

# Professionalism and the role of professional bodies

**A stimulus paper from the Institute  
for Learning**

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## Introduction

In 2006, the Institute for Learning (IfL) hosted a series of *professional knowledge* symposia; supported by Centre for Excellence in Leadership, Lifelong Learning UK, the Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University, UCU and others partners. Held across the country, these brought together practitioners, leaders and academics to debate the defining features and future development of professional knowledge in the further education and skills sector<sup>1</sup>. These symposia explored: the proposition that there was a shared understanding of the word professional. Subsequently, at IfL we have been grappling with the range of views on the concept of the professional and we want to share our thinking. This paper will be revised, following the discussions during the fifth LSIS seminar, February 2009, in the series focusing on regulation and improvement, self regulation and self improvement.

The term professionalism is used to mean different things to different people. One view is that it may be fruitless to try and pin down one exact meaning, like many words and concepts it has different dimensions and changes over time too. However, we think it is useful to come to an understanding through discourse of some of the essential qualities we agree the concept needs into the future. That is what this piece is about.

Professionalism as a named entity is defined as ‘the qualities or typical features of a profession or of professionals especially competence and skill’ (OED).

## Professional Paradigms and Paradigms Lost

There has been a change over time in the understanding of the notion of professionalism. These paradigm shifts are along the lines of the following:

In the beginning professionalism meant.....

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▪ Expertise, Specialist knowledge, Virtuous, Authoritative, Exclusive, Altruistic,  
▪ Autonomous, Professing  
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<sup>1</sup> This term is used to cover the full range of the sector, including adult and work-based learning.

And then a reaction.....a conspiracy against the laity (George Bernard Shaw)

Mystification of knowledge, Independence, Elitist, Self-seeking, Arrogant, Exclusive, High remuneration

And then to the managerial ..... New Public Management (Hood, 1991, Bottery, 1996)

Accountable, Competent, Regulated, Explicit standards and measures of performance, Quality control, Dependant

And into the Future characterised by greater autonomy and accountability, minimal regulation and a thirst for improvement and self improvement, drawing on values

Altruistic, Accountable, Continuous Learning and Improvement, Extending Professional Knowledge and Skills, Collaborative Autonomy, Inclusive, Integrity, Quality improvement, Self-regulation, Vigilance, Humility and Passion, Trusted

**To what extent do you agree that these are contemporary and key characteristics of a professional?**

## The Application of Language

There is a distinction between firstly, 'the name of a thing' and secondly, the 'description of an approach'. The question 'Are you a professional?', in the first sense, enquires if a person belongs to a professional body; in IfL terms a registered member. This is a fact. So, if someone were asked the question they could answer confidently 'yes' if they were registered with the IfL or another professional body. Being a professional in this sense also means signing up to the regulatory aspects of a professional body. As IfL is an independent body set up by its members for its members, this is a self-regulatory aspect.

In the second sense, 'the description of an approach', 'professional' means worthy of professional status by reason of how well something is carried out, doing a job in an appropriately professional manner. This perception of worth can vary from person to person and is not limited to belonging to a particular group or association. This is a matter of opinion. So, if someone were asked the question 'Are you a professional?' the answer might be yes, or no depending on what they thought about the public perception of the job they do, their own self-esteem and their sense of worthiness in doing that job.

## Self-regulation and Self Improvement

Self-regulation and self-improvement are often associated with professional status. Here previous LSIS seminars have proved invaluable to IfL and our thinking:

*“Regulation is essentially about protection of public interest, whereas improvement is essentially about pride and aspiration – distinguishing between them in our thinking liberates ambition.....”*

*We therefore agreed to distinguish between activities whose primary function is regulation and those that are primarily about quality, self-improvement and development. We came to a view that ‘self-regulation and self-improvement should be separate’, but that we should ‘understand the interaction’ between them.”*

*External regulation and self-regulation have been comparatively easy to place in the arena of New Professionalism but the real challenge comes in determining what our professional aspirations should look like. (LSIS, 2009)*

Where does this leave the individual member of the IfL? The member is a professional certainly in the registered and regulated sense. External regulation requires teachers and trainers across the further education and skills sector to achieve a level of skill or competence through initial teacher training, and self-regulation is exemplified through their commitment to the IfL’s code of professional practice, developed with members. Hence members can publicly and very properly declare themselves to be a professional. But becoming a professional in the aspirational and more abstract sense means a commitment beyond competence and a journey towards a declaration of high worth and esteem, pride in practice and commitment to continuous improvement and development in professional knowledge and practice ie self-improvement. How does the individual teacher or trainer and member of IfL respond?

This lifts the discussion beyond a simple analysis of professionalism as holding a particular job, qualified and registered status, towards a consideration of the traits and behaviours of the individual professional.

Focusing on professional characteristics and traits is reflected in the use of ‘professionalism’ by the Cabinet Office (*Excellence and Fairness: achieving world class public services*, 2008) where the thinking becomes broadened out into a ‘new professionalism’ – a further developed conceptualisation of the professional which also focuses on the relationship between the professional in public services and the citizen.

We think it is the different professional paradigms and the various meanings implied by the same terms and language which can create ambiguity and confusion when discussing professionalism. Viewed through the eyes of the professionals we are considering, members of the IfL, we hear the range and the fluidity with which the term professional can be used:

*“I feel like I am a professional, I take pride in my work and strive to do my very best for my students by continually developing my skills and knowledge.”*

*“I don’t see my doctor being observed in his surgery or lawyers being inspected, they are trusted as professionals and are accountable only to their professional body. I’ll believe I am a professional when I’m trusted to be professional.”*

*“I joined the IfL on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2007 so now I am a professional, I’m not sure that I was a different person on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October so what’s changed?”*

*“How can I be a professional? My salary and terms and conditions of employment are fixed and outside of my control.”*

So what do we mean when we talk about a professional workforce? And is professionalism a useful construct? Some think not:

*“The debate about what precisely constitutes a profession has become sterile, unable to cope either with the changing nature of professional work or the diversity of occupational claims”. (Eraut, 1995)*

There is, of course, no single, neat definition as the concept of professional is evolving and it is situational. However, we propose there is merit in an exploration of the characteristics associated with professionalism such as: professional knowledge, professional identity (the dual professionalisms present in further education driven by professionally expert in the subject or vocational area **and** professionally expert in teaching and training), professional development, professional communities, an obligation to profess. Furthermore, debate is important as it aids the development of a deeper understanding of professionalism. This special kind of understanding and knowledge is explored below.

## **Professional Knowledge, Identity, Development and Professional Communities**

Eliot Freidson presents the argument that while all occupations contain some blend of skills, knowledge, qualification and competence, professions involve a “special kind of knowledge ... believed to require the exercise of discretionary judgment and a grounding in abstract theory and concepts” what Michael Young would refer to as powerful knowledge (Young, 2007). This powerful knowledge for practitioners is about competence in their subject and vocational specialism and their special knowledge and understanding of and ability to teach and train in order to promote successful learning.

However, Freidson can be seen as not promoting the need for continuous learning and the commitment beyond competence, and hence associating more with a regulatory world view. IfL sees professionalism as requiring ongoing learning through experience, reflection, theorising, mutual observation and discourse; through access to new educational thinking and up to date subject matter and analysis and understanding of policies and their impact. This is a highly developmental and aspirational understanding of professionalism, aligned with improvement and self-improvement, rather than regulation. As in the previous LSIS seminars, the proposition remains that ‘regulation and compliance can only take us so far; the challenge is what our professional

aspirations should look like'. More detail about professional identity, development and professional communities is at annex one. There are also some quotes by key thinkers about learning in this annex.

## **The role of Professionals and Professional Bodies in the Further Education and Skills System**

Professionals and professional bodies have a crucial role to play as part of the regulatory landscape. Professional body membership gives the public, the sector and government assurance that services are being delivered by qualified and expert professionals who are self-regulating based on a code of professional practice (or conduct) that they have developed. These codes set a standard and are a source of professional pride. In addition, there are robust and fair processes for professional bodies to consider allegations that an individual member may have breached the code, and if there is a case then to take appropriate action, including removing them from the register of the professional body.

Professionals and professional bodies have an even more powerful role to play as part of the improvement and self-improvement landscape. Professional bodies give the public, the sector and the government confidence that individual professionals will be striving to continuously improve their skills, knowledge and expertise to offer the highest quality and exemplary professional services they can to their learners. Professional bodies have the potential to really tap into and help ignite more enthusiasms and ambition among individual; teachers and trainers to develop, hone and strengthen their practice to benefit learners.

Teachers and trainers are in pole position as they affect the quality of experience and success for their learners most directly, and IfL has over 180,000 members. We believe IfL has a distinctive contribution and that together we can build on our progress to maximise benefits for members and their learners.

Most teachers and trainers are dual professionals. As well as being professionals in relation to teaching and training methods, often they have professional backgrounds and experience from a first career or a career in tandem with teaching and training, for example as a plumber or a lawyer.

In addition, many holders of roles other than teaching and training may be professionals and members of a range of professional bodies, for example in relation to finance and marketing. Landex recently surveyed its colleges to identify the professional associations to which their staff overall belong, and the long list of some 140 at annex two is fascinating. HOLEX also surveyed its members and over 100 associations are included at annex two, and a case study from a work based learning provider from ALP. Many bodies are linked to the dual professionalism of teachers and trainers, and some to other roles. We propose that it is clear that:

- professional bodies already contribute to the sector
- there is a mix of associations, networks and professional bodies

- that the role of professional bodies is largely a 'hidden' treasure, and
- that there is significant potential for IfL and other professional bodies to play an influential and positive role for the sector.

**What is the range of professional bodies to which staff belong in your organisation, and how are you drawing on this resource for improving quality?**

**How do you we think we can exploit the potential of professional body membership for improving quality for the sector in future?**

Recent research by London Economics (*An Economic Impact Assessment of the Consultative Committee for Professional Management Organisations*, December 2008) found that employers place a high value on the skills provided by professional bodies and that professional bodies also generate broader economic impacts. They found that members of professional organisations achieve a 9 percentage point increase in the probability of being employed, controlling for other personal, educational, regional and job-related characteristics.

## **Next Steps**

IfL is uniquely placed to unite senses of the word 'professional' and support individuals at different stages in the professional journey. We do not have all the answers but we are happy to surface the questions and engage in the dialogue that will keep the issue of excellence in teaching and learning a live one.

IfL is also willing to explore with other professional bodies linked to the dual professionalism of teachers and trainers how we can work together to support professionals in the further education and skills context, and how together we can add most value to the sector and learners.

## References

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## Annex One

### Professional identity

I may share features of a professional identity with other teachers – I have the same qualification, the same job title, the same pay, similar daily experiences, belong to the same professional body and the public will have a similar perception of us. However my individual professional identity is more than that. It is a pride in practice that is personal, private and situational. It requires a professional curiosity, commitment to continuous learning and acknowledgement that my expertise is always in need of expansion.

### Professionalism and Professional Development

'Learning is for life not just your early career.' (Husbands, 2009). Professor Husbands recently wrote of the need to rethink teacher education in the light of the rapid changes we are experiencing globally and the need to prepare citizens for those changes through education. This thinking has emerged from the International Alliance of Leading Educational Institutions. If we are to promote lifelong learning in our learners then we must model good practice.

*"Teachers' continued learning and professional development are key avenues for developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to teach all students to reach higher standards. Effective professional development strategies must:*

*☞ lead to changes in knowledge and skills of teachers to more effectively respond to the problem of practice; ([www.intlalliance.org/reports.html](http://www.intlalliance.org/reports.html), 2009)*

*"There is an urgent need to recognize teachers' work as complex and demanding, and improvement in teacher quality requires a re-conceptualization of how we prepare a new generation of teachers.*

*Simultaneously, a change in the form and function of teacher preparation is best based on a strengthened or redefined professionalism. The concept of a redefined professionalism:*

*☞ recognizes teacher's work as being based on specialized knowledge and skills, expecting all teachers to have the ability to use them appropriately in a variety of institutional contexts and with diverse student demographics;*

*☞ necessitates that teachers adopt an inquiry orientation to investigate pedagogical issues, and critically utilize evidence-based knowledge to inform professional practice;*

☞ requires teachers to accept responsibility for the academic and emotional outcomes of their students by setting realistic goals, structuring empowering learning environments, and facilitating and guiding learners;

☞ accepts the involvement of education stakeholders and non-education communities to work in collaboration to ensure that educational reforms and efforts remain pertinent to society; and

☞ expects teachers' self-directed commitment to continuous learning related to the individual's own expertise and experiences and is directed towards enhancing student outcomes and strengthening professional identity.”  
([www.intlalliance.org/reports.html](http://www.intlalliance.org/reports.html), 2009)

## Professional Communities and the Obligation to Profess

But there are other characteristics that we expect of professionals. Most teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to their learners within the context of their teaching and learning and their specific relationships. Should they also show that commitment to a community of learners in general, their learners when they are with other teachers or to other learners in other institutions or indeed their professional colleagues? This may require them 'to profess'. Commitment to professional practice within a profession is not only personal but an obligation to the profession itself. Teachers need to develop communities of professional practice, extending beyond their employing organisations where they can engage in developmental dialogues about the profession and those they serve.

## Some thoughts on Learning

*The idea is there, locked inside. All you have to do is remove the excess stone.*  
(Michael Angelo)

*Wisdom is not a product of schooling but a lifelong attempt to acquire it.*  
(Albert Einstein)

*A wonderful harmony arises from joining together the seemingly unconnected.*  
(Heraclitus)

*What we see depends mainly on what we look for.*  
(Sir John Lubbock)

*It's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change*  
(Charles Darwin)

## **Annex Two**

### **Membership of Professional and other Bodies in the Sector**

#### **Membership of Professional (and other) bodies - a straw poll of Landex (land-based) Colleges**

AA - Arboricultural Association  
 AAT – Association of Accounting Technicians  
 ACC - Association of Cricket Coaches  
 ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants  
 AfPP - Association for Perioperative Practice PGA -Professional Golfers' Association  
 Agricultural Education Society  
 Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority  
 Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology  
 Association of Accounting Technicians  
 Association of Applied Biologists  
 Association of British Wild Animal Keepers  
 Association of Chartered Certified Accountants  
 Association of Librarians in Landbased College and Universities  
 ATL - Association of Teachers and Lecturers  
 BAGMA - British Association of Garden Machinery Manufacturers  
 BASC - British Association Shooting Clubs  
 BASES British Association of Sport & Exercise Scientists  
 BCS - British Computer Society  
 BFA - British Florist Association  
 BIGGA - British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association  
 BPS - British Psychological Society  
 British Artist Blacksmith Association  
 British Association for Counsellors & Physiotherapists  
 British Association of Landscape Industries  
 British Association of Sport and Exercise Science  
 British Canoe Union  
 British Council for Archaeology  
 British Dog Groomers Association  
 British Dyslexia Association.  
 British Ecological Society  
 British Horse Society  
 British Numismatic Society Fellow  
 British Psychological Society  
 British Show Jumping Association  
 British Society of Animal Science  
 British Veterinary Dental Association  
 Bureau of Freelance Photographers  
 BVNA - British Veterinary Nursing Association  
 Chartered Chemist  
 Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
Chartered Institute of Management Accountancy  
Chartered Institute of Marketing  
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy  
Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management  
Chartered Insurance Institute  
CIB - Chartered Institute of Bankers  
CIEA - Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors  
CILP - Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals  
CIMA - Chartered Institute of Management Accountants  
CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
CMI - Chartered Management Institute  
Community and District Nursing Association.  
Countryside Landowners Association  
Countryside Management Association  
Dyslexia Guild  
ECB - English Cricket Board  
ECBCA - English Cricket Board Coaches Association  
ENTO  
FACA – Football Association (FA) Coaches Association  
Federation of Small Businesses  
Fellow British Professional Photography  
Fellow Chartered Society of Designers  
Fellow of HE Academy  
FICF - Institute of Chartered Foresters Fellow  
Floristry Society  
GCA - Golf Club Association  
Guild of Professional Gardeners  
HEA -Higher Education Academy Fellow/s  
Higher Education Academy  
IAM - Institute of Agricultural Management  
ICF - Institute of Chartered Foresters  
IFA Irish Football Association  
IfL - Institute for Learning  
ILM - Institute of Leadership and Management  
Institute for Agricultural Journalists  
Institute for Outdoor Learning  
Institute of Agricultural Secretaries and Administrators  
Institute of Biology  
Institute of Careers Guidance  
Institute of Chartered Accountants  
Institute of Customer Service  
Institute of Direct Marketing  
Institute of Food Science & Technology  
Institute of Horticulture  
Institute of Hospitality  
Institute of Risk and Safety Members  
Institute of Safety & Health

Institute of Safety and Health  
Institute of the Motor Industry  
Institution of Agricultural Engineers  
Institute for Learning  
International Plant Propagators Society  
IOG - Institute of Groundsmanship  
ISA - International Society of Arboriculture  
ISHS - International Society of Horticultural Scientists  
IVA - 'The independent Organisation for Licensed Verifiers & Assessors'  
LALNET - Lancashire Academic Library Network - Chairman  
Mountain Leader Association  
NAAC  
National Association of Disability Practitioners  
National Association of Environmental Educators  
National Association of Field Studies Officers  
National Bowling Coach association  
National Governors Ass.  
National Register of Sprayer Operatives  
National Sheep Association  
NFU - National Farmers Union  
NHF - National Horticultural Forum  
NIAB - National Institute of Agricultural Botany  
North and Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce  
Nursing, Midwife and Community Nursing council.  
Pet Care Trust  
PFA Professional Footballers Association  
Professional Golf Association  
RCVS – Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
RFS - Royal Forestry Society  
RFU - Rugby Football Association  
RHS -Royal Horticultural Society  
Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers  
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
Royal Entomological Society  
Royal Horticulture Society  
Royal Institute of Public Health  
Royal Society of Chemistry  
Royal Yacht Association  
Society of Floristry  
Society of Garden Designers  
Society of Master Saddlers  
Society of Sports Therapists  
The Kew Guild  
The Landscape Institute  
The Society of Floristry  
The Soil Association  
UCU  
UK Athletics  
UK Strength and Conditioning Association

Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths  
 Worshipful Company of Farriers

**Membership of Professional (and other) bodies - a straw poll of HOLEX member organisations**

1st4Sport (Football Association)  
 ACAS  
 ALL (Association of Language Learning) Amateur Football Alliance (AFA)  
 Amateur Swimming Association  
 Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)  
 Association of Aromatherapists  
 Association of BSL Teachers & Assessors  
 Association of Chartered Certified Accountants  
 Association of Language Learning  
 Association of Reflexologists  
 Association of Sign Language Interpreters  
 Association of the International Dance Teachers Association (uk) (AIDTA)  
 Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association (AMBDA)  
 Association of Natural Medicine (ANM)  
 Associate of the Royal College of Music (ARCM)  
 Amateur Swimming Association (ASA)  
 Association of Teachers of Lipreading  
 Badminton England  
 Bead workers Guild  
 BILD – British Institute for Learning Difficulties  
 British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy  
 British Computer Society  
 British Safety Council (BSC)  
 British Surfing Association (BSA)  
 British Swimming and the Amateur Swimming Association  
 British Wheel of Yoga  
 CACHE  
 CIEH – Chartered Institute for Environmental Health  
 Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors  
 Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals  
 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)  
 Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).  
 Chartered Institute of Linguists  
 Chartered Institute of Management Accountants  
 Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development  
 CILT - The National Centre for Languages  
 CIM and Chartered Marketer  
 CILT Centre for Information on Language Teaching & Research  
 Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)  
 Chartered Management Institute  
 City of London Guides  
 Complementary Therapy Association (CThA)  
 Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body  
 CPA - Craft Potters Association

Crafts Council  
Design and Technology Association  
Educational Centres Association  
Embroiderers' Guild  
English Bridge Union Teachers' Association  
Essential Skills Development Centre (University of Warwick)  
Extend  
Felpham School of Holistic Training  
Football Association  
Friends of Yoga International  
Goethe Institute (German)  
Higher Education Academy  
Institute of Administrative Management  
Institute of Assessors & Internal Verifiers  
Institute of Career Guidance  
Institute of Certified Book Keepers  
Instituto Cervantes (Spanish)  
Istituto di Cultura (Italian)  
Institute of Customer Service  
Institute of Hospitality  
Institute for Leadership & Management  
Institute for Learning  
Institute of Linguists  
Institute of Photography  
Institute of Tourist Guiding  
Iyenga Yoga Institute  
ITEC  
Keep Fit Association  
LLN (London Language Network)  
L.T.C.L (Licentiate Diploma from Trinity College of Music, London) and F.T.C.L  
(Fellowship from Trinity College of Music, London)  
Machine Embroiderers Guild  
Mathematical Association  
Metamorphic Association  
NARIC  
NATECLA  
National Association of Communication Professionals with Deaf & Deaf Blind  
People  
Network Workplace Language, Literacy and Numeracy  
Nursing and Midwifery Council  
Quilters' Guild  
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists  
Royal Institute of Navigators (MRIN)  
Royal Yachting Association  
Royal College of Art  
Royal College of Nursing  
Rugby Football Union (RFU)  
Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS)  
Royal Society of Arts  
Royal Yachting Association

Shiatsu Society  
Society for Teachers in Business Education  
TaiChi Union  
The Library Association  
The Register of Exercise Professionals  
United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dance and Kindred Arts (UKA)  
Volleyball England

... and lots of specific ones for bookbinders, ceramicists, watercolour painters, printmakers and alternative therapies and holistic medicine etc

notes

- This listing excludes staff associations/trades unions listed by correspondents – UCU, Unison, NUT, Musicians Union, Equity etc etc
- A correspondent also adds that “most awarding bodies also provide professional development “ – ABC, Edexcel, OCR and NCFE are explicitly listed
- IfL was also mentioned many more times than once....!

- - - *Listing compiled from HOLEX member e-mail responses by Bob Powell, January 2009*

**Case Study of a small specialist work based learning provider from ALP**

British Institute for Innkeepers (BII)  
Institute of Guild and Brewing (IGB)  
Institute for Leadership & Management  
Institute for Learning – all trainers.