attendance and working within the new regime of targets. The interviewees indicated that teachers and lecturers from the 'old' professional viewpoint and new teachers do not share a set of values and managerial reform is able to exploit the divisions exist between them holding up the new teachers as higher performers and best practice champions for the established teachers to copy and learn from. The newer teaches were more compliant with the values of the dominant discourse of professionalism in that they were prepared to be flexible and identified real potential for 'professionalism' in FE. For those who had taken the traditional part-time route into FE, the promised creativity, autonomy and career development was being diminished by the change process. For these staff their adoption of a strategy of compliance was linked to the need for job security, in the

wider context of unemployment, this strategy of compliance can be seen as a part of a conscious strategy of survival.

Though they had different reasons for complying and were not fully incorporated into the new corporate culture of FE, in adopting this response they played a key role in the re-creation of the 'official' or dominant discourse of FE teaching in which compliance and flexibility and a smart appearance are valued over judgement and skill. The vast majority of lecturers involved in this study were more selective in their compliance.

A Strategic Approach to Compliance with the New Professional Order

The vast majority of teaching staff interviewed were critical of some aspects of reform but accepting of others, the minority were entirely accepting of the changes in the nature of teacher professionalism. Changes in the work of the profession created by flexible learning, for example, was viewed as a positive change as long as it was not resourced through unqualified learning assistants in place qualified teachers or lecturers and as long it did not replace direct contact teaching.

The long serving, and they thought suffering, teachers drew on residual elements of public sector professionalism to explain their position, although a significant majority had reworked this view of professionalism within the current context, to inform their practice and accommodate the changes. Of primary importance was the need to ensure that students received a quality education within the constraints of the current system, which suggests that there was a conspiracy to meet the demands of the new system at least superficially. The notion of quality was subject to competing definitions that was reflective of the tension between the official college managerial discourse of what defined the new professionalism and these teachers 'old' public sector professionalism. The differences between the managerial definition and the teachers definition were based on the argument that quality came from the individual teachers pride in their personal performance and expertise whereas, they believed, the management of the college saw quality as being based on the monitoring and surveillance of teachers and lecturers performance against narrow performance indicators and the measurement of student outcomes and attendance. Those who complied, strategically, with the changed notion of the profession still tended to identify much more with their discipline or sector than with the college or institution as a whole, which created small pockets of teaching staff unwilling to look beyond their own area. The teachers interviewed identified one of these reasons for the sector identity was work intensification, causing staff to ignore the common staff room in favour of their departmental room as there was less time for them to socialise with people outside their sector during breaks.

Further comments indicated that the sector identity was further reinforced and encouraged where devolved budgets were in operation and could lead to some conflict between sectors where the need to recruit students to courses was perceived to be integral to the survival of that sector. Further breakdown was caused by the resentment amongst teachers that less successful sectors were effectively subsidised by successful ones offering popular courses. The conflict and resentment from teachers/lecturers in successful sectors had led to students being given inappropriate advice and being recruited onto courses they were not suited to.

Conclusion

The situation presented in this paper suggests that changes are occurring in terms of what counts as a good teacher in FE through managerialist discourses that emphasise flexibility, reliability and competence.

Though there is evidence of some incorporation of teachers into this discourse, it is by no means complete nor uncontested but rather punctuated by residual elements of 'public sector' or 'old' professionalism the members of which draw on and rework the old professional concepts through their practice, both as a means to make sense of the changing conditions and to enable them to balance their personal identification needs while meeting those of their work in the new managerial and competitive contexts.

The responses of teachers across the colleges were diverse but the vast majority of teachers were strategically compliant in their approach to work. The main element of this response was a commitment to ensuring that students received a quality and rounded education based on a compromised definition of quality through process while acknowledging and trying to meet the managerial definition of quality through output.

This approach encouraged teachers in some sectors to share resources and place an emphasis on developing collaborative modes of work within the highly competitive environment so that they might influence the culture towards acceptance of a balance between these two interpretations of culture. This growing climate of collaboration operated across the colleges as well, encouraged by management as sharing best practice, though it was contained within particular sectors and not others. There existed apparent support for this growing atmosphere of collaboration at both locally and nationally, while at the same time the majority of teaching staff sought sanctuary by remaining apart from colleagues within their specific section. At the local level, management in colleges proclaimed that they were working towards collaboration as far as possible within the competitive framework, while at the same time using tactics which supported the growth of their institutions to maximise income. At the national level, the Learning and Skills Council support this move towards partnership and collaboration, interpreting this emphasis on collaboration within competition as a new form of control, reflecting a policy of management of education by exploiting the benefits of joint working while allowing colleges to increase the quality of delivery and student outcomes within league table of performance.

In essence this means that the teaching/lecturing profession in FE is not being the subject of strategies aimed at deprofessionalisation but quite possibly is subject to strategies of reprofessionalisation. It is important to recognise that the powerful reprofessionalising agendas seeks to engage generations of teachers to come in rethinking contemporary education and the role of the professional teacher in that change. The main underlying agenda suggests change processes beyond simple deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation in education, but a deeper re-working of how education, the organisation of educational work, and roles of educational workers in the social organisation of knowledge and power, resources and recognition, might be reworked and to what ends.

Successful change will depend on whether a meaningful relationship can develop between teachers/lecturers and managers supporting a culture of mutual trust and sharing of strategies. It could also be argued that as teachers become aware of these

processes of identity reconstruction, it may enable them to think reflexively, which would allow them to think about their priorities in new ways. From the interviews carried out for this study it does seem that FE teachers are going to change the profession, albeit reluctantly, due to their voiced concern for the student and a need to express their individual and group expertise about how to create conditions for learning.

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