Review

Considering the mystery of professionalism: Further education in the UK

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Abstract: The paper considers the concept of professionalism within the UK Further Education (FE) through an analysis of the literature. The paper identifies professionalism as a key feature of the changing landscape within UK FE since the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), which incorporated FE colleges, allowing them levels of autonomy and discretion not seen before. With it came new staffing contracts and changes to the expectations of a 'professionalised' staff team. This paper suggests that despite 30 years having passed since incorporation, FE Colleges and their management still struggle with the concept of professionalism and its reality, noting particularly the dysfunctional nature of the sector and its difficulty in having a defined identity.

Keywords: professionalism; further education; UK

1. Introduction

Within the UK, the Further Education sector may be considered as the education sector that has changed most of all. Robson [1] highlighted that as the sector has grown, it has become increasingly complex. Growth has come in many guises, notably in size of site, but most importantly, breath of provision has led to a curriculum that spans from the age of 14 to no upper limit. As all this has changed, the concept of professionalism has become increasingly contested [2], while others suggest it is a shifting phenomenon [3].

The issue of professionalism within the FE is and has remained a constant issue for consideration for the previous 30 years and is one that has not been fully addressed despite many academics and professionals trying to narrow it down. It has been such an issue that a report was commissioned by the Minister of State for Further Education, Skills, and Lifelong Learning. The independent report, published in 2012, sought to address the professionalism debate, in particular attempting to address how professionalism could be characterised, implemented, and supported in the FE sector in the absence of a 'registered membership' process that had fallen from grace through the Institute for Learning (IfL). The report concluded a need for greater autonomy within the sector and the freedom to be more self-regulatory, allowing institutions to concentrate on raising standards and developing a code for the development of the lecturing staff [4]. Arguably the report led to the demise of the Institute for Learning (IfL) and introduction of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF).

Within this paper, we shall seek to consider what professionalism is within the context of the further education sector, what has created the situation, and how this has manifested itself as a contested term.

2. Background

A number of key political and regulatory changes have helped to shape the further education landscape and, with it, influence the 'Professional' landscape that has impacted the professional debate that has engulfed the sector. Key professional standards may be split into three periods, what can be described as the FENTO (Further Education National Training Organisation) years, the IfL (Institute for Learning) years, and most recently the ETF (Education and Training Foundation) years, as the three critical attempts to set professional standards for the FE sector. There is, however, a blurring of this in that, in essence, the FENTO standards were morphed into the IfL standards, which really set out a registration and membership process. There also remain key political changes (UK General Elections) since the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) as a key element that identifies the influence that government objectives, policies, and priorities have had on the sector. This is deemed a key factor that has created the dysfunctional and fragmented sector that many see now. This includes the changing funding regimes that have been used to prioritise funding into specific areas so as to channel college activities to meet government priorities. We must also consider the different inspection regimes that have been used to measure and control the sector, many of which would suggest that the formats are not necessarily fit for purpose and are borrowed from other education sectors and applied to the FE sector out of necessity. This in itself identifies a number of issues in that the FE Sector, due to its broad appeal, has been subject to differing (and often contradicting) inspection regimes at the same time due to the nature and cross-over of its provision. In particular, this may over time have included FE colleges being in fear of Ofsted's (Office for Standards in Education) looking at a college's 16–19 provision, the ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate) looking at adult (or post-19 provision), and QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) reviewing a college's higher education provision. Thus, perhaps this provides a backdrop for understanding the sector's attempts to restrict many of the characteristics of professionalism in favour of control.

3. Professionalism

In defining professionalism, it is first necessary to decide on what constitutes a professional. If we take the Oxford Dictionaries Online [5] view of a professional, we find it relates to work that requires special training; thus, if accurately defined, professionalism is "the competencies or skill expected of a professional" noting "the key to quality and efficiency is professionalism". In addition, according to Hoyle [6], the term 'professionalism' denotes the notion of 'profession' and has a range of characteristics that may be associated with it, such as self-governance, ethical code, education, work-related, and vocational. Further to this, Randle and Brady [7] emphasises the need for common values in a profession; they make note of the notion of professional autonomy. The common flow of these ideas suggests reliance on skills and expertise. This argument is further supported by a number of writers who argue for the need to have both subject expertise and knowledge [8]. Further to this, Armitage [8] identified three central features of professionalism, which were identified as specialist knowledge, autonomy, and service. A broad conclusion therefore is that

the notion of professionalism has its roots in a high level of skills and expertise, with a basis of key values and behaviours in terms of a 'code'. It seems, however, that crucial to this notion of professionalism are the concepts of autonomy and self-regulation. Interestingly, the Charted Institute of Personnel and Development [9] has attempted to highlight their expectation of their membership into a 'Profession Map' outlining the expectations of HR professionals in terms of knowledge, values, and behaviours. Critical to their road map are these ideas of self-regulation, autonomy, and expectation.

In considering this, Feather [10] notes the interchangeable use of the words professional and professionalism. The terms are used interchangeably and may also often include the use of the word profession alongside it. It is therefore important to understand what we mean by a profession and to consider whether FE teaching is a profession. We shall consider this later in the paper. It is however important to consider this range of words associated with the word professionalism, as they are not always used within similar contexts, even when discussing similar contexts. This is supported by Tummons [11], who suggests that there is not one single definition that is accepted universally and that even if there were, it would be hugely difficult to apply it in post-compulsory education. Subsequently, Schuck et al. [12] state, "professionalism is commonly understood as an individual's adherence to a set of standards, code of conduct or collection of qualities that characterise accepted practice within a particular area of activity". Previously, Farrugia [13] had described professionalism as "openness and exposure to scrutiny whereby one's pronouncements, beliefs, values and actions can be analysed and evaluate for their validity".

Within the context of professionalism, it is difficult to find one agreed definition, as to many professionalism means different things. Tummons [11] argues. "It is naive to expect that a single and uncontested definition of professionalism should be able to trip off the tongue and be applied to a tutor in adult education or an F.E. College.'' Tummons is arguably making two different points within this quote. Firstly, the idea that there is not one single definition that is accepted universally, and secondly, that even if there were, it would be hugely difficult to apply it in post-compulsory education. Similarly, Feather [10] considers the notion of professionalism within FE colleges, but from a college-based higher education perspective. Feather [14] suggests that professionalism is a complex subjective term and, as such, is difficult to define. Consequently, Plowright and Barr [15] note two strands to the notion of professionalism. The first strand supports the notion of defining characteristics, while the second identifies the notion of power and control, suggesting that professionals have an element of standing and power that allows them to exercise some form of autonomous activity of influence and self-direction. Perhaps a professional is one where self-determination is in some way at the forefront of behaviours. Alongside this, none of the crucial aspects underpinning behaviour, beliefs, and conduct are values. Hailstead, cited in the study, describes values as "Principles, fundamental convictions, standards or life stories which act as general guides to behaviour or reference points in decision making" [8]. Values are therefore crucial in the approach to education.

Two traditional views of education are that education's purpose is to maximise the potential of each individual and education's purpose is to develop the individual around the needs of society. This can further be developed to consider how the purpose

of the further education has been adapted and developed to meet the agenda of different governments, leading to some commentators and politicians discussing education as a political football [16], while others may consider it as a tool for social and economic change. Alongside this, Stoten [17] suggests key elements of professionalism centre around being ethical and the maintenance of a self-identity. He suggests that an ethical code or framework is fundamental to the notion of professionalism. Corbett [18] in research focusing on further education, middle managers identified four pillars that they suggested denoted professionalism the first centred on the ability "to lead and foster teamwork". The second pillar they acknowledged as providing drive to support achievement. The said pillow was resilience and, in particular, adaptability towards change, and finally the fourth pillow sent it on good understanding and commitment to the further education sector.

4. Government intervention and policy

The FE Sector has undergone significant adaptation and change since the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), which many would describe as a watershed moment for the post-compulsory education sectors. In essence, the Act changed the landscape for both further and higher education, which many would say still has repercussions today. Many writers, including Simkins and Lumby [19], point to the changing nature of education in the last quarter of the 20th century, highlighting key drivers of change including marketisation and the changing nature of the learners. This is also coupled with the continuous education reforms; in particular, this centres around the move away from the concept of education for knowledge to education for the purpose of skills development for the job market. Clow [20] raised questions regarding the rationale behind policy strategy towards the FE sector through funding cuts and pressures to meet agendas. Illsley and Walker [21] confirm the FE sector as being known as the 'Cinderella sector' of the education sub-sections on the basis of poor funding levels on a student-head basis.

Lucas and Crowther [22] refer to the "Logic of Incorporation" to explain the rationale behind the incorporation of colleges in 1992, explaining it as a part of a neo-liberal paradigm that was to become synonymous with the wider public sector. Key elements of this included marketisation, managerialism, and rationalisation. In essence, incorporation brought with it business processes designed with the purpose of making the sector more efficient and economic, with an intended outcome of being effective. This, however, is open to interpretation of how these could be measured, and successive governments have introduced and changed approaches, which has led to a number of issues and challenges for the sector and may have created inertia in terms of driving the professionalism agenda. Gleeson [23] explains the term incorporation as the local management of further education colleges, separated from local education authority and with self-governance. He suggests that while this independence may have brought autonomy in decisions and the opportunity to operate as a business, it also brought with it greater centralised (national government) control via market funding and management processes. In particular, Gleeson [23] identified increased pressure on teachers measured in terms of achievement rates and retention (success rates). It therefore remains contestable as to whether incorporation was about

freeing up FE colleges to make business-like decisions and thus become more entrepreneurial in their activities or whether it was more about shifting control from the local education authority to central government. This would subsequently allow central government to use the FE College as a vehicle for meeting the skills agenda and arguably for making a more cost-effective sector. This itself highlights an interesting view in that 'ownership' and the budget for the FE sector have been kicked around central government on numerous occasions. The sector has sat under the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment), BIS (Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills), and the Department for Education (DfE), all with their own priorities and pressures, which in turn shift priorities and expectations.

In support of this, Ball [24] and Spenceley [2] suggest incorporation provided a vehicle for institutions to cut cost, drive improvement and efficiency, and raise standards and quality. In particular this notion of standards and quality driven by quantitative measures, which in itself may have led to 'twisting' of data. Without wishing to expand on the interpretation of Spenceley or Ball, this raises the question around grade inflation or over-marking to ensure college statistics are improved. That said, however, colleges cannot be blamed for the structuring and subsequent re-structuring of qualifications such as A Levels and BTECs, which allowed for multiple attempts and resits, which arguably has led to the 'improvement' in achievement data. This in itself links back to the way FE colleges were measured and funded by Central Government processes.

Avis [25] suggested that incorporation led to a number of recurring themes: Loss of control; intensification of labour; increased administration; perceived marginalisation of teaching; stress on measurable performance indicators, each reducing autonomy and raising levels of managerial control and monitoring.

5. Managerialism and quality assurance

The IfL was just one attempt by the government and regulatory bodies to impose professionalism and a code of conduct on the sector. Avis [25] had previously noted attempts by government bodies such as the DFES, Ofsted, and FENTO attempting to invoke professionalism through a fully trained workforce. Avis [25], however, argued that often these attempts ignored the labour situation that many lectures found themselves in. Reflecting on this, Atkins and Tummons [26] highlighted the notion of professional standards as an outcome of the managerial perspective of professionalism and, as such, leads the perspective of professionalism that manifests within managerialist organisations that are commonplace within the FE sector. Tummons [27] points to the ETF (Education and Training Foundation) standards (2014) as a move towards dressing many of the key issues, however, suggests that there is a there is a need for this to be better embedded into working cultures before any real judgment can be made. Significantly, it remains to be acknowledged the continued voluntary basis of the implementation of them. Tummons [27] does, however, note the compulsory nature of inspection and audit processes and measures and, as such, suggests this as a major issue. The nature of audit and inspection manifests both in terms of individual managerial approaches to staffing through the observation of teaching and learning (OTL) processes and also at the college level through the college

inspection framework, which creates a culture of mistrust and checking throughout all levels.

Initially looking at it through the staffing lens, Boocock [28] is critical of the Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) cultures within the FE sector, suggesting that the rigidity of the process coupled with the 'one size fits all approach' has had a restricting impact on the performance and effectiveness of lecturing staff. Boocock [28] bemoans the audit culture that has become a key element of the managerialist approach that has besieged the FE sector and has reduced the professionalism of staff. Alongside this, O'Leary [29] suggests that OTL systems and managerialism are the manifestations of a lack of trust by managers in lecturing staff. As such, this lack of trust and managerial strategies has led to a reduction in professionalism and professional identity amongst lecturing staff within college environments. A significant aspect of the issue around professionalism is the concept of autonomy. Stronach et al. [30] note the loss of 'professional control coupled with these deepening surveillance strategies. Simons [31] concludes that education has always been built on the basis of control; however, control permeated through the sector, completely reducing any autonomy available. Eraut [32] identified three central features of professionalism, which were identified as specialist knowledge, autonomy, and service. As we have seen previously, the specialist knowledge is quite clear, but the autonomy and service ports are grey areas that must be uncovered. Certainly, any tutor has a high level of autonomy in that they control what goes on in the classroom or learning environment; however, there are enough checks going on to limit that level of autonomy. Inspections (internal and external) lesson observations, scrutiny of results, feedback sheets, and learner voice all act as checks on activity and therefore limit some of the autonomy that may otherwise be abused.

Others consider the managerialist approach as a key factor affecting professionalism. Bathmaker and Avis [33] suggest the notion of professionalism as being like a Janus identity. The first face manifests as the managerialists approach, while the other manifests as the authentic practice. They support this notion of de-professionalisation. Tummons [11] supports this notion and describes this as two discourses. A significant factor in this is how institutions visualise their approach. Illsley and Walker [21] emphasise the lack of 'Caring' regarding standards and educational ethos by managers; instead, they focus on results and achievement regardless of student engagement and behaviour. An analysis of the inspection regime, the use of data, funding methodology, and the 'league table' approach provides a key driver and an influencer for college managers. The inspection and judging system drives a focus on 'ends justifying the means'. Robson and Bailey [34] acknowledged this in an earlier work, noting the decline in support available for individual students as further constraints are put on staff. Notably, Illsley and Waller [21] concluded that accountability and standardisation do not necessarily result in improved standards. They suggest that the financial pressures centred on achievement ultimately lead to pressure to ensure achievement success, which may come at the cost of maintaining standards and hence professionalism. Crucially, as Avis [25] suggests, the focus on performativity and targets has resulted in reductions in professionalism, as lectures are resistant to risk-taking due to the focus on accountability and being measured. Critically, he suggests that alongside this teacher identity has been reformed.

Feather [10] highlights lecturers in FE have little control over what they do. He makes use of the term communities of practice. In particular, he highlights the clash between the individual's goals and those of the department or organisation. He acknowledges the notion of managerialism with the emphasis on marketization and control. Lucas [35] suggests that the fundamental rationale for professional standards in FE was centred around state regulation of the sector. He highlights one of the key issues is around interpretation and context, both by organisations and government itself. They are further complicated by having 192 standards broken down into performance criteria in an NVQ and competence-based approach.

Feather [10] highlights the work of Nixon [36], who suggests even the higher education profession has been de-professionalised. He suggests this happened previously in the FE Sector long before. In particular, he suggested these approaches have been borne out of commercial practice and they do not fit. In line with this, Stoten [17] is critical of attempts to impose business constructs of professionalism into education. Hillier and Appleby [37] acknowledge the shifting landscape of government policy and in particular how this results in a dysfunctionality within the college environments where the fast-changing nature results in reactive processes that do not allow the college to plan effectively. Stoten [17] notes the re-definition of professionalism into the professionality by the government. He identifies this notion of professionality as being focused on conformity and subordination. That is built on following predefined rules and procedures. In addition, Feather [10] questions the rationale behind the obsession with having professional standards in the FE sector and the constant changes to them and who develops them. Additionally, Stoten [17] highlights that the recognition of "the transferability of professional status" between schools and colleges is of massive significance.

6. Workforce

Avis's [25] five themes outline the recurring nature of the challenges faced by FE in general, but notably by the teaching staff within the FE colleges. This arguably led to the fragmentation of the workforce and the disruption to the notion of professionalism. In support of this, Spenceley [2] points to the rise of government influence in the sector and to the rise of managerialism as key factors in the decline of the notion of professionalism. There has been an increasing drive and emphasis on performance improvement and productivity; this, she points out, is undertaken under the auspices of efficiency and effectiveness. Bourdieu [38] would point to this as 'symbolic violence' [39]. Notably, Bourdieu is highlighting the systematic downgrading of the role of the lecturer, which results in reducing the professional nature of the workforce. This was potentially identified by Randle and Brady [7], who pointed to the decline of an autonomous and spontaneous workforce, and Avis et al. [40] highlight the movement of education as delivered in the FE sector as becoming a matter of process rather than focused on the subject.

This starts to contradict those initial ideas of Hoyle [6] and Eraut [32], who note the need for self-regulation and autonomy as key factors in denoting professionalism, yet the whole practice of incorporation potentially led to the removal of these fundamental facets. Tully [41] highlights three lenses of professionalism within FE.

These he considers expertise in service and compliance. In his research, he proposes a tripartite framework demonstrating the relationship between each of these lenses. In considering this, he highlights each of these lenses with a focus. He associates with himself, service with students, and compliance with the organisation. Focusing on this, he recognises staff perceptions and linkages to the concept of professionalism. In a later article, Tully [42] links to the relationship between teachers and managers within FE as a critical feature in the concept of professionalism within FE. He suggests that teaching staff are heavily invested in supporting their students to achieve, and as such, this drives behaviour. Subsequently, this approach leads to a culture driven by managerialism. Furthermore, Tully [43] notes that economic, social, and cultural capital influences our thinking of professionalism. In this article, he emphasises the importance of leadership culture and, in particular, the values they place on areas such as expertise and the status placed on teaching staff.

7. Teaching qualifications and professional recognition

In accepting the preposition that teaching in an FE college is a profession. The need to have a teaching qualification (since the late 1990s) and more recently for that to be QTLS (Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills). This is further enhanced by the need to be qualified or experienced in your teaching area, and the need to hold membership in the Institute for Learning (IfL) up until 2014 (at least) would support this argument. It is important to review what this actually means in the context of professionalism and the FE sector. From April 2008 until it ceased operations in 2014, all tutors were guided by the IfL's code of practice, which effectively licenses tutors to teach in the FE sector, similar to how teachers have been licensed to practice in schools. The IfL was an attempt to create a more professional approach to the sector by creating a professional body to look after its members, with a primary function of raising standards in the sector and giving status to the role we undertake. The code of conduct expected all tutors to demonstrate evidence of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). While CPD must be seen as a positive step, we must ensure that the right type of CPD is being undertaken and not just CPD for ticking a box.

One of the major issues of professionalism surrounded the non-compulsion to hold a teaching qualification. A report by the Further Education Funding Council in 1999 [44] indicated that only 59% of tutors in FE had a full level 4 teaching qualification. Dennis [44] notes the attempt to professionalise the sector with lecturers needing to have Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS) status coupled with membership in the IfL. This attempted to give priority to the status held by qualified teachers who were required to have QTS (qualified teacher status) and were regulated as members of the General Teaching Council (GTC). However, the IfL did not have the regulatory status of the GTC and did not emphasise the role needing a professional code as part of membership. More so, emphasis relied merely on membership. Plowright and Barr [15] suggested the IfL actually has the reverse effect and instead results in the de-professionalisation of FE lecturers. This may be evidenced by the fact that while membership was funded, lecturers were willing to engage; however, once funding was removed and lecturers were expected to pay for their own membership, then there was resistance to being part of it [45], and subsequently membership

declined rapidly. This was coupled with the context that it became voluntary to join and no longer a requirement to practice. In essence, by removing the compulsive nature of the requirement, any 'teeth' to enforce the standards were blunted. Even today, the IfLs (devised) successor, the ETF (Education and Training Foundation), remains non-compulsory and, as such, retains little influence across the sector, beyond setting standards for teacher-training courses.

Houle proposed a model of professionalism in which he identified fourteen criteria, while Millerson's earlier model had five characteristics [8]. The introduction of both the IFL version of the criteria and that of the ETF scale significantly identified extensive competencies, which broke the standards down into a competence-based model rather than a code of conduct or system of behaviours that could be adhered to.

Notably, Spenceley [2] highlights that in all areas of teaching, other than that of the post-compulsory sector, the notion of professionalism is embedded into the training processes. Significantly, training for teaching within the compulsory sector is compulsory prior to engaging in employment, while post-compulsory education is more commonly associated with in-service training and development. In addition, she notes that many teachers in the FE sector are employed on the basis of previous expertise in an applied occupation. This suggested an amalgamation of individuals with no central value core. This in itself provides a limited approach to consistency. The development of staff (collectively training) also assists with the fragmentation. Boocock [28] points out that the 'top-down' approaches to CPD are designed to produce a homogenous outcome that fits nicely in a controlled framework as opposed to allowing for a move-free thinking approach to teaching and learning. To emphasis this, he commands a need for a more critical pedagogy, which will allow for a more adaptive and free approach to the delivery of the curriculum.

In a similar vein, Tummons [27] supports the earlier work of Gray and Whitty [46], who argue that the notion of professionalism has been diminished through too much power in the hands of the state, concentration on compliance, and a focus on competence and training rather than on knowledge. Tummons [27] places that lack of professionalism at the feet of the training mechanism for those teaching within the FE sector. He suggests the lack of professional standards for those training to teach in the FE sector compared to the schools themselves. He notes that most FE lectures are on a 'second career' when they move into teaching and undertake their teaching qualification (or training) as an in-service qualification. In addition, Tummons [27] also points to the lack of effective mentoring within the FE College as a second key issue. Significantly, Tummons [27] suggests that if professionalisation is needed to produce professionalism, it needs to be practitioner-led, with an argument from a bottom-up process rather than an employer-led top-down approach determining it. This, he suggests, may lead to further buy-in by the sector and the development of an appropriate system and code of conduct/behaviour that lecturers may be able to align with. As Gleeson [47] suggests, while the concept of professionalism is important at a high level, there is little agreement placed on the 'shop-floor' amongst the lecturing community.

8. Reflective practice

A key element of this which coincides with this notion of professionalism, is reflection. Through reflective practice staff evaluate and improve their performance. For a tutor reflection should happen naturally before, during and after any taught session. Ecclestone [48] argues that reflection works where there is a flexible approach and an openness to adapting practice, through a process of rigorous analysis of what happened and consideration of how changes may be implemented to improve the activity. This also suggests a need for the consideration of social awareness and consideration of the wider context of what is intended through the education process. This links back to the notion of values and behaviours discussed previously. Ultimately, reflection is therefore a means to improve the effectiveness of the tutor and lead to improved performance across the sector. It is also an opportunity for the tutor to take responsibility for their own development. Thus, reflection should lead to improved performance. One method, which we have previously been critical of, is lesson observations. If used for the development purposes, rather than for judgement purposes lesson observations are a powerful tool and significant in a professional arsenal. In particular peer observations are a useful way of undertaking reflection. The opportunity to reflect on feedback from a peer can be hugely developmental and can also give opportunity to share experience and develop practice. The opportunity to observe a peer can also be hugely beneficial giving the opportunity to watch another tutor and learn from their practice. This fits significantly with an ethos of professionalism in terms of self-autonomy and self-regulation. It is widely accepted that the process of reflection is essential to the development and understanding of teaching and learning. In carrying out reflection it is important that it is meaningful and critical in nature [49].

A significant reason why this shift in control and standardising the nature of FE and the notion of measuring links partly to the notion of the purpose of further education. Reflecting on the point made earlier there remains the notion of further education being a vehicle for social and economic change and part of this results in the shift from 'education' to 'training'. Spenceley [2] highlights a key note of the further Education sector as "practical skills" as opposed to education, thus diluting the notion of teaching and education and the reduction of the notion of professionalism. As such, Spenceley [2] highlights the fragmented nature of further education and the contradiction between the delivery of theoretical and practical knowledge, this builds on the work of Randle and Brady [7]. In particular they, support the notion of skills related as opposed to academic based. Lucas [35] also points to this fragmented nature of the post-compulsory sector as a reason for the lack of professional identity. They note FE Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges and Adult Learning Providers in one sense, but also note A levels, vocational, adult, HE and apprenticeships in terms of provision. A further aspect of fragmentation may be identified in terms of academic subjects taught by 'professional teachers' and vocational subjects taught by 'occupational professionals'. Of course, many subject areas within FE Colleges face a mix of both within the same departments. In essence while we talk of an FE Sector or more recently a Learning and Skills Sector, there is little in terms of a homogenous whole, instead there is an amalgamation of organisations, under a general banner. Even if we focus

on what we would think of as an FE College may be subdivided into what others may describe or define as a General FE College, a Specialist FE College or a Tertiary College. We have also recently seen the formation of College Groups (e.g., Newcastle, Hull etc) while others have sought degree awarding powers to differentiate themselves from others. Arguably, Spenceley [2] refers to "de-skilling or differently skilling "as a movement in the perception held about the concept of professionalism.

This has drawn the debate into the recognition of the role amongst the people undertaking it. Staff teaching in schools see themselves as going into a profession, it is, in essence, and in most cases a career choice at an early age. It involves going to university, studying (often including teaching practice–learning the ropes) and qualifying with a licence to practice, however many staff who teach within FE have come through a skills route and are often more aligned to their trade profession rather than the teaching profession. Playfair [50] describes this as having dual professionalism. They have not been inducted into the 'academic' culture that University will often centralise, perhaps centred on this alien concept of 'academic freedom' and 'academic license' which perhaps is central to professionalism in the other education sectors. Perhaps control measure imposed from central government and College management have sought to diminish this.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper sought at the outset to attempt to discover why the FE sector continues to struggle to identify with the concept of professionalism and to develop this into a 'professional role'. This seems to be in contrast to both the school sector and the HE sector (with which it should identify more), where this notion of professional identity seems to be commonplace. There are several definitions and views of what professionalism is in context drawn from individuals such as Hoyle [6], Randle and Brady [7], and Eraut [32] who identify key characteristics; however, more recently, writers such as Tummons [13] have noted there are still no agreed definitions, and even if there were, there is no agreed application to the FE sector.

One particular reason for this remains the dysfunction and fragmented nature of the FE sector, from the 'types' of organisations that sit within it, the 'types' of courses and programmes of study it provides, and the 'types' of people who work within it. These three factors make it difficult for the sector to be viewed as a whole rather than as an amalgamation of different facets brought together under one roof to provide a service. A service, which in essence has been a pawn of governments to achieve a range of agendas, which quite often we can only debate as the real reason. Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that incorporation was driven by a desire to take FE out of Local Education Authority control, to free it up and deregulate it, making the sector more responsive to meeting skills and economic activity agendas, and notably to make the sector cost effective. There are also suggestions that the Labour Governments 1997-2010 also made inroads related to increasing the level of regulation of the sector and imposing more control over it than the Conservative (and coalition) governments pre-1997 and post-2010 had intended or wished.

One thing that cannot be disputed is the role control has had over the sector and its professionalism issue. In particular, inclusion has driven a control and inspection

framework, coupled with a range of funding structures, which has led to a system where control is at the forefront of activity, and this contradicts this notion of professionalism. Much of what has been driven as a 'solution' to professionalism has been driven top down either by employers or the government, arguably to raise standards; however, as suggested, perhaps the sector needs to adopt more of a bottom-up approach to the process. This would seem to resonate with the principles that align with the notions of professionalism.

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