



**WALES
CYMRU**

**RESPONSE TO:
New professional standards for further
education teachers and work-based
learning practitioners**

Contact Details:

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1. The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales.

2. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world. It was formed on the 1st June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners – the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) – who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators’ employment and professional interests.

3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the survey on new professional standards for further education teachers and work-based learning practitioners.

Aims, principles and model

Question 1 – Do you agree that the aims and the key principles on which the standards have been developed are appropriate as a basis for developing these new professional standards?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

UCU Wales agree that the aims and the key principles are the foundations of professionalism in teaching and learning. However we are concerned that the above consultation question alludes to them as being a 'basis' for developing new professional standards. If the intention is simply to 'polish up' the draft document, in light of the consultation, to create a final format, with input from the working group; we accept that this is necessary. However it would raise issues for us if there was an intention to develop further professional standards, without the input of the working group. It is only because of this ambiguity that we have answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.

UCU Wales are in general agreement with the aims and the key principles on which the standards have been developed. However there needs to be clear guidance published alongside the standards that makes it unmistakably evident that the professional standards are a toolkit for lecturers to use for themselves, to enhance their development and NOT a checklist for managers to use as a way of controlling the behaviour of lecturers.

Although it is understood that the principles behind the development of the professional standards for FE lecturers are intended to be supportive, UCU Wales has concerns that their interpretation and implementation, in the current performance management culture that is found in parts of the FE sector, will undermine the aims and principles at the heart of these professional standards.

Lecturers in the sector are suffering from the results of being 'micro managed' by those who often do not have relevant teaching experience. This has resulted in a series of unintended consequences, related to the interpretation and gathering of data to measure quality in teaching and learning, which have had the effect of undermining the professional autonomy needed for lecturers to be able to grow and develop the skills of both themselves and their students. It is hoped that the new professional standards for FE and WBL, along with improved opportunities for meaningful professional learning, will help begin to redress this balance.

The key principles outlined, highlight the importance of dual professionalism, ownership, growth and critical thinking; principles that have often been overlooked in the drive to achieve the quantitative data chosen to indicate quality. Ownership and growth have been curbed by excessive standardisation and the time and space needed to develop critical thinking, professional skills and knowledge, are often not seen as cost effective. The new professional standards must therefore be supported by appropriate and meaningful professional development. professional learning should not be restricted to simply attending courses and workshops, it must involve opportunities for critical reflection, professional dialogue and practice, as well extend to activities such as:

- Reading relevant journal articles or reviewing books
- [] Formal development or study
- Peer review, mentoring or shadowing
- Online learning including engagement in discussion forums and blogs
- Viewing and reviewing television programmes, documentaries and the internet.¹

Professional learning is paramount to the success of the new professional standards, but without the time and space for lecturers to experiment, reflect, discuss and consolidate their professional learning, the professional standards will do nothing to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Question 2 – Do you agree with the statement that a particular blend of values, skills and knowledge taken together define professionalism in action and high-quality learning?

Agree	✓	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Yes, absolutely! It is important to recognise that teaching and learning professionals need a variety of skills, values and knowledge that they can use flexibly and interchangeably, in order to succeed in their own development and that of their students. It is not enough to be an expert in your field of knowledge. To successfully teach, you also need to be open minded, empathetic, reflective, open to change and experimentation in your teaching, and have a sound understanding of the principles and practice of pedagogy. There should however be recognition that professional educators also act with honesty and integrity.

It would be unusual to find a lecturer who wanted their students to fail. The values, skills and knowledge encompass the role that the majority of UCU members strive to fulfil every day; so we welcome the development of the new professional standards, if it will promote a better understanding of the variety and complexity of the skills, values and knowledge needed to be a successful practitioner.

However, critical to the success of the professional standards, is the relationship between professional learning and the ability of the individual to decide what it is that they need, in order to develop as a practitioner. Professional development is not just about completing a list of activities that the employer deems important; unless they are meaningful to the individual they will do little to improve their professional practice.

It was suggested by the working group that an online self-assessment questionnaire could be developed alongside the professional standards to help practitioners to pinpoint areas for their own development. UCU would like to endorse this suggestion. It would add a meaningful context to the professional standards, in which individuals could explore their development in a way that is unique to their own needs. Just as we expect our practitioners to differentiate their teaching styles according to their students' needs, we must acknowledge and respect that practitioners learning needs are also individual and that to develop as professionals, they must be supported make decisions about their own learning.

¹ <https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/professional learning/>

Question 3 – Do you agree that the values, skills and knowledge capture the appropriate requirements for sustained highly effective teaching?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

Some of the values more closely reflect those of the current government in Wales, rather than those essential to teaching and learning.

In terms of valuing culture and language, lecturers in FE are likely to encounter students and colleagues from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In terms of equality and inclusivity, one should not be favoured over the others.

Being learner focussed, can be problematic; do we mean working for the best interests of the students or doing what the students think is best for them. Teaching and learning professionals need to be supported in using their professional judgement; that’s what makes them professionals in their fields. Lecturers need to be given the confidence to make judgments and decisions that students may not always like, but are in fact in their best interest.

Openness to change also needs to be put into context. As a value for a teaching professional, it is important to be able to adapt quickly to situations that arise in the classroom; to be flexible enough to change tack spontaneously as opportunities for learning arise; to be experimental in one’s approach and to embrace and learn from failure. It should not be used in the context of being expected to suddenly deliver a totally different programme or to accept without question, changes to working practice.

UCU very much welcome recognition that lecturers are dual professionals. As mentioned in the previous section, successful teachers and lecturers possess not only subject knowledge, but also a raft of personal qualities, a sound understanding of the principles and practice of pedagogy, and they welcome opportunities to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. It is hoped that the professional standards will help promote wider understanding of the professional needs of lecturers.

The use of the word ‘evidence’ needs to be clarified. The need to provide evidence could be taken too far and become impossible to show, leading to the criticism that lecturers are not being professional. There needs to be clear guidance on the types of evidence that are considered acceptable, and that this is not limited to published research. In terms of being a reflective professional, lecturers gather their own evidence as to what works and what doesn’t, on an almost daily basis. Although this may not be as easy to quantify, it is a crucial part of being a creative and flexible lecturer. The misguided insistence that the only evidence that should be used is from published research, will have the unintended consequence of stifling an important part of professional development, by introducing the idea that any form of teaching that cannot do this, is ‘bad’ teaching. The real skill is being able to use appropriate sources of evidence (published or from experience) and adapt them to individual teaching and learning situations, and then be able to critically reflect on their efficacy.

The ability to work collaboratively is also an important skill. Working in partnership with colleagues and with students, is essential to organisational and individual success; likewise, so is the ability to use initiative and to work alone.

The model of professionalism presented in the paper, is a useful visual aid to show how knowledge, values and skills are all interrelated and inseparable components of professionalism; and that without them, high quality learning cannot be achieved.

Question 4 – Do you agree that the personal commitment statement and descriptors for further education (FE) teachers/work-based learning (WBL) practitioners will support them to take responsibility for their career-long professional learning?

Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting comments

The inference in the above question is that FE lecturers do not already take responsibility for their career long professional learning. Feedback from our members is that very often their wishes and needs to engage in professional development, are frustrated by cost or being unable to take time from teaching duties. Maximised timetables, back to back teaching sessions, shortened courses and increased administrative tasks may be more cost effective for the organisation, but they allow few opportunities for professional development. UCU Wales understand that there is an urgent need for lecturers to be able to undertake meaningful professional development; the issue is not lack of responsibility, but lack of opportunity and in some cases lack of funding.

We would like to see reference in the guidance, not only to the importance of keeping abreast of the subject knowledge, access to and reflection on theories and research, but also to there being adequate time during contracted working hours, in which to do this.

However, being aware of the spirit in which the professional standards for FE and WBL were developed, UCU welcome the personal statements, as a tool to illustrate the everyday professional duties undertaken by lecturers. It is hoped that they will provide the means to ensure that there is wider understanding of the nature of teaching and learning, and of the support that lecturers need in accessing career long professional development.

Question 5 – What are your views on how well the new standards will support you to reflect on your practice and to plan your professional learning?

Comments

However well planned, opportunities for reflection and professional learning are often beyond the control of the individual lecturer. Without the buy in of the Welsh Government and employers in FE and the WBL sectors, the new professional standards will do little to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Wales.

UCU Wales members stated that in theory the standards will a useful tool for increasing the understanding of professionalism in the FE sector; however the ultimate concern was the inappropriate use by managers, as a performance management tool as opposed to a self-evaluation and support tool. Therefore is critical to see the professional standards as only one side of the coin, which must be balanced with professional learning on the other.

Organisation/employer

Question 6 – What are your views on how well the new standards will support your organisation to engage your staff to reflect on their practice and to develop their and your own organisation’s professional learning?

Comments

The standards have the potential to be a useful means of highlighting and promoting the professional skills required of lecturers, and improving access to meaningful professional learning. Hopefully resulting in more realistic workloads that allow time for experimentation and reflection.

However, clear guidance is needed for employers to clarify their role in supporting lecturers to carry out their professional responsibilities, as set out in the professional standards. There is a very real fear that lecturers will be held responsible for maintaining professional standards, even when given little or no support to allow them to do so. The professional responsibilities of lecturers cannot be upheld if the organisations that they are accountable to, do not provide them with a professional framework in which to grow. An example of this is the growing pressure on lecturers to deliver more courses, to more students, in less time and with fewer resources; and to not only maintain standards, but to continually improve. There is deepening frustration amongst lecturers, who would like nothing better than to be creative and reflective professionals, but are prevented from doing so, because of the constraints placed upon them.

It is crucial that to enable the professional standards to become a useful working tool, lecturers must be given the space and time to engage in meaningful professional development/learning. It must be acknowledged and respected, that research and reflection are integral to maintaining professional standards in high quality teaching and learning. In making a success of the professional standards we must move towards a culture of trust in the teaching profession and away from the culture of measuring quality and success through arbitrary and inappropriate target setting.

Question 7 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposed new professional standards would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How positive effects could be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Comments

Question 8 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed new professional standards could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Comments

Question 9 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

UCU Wales welcomed the Welsh Government decision to allow the FE sector to move in a different direction, from the professional standards for schools and are pleased to have been involved in the professional standards working group for FE and WBL. UCU Wales note that Welsh Government has plans to develop Professional standards for PGCE FE and would welcome being included in any such associated stakeholder/working groups.

We also recognise that there is a now a disconnect between the professional standards for school teachers and the professional standards for FE and WBL and would be willing to explore this further with Welsh Government, as we move towards a more connected and collaborative education system in Wales.