



## What makes a great teacher or trainer in further education?

On 22 September 2009, a subgroup of the National Learner Panel (NLP) met with Jean Kelly and Marie Ashton from the Institute for Learning (IfL) to provide learner input into the attributes and skills a great teacher<sup>1</sup> in further education (FE) should possess. The views below reflect the input of the five panel members who attended the sub-group.

### 1. Background and Context

IfL is the professional body for teachers, trainers and assessors across FE. Its remit is to assess continuing professional development (CPD) amongst its teachers and trainers in the FE and skills sector. IfL was created by teachers, and is led by members for members. The IfL code of professional practice came into force on 1 April 2008 and was developed by those within the profession. It outlines the behaviours expected of members for the benefit of learners, employers, the profession and the wider community. IfL sought the views of members of the NLP as to what they expect of their teachers in FE, as part of their focus to raise the profile of the professional status of teachers.

### 2. A learner perspective on high quality teaching in FE

We explored the various attributes we look for in a good teacher, and fed in our experiences of being taught in the context of our diverse FE backgrounds. We felt, universally, that we expect the highest standards from our teachers and are looking for “the consummate professional” to help guide us through our learner journey. We felt that professionalism can be demonstrated through:

- **Knowledge** – both of the subject and the learner:  
*“I always felt that my tutor was up to date with her own subject and with changes in education, and I trusted what she told me.”*
- **Behaviour** – time-keeping and boundary setting:  
*“Teachers have to maintain professional boundaries and show commitment by being ready to teach as soon as their learners arrive.”*
- **Appearance** – well-presented and appropriate for a person of authority:  
*“I expect my teachers to invest in their personal appearance and to make every effort to maintain good personal hygiene.”*
- **Communication** – present their lesson skilfully and engagingly:  
*“When a teacher has good voice projection and delivers their lesson confidently, I find I listen more.”*

We all believe that the best teachers are those for whom the career is a **vocation and not just a job**. This stems from our personal experiences in the classroom and we look for a range of personal and professional qualities, skills and behaviours.

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<sup>1</sup> We use 'teacher' as a generic term to include teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers, instructors in the learning and skills sector.

## 2.1 Qualities of a professional teacher:

### **Passion and enthusiasm**

These are the key qualities we all recognise in a great teacher, both in their passion for the job and their enthusiasm for the subject they are teaching. We have seen this in teachers who will go the extra mile to inspire us about the subject, and take time to encourage us to achieve our full potential.

*“My teacher is wonderful. She uses her life experiences to inspire us. I think that having that kind of teacher helps me be passionate about learning and having goals.”*

*“I believe that a teacher should be able to choose what they want to teach – the subject(s) they are passionate about.”*

### **Creativity and inventiveness**

We recognise that we learn the most from those teachers who use teaching methods which encourage us to think in different and interesting ways and to explore avenues of learning which may not be obvious.

*“I had a politics teacher who planned the lesson to the class strengths, and held debates to discuss political topics and gave us case studies to discuss the law.”*

*“A good teacher is one who is happy to work on practical lessons and not just theory, to help engage the whole class.”*

### **Fairness and flexibility**

Some of us recognised that our best learning experiences are with those teachers who treat us all as equals from the outset regardless of background or difference and subsequently adapt their mode of teaching for the diverse groups of learners they work with.

*“In my class there are a variety of different learners. The teacher makes it possible for all of us to learn so that age and ability aren’t an issue. He passes on his knowledge and empowers us by simplifying the subject for those who need it and by encouraging those who want to push on faster.”*

*“A good teacher treats all students fairly and equally and makes sure that they are learning the most, and to the best of their ability.”*

*“Teachers who can be flexible and individually tailor learning programmes, make further education an option for working parents which other forms of education aren’t.”*

### **Stamina and energy**

We are inspired by those teachers who bring positivity and vibrancy into the room and recognise this as a vital part of engaging with learners, particularly those who may be disengaged from education.

*“A teacher should look after their own physical and mental well-being to be able to do their job effectively.”*

*“I have seen teachers make a particular effort with those who have obviously hated school in the past, and I think that is really impressive.”*

## 2.2 Skills of a professional teacher

The skills of a professional teacher include the ability to:

### **Personalise the planning process**

Teachers who plan their lessons have a much greater degree of success in inspiring enthusiasm and commitment from us than those who are unprepared. Our individual needs, situations and circumstances have to be taken into account during our learner journey as these might affect our ability to progress, and some of us have appreciated teachers who have taken time to find out about us before we even arrive in their classrooms.

*"I want my teacher to prepare me for life's experiences and to help me prepare for the next steps in life."  
"It is a complete waste of time if you arrive on a course and the teacher hasn't bothered to find out what you already know. This happened to me on a book-keeping course and I became disengaged and it was a waste of money."*

*"If a college uses short term and supply teachers a lot, it means the learners have no continuity of learning and there is often no handover or follow-up of the work that has been set. This is very frustrating and the teachers don't always make the same effort that the learners do."*

### **Set learning goals with us**

We are, to a great extent, reliant on our teachers to help us set realistic but aspirational goals, and our best experiences have been with those teachers who can do this effectively and keep us motivated and challenged at the same time.

*"My teacher impresses on me the need to aim higher and dream big!"*

*"My teacher made it all seem possible. I had thought I wouldn't last a week, but he kept encouraging me."*

### **Use ICT effectively**

We all agreed that teachers should have a minimum of a Level 2 qualification in ICT to fulfil their role. We feel it is essential for a 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher to, at the very least, be able to use a computer effectively, upload coursework data, and display basic ICT awareness in front of their learners, and, at best, be inventive and creative with ICT to enhance the learning experience and to inspire individuals to use technology further and to their own advantage.

*"My teacher doesn't seem to know how to upload data and make information available from his lectures which makes it impossible for us to complete our coursework."*

*"I had an ICT teacher who didn't know any of the keyboard shortcuts and I lost faith in him because of it. I began to think that I knew more than he did!"*

*"One of my teachers had developed his own personal website and obviously had an amazing ability to use ICT, but didn't bring any of it into the classroom so we felt we'd missed out on a potentially valuable experience."*

### **Encourage and act upon learner feedback**

We all felt that teachers should be open to constructive feedback from their learners, paying particular attention to feedback on how their CPD is improving their performance in the classroom. Some of us believe that this should be a three way process between teacher, learner and provider. Some of us felt that we should be allowed to comment on specific teachers' performances so as to contribute to improved standards across the sector.

*"The teacher is not a god, and should engage with the learners as part of a two way process."*

*"I would have appreciated being able to give my learners' questionnaire to someone who I felt was 'safe'? I was worried about my comments being seen by the wrong people."*

## **2.3 Behavioural attitudes of a professional teacher:**

### **A willingness to engage with learners**

We all believe that the best teachers are those who actively listen to their learners as well as impart knowledge. When we feel that we are part of the learning process it can make the classroom an interactive and innovative place in which to learn.

*“A teacher, who gets involved with the learners at their level, shows that they’re interested and active in the learning, as opposed to standing at the front.”*

*“The hands-on approach is good, and speaking to the learner with respect.”*

*“The teacher needs to show they want to listen to us in the first place and that they are prepared to adapt their methods and styles to help the whole class.”*

### **A willingness to engage in their own CPD and constant improvement**

In an increasingly technical and media-conscious environment, some of us have high expectations of our teachers’ ability to ‘perform’ in front of a class. We expect teachers to participate in CPD to ensure that they are constantly striving to improve their own presentation skills in front of the class and that they are up to speed with the most modern ICT.

*“My best teacher varies lessons from written work to online debates, power point presentations and question and answer sessions.”*

*“If you find yourself in front of a teacher who mumbles, you switch off immediately.”*

### **A willingness to engage with the wider educational community**

Some of us have come across members of staff who don’t appear to be engaged with the learning provider and in some cases this has impacted on their learner engagement too. Some of us think it can affect learners positively if they feel their teacher has respect for the Senior Management Team and works well with the other staff. We expect teachers to be fully committed to us the minute they walk in the room, no matter what is going on behind the scenes.

*“Staff should be able to talk positively about their school or college.”*

*“My teacher seemed more interested in internal politics than on teaching us.”*

### **Fulfilling your teachers’ potential – a learner’s perspective on how providers can help**

Allow sufficient time and funding for CPD.

Ensure teachers have access to relevant data on learners before courses start to enable them to teach individuals effectively from the beginning.

If a teacher has a specialist subject, don’t force them to teach other subjects unless they are equally passionate about them.

Take full account of the value added scores for learners’ results, so that the full picture of their impact can be recorded.