

IfL Advisory Council meeting – 10 October 2013

The Institute for Learning's Advisory Council, which focuses mainly on policy matters, held its 12th meeting at 12.50 on Thursday 10 October 2013 at IfL's office in London. Seventeen members of the Advisory Council attended the meeting, which was chaired initially by IfL's outgoing elected president, Bea Groves, who then handed over to her successor, Penny Petch.

1. Welcome and introductions

The chair of the non-executive board (NEB), Sue Crowley, said that it gave her great pleasure to thank Bea Groves for the work she had done over the past year and to welcome Penny Petch as the new president.

In her address as outgoing president, Beatrix Groves said that one of the proudest things in her life was to stand there as president of IfL, the only transgendered person in that role in a national organisation.

She also spoke of the need for further education teachers and trainers to nurture their sense of professional pride. "I have learned a lot about an FE system that works on the basis of the hard work of staff and all the things they take on board," she said. "Only in a system such as education would that happen. It is all part of the unspoken gift that employees bring, and should never be taken for granted. We are not just coming along to do a job: we are being paid to be the professionals we really are. That is a great source of professional pride."

She said that if she was re-elected to the Advisory Council, she would like to continue to contribute, and did not want the experiences of her two years in office to be lost: she welcomed questions from the new president and other Advisory Council members.

The incoming president, Penny Petch, said it was a "massive privilege" to be addressing the meeting, and that she had taken on a big responsibility. She explained that she had initially trained as a nurse and midwife before being drawn into teaching while studying for a social science degree. She had recently completed a master's degree in education, and had graduated that Tuesday, the same time as her Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) students.

She then set out three themes for her tenure as elected president: teaching qualifications; management training for newly promoted teachers; and professional development that has impact. "I am passionate about the need for an independent professional body, she said. "Before training as a teacher, I was a qualified nurse and midwife, so for me it is second nature to be a member of a professional body.

"It is amazing how many people do not know that the regulations for teachers needing to be trained and qualified have been revoked. Part of the reason I stood for election as president was my anger at the Lingfield report and my desire to do something about its recommendation to revoke these regulations, which are so vital as a national requirement for the profession of teaching."

She hoped that in her year of office she would see increased membership; further development of CPD opportunities for members; and improved communication and collaboration between Advisory Council members and the regional members, leading to a network of communities of practice across the country.

Penny Petch then welcomed members and noted apologies from those unable to attend (see Appendix). She reminded members that the president of IfL now had delegated authority regarding accepting Advisory Council resignations, and that since the last meeting in May, Fiona Joy, April Carroll, David Baines and Markos Tiris had resigned from their posts and were no longer Advisory Council members.

The notes of last Advisory Council meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising from the notes and feedback from the last Advisory Council meeting.

2. Chair's report from the NEB

Sue Crowley presented the chair's report.

The directors had agreed to invest £1m of reserves in 2013/14 for three reasons: to support the transition to self-funding; to help staff counteract negative influences; and to optimise benefits for members so that they would see when it came to renewing that the benefits of membership outweighed the costs. The year was not finished yet, but NEB members had been scrutinising expenditure and monitoring effectiveness, and were unanimous that it had been money well spent.

IfL's reputation had remained strong, and the fact that membership was likely to reach 35,000 represented a remarkable achievement at a time of austerity, when people were scrutinising their expenditure. Members were joining or renewing every day, some for two years, which indicated a vote of confidence.

To provide similar levels of service as before and without the same level of investment of reserves being possible, however, the fee would need to go up. Research was being undertaken, but it was hard to discern the potential impact of increasing the fee. The Board would be setting the fee in November.

Comments included:

- Compared to the fees charged by other professional bodies, the increased IfL membership fee would still be low. Most professional bodies charged more than £100, which IfL would not be doing.
- Transparency was vital.
- Members should be consulted about whether they would be willing to pay more, or whether they would prefer to pay less and do without some of the services.
- A survey was currently being undertaken, to which 1,700 members had responded so far. It would not be possible to maintain the current fee level: IfL had done everything it could to drive costs down, but the business model needed to support the costs of the reduced staffing, office space, IT infrastructure and so forth, and there were already concerns about doing too much, stretching themselves.
- The ability to spread the payment, for example, through a monthly direct debit option, might help.
- Membership organisations were increasingly looking at charging a base fee with the option of purchasing additional services, but it was a difficult thing to do and might take some time.
- The profile of IfL's membership was representative of the entire sector, which now had an estimated teaching and training workforce of around 120,000 people.

3. Democracy in action

Penny Petch and Sue Crowley led a discussion about Advisory Council elections. As there is a two-yearly cycle for election of part of the Advisory Council membership, these would be the first in two years, and it was anticipated that there would be a considerable number of new members elected. There was an obligation for Advisory Council members to welcome and induct the new Advisory Council members. Also, it was important to encourage people to vote.

After the nominations the following week, voting would start at the end of October, and the names of the elected members would be known at the end of November. Existing Advisory Council members were welcome to come to the induction session to welcome new members and as a refresher on 9 December 2013.

As soon as the new Advisory Council was in place, its members would be invited to nominate themselves for the NEB, some of whose members were at the end of their term.

4. Tell us about it!

Penny Petch led two discussions in small groups. The first offered an opportunity for feedback from members on professional issues that impacted on their teaching practice, their learners' success, the organisations they worked in, and how IfL could support them.

Feedback included:

- Cuts in funding had led to many good people leaving the sector; a lack of resources; and increased workloads for those teachers who remained.
- In some organisations, quality units were being disbanded, placing more burdens on other teaching staff and risking loss of quality.
- Part-time and sessional teachers were being marginalised, and there was an issue around being paid only for the actual contact hours with learners, not for course preparation. Being marginalised also meant not being part of professional dialogues.
- The new inspections framework was better suited to a schools model, and did not work well with work-based learning.
- Those working in offender learning report difficulties with getting access to the IT systems at specific sites.
- In many organisations, teachers were not being given sufficient support for continuing professional development (CPD).
- A “pedagogy partners” initiative at one college recognises the value to talking about teaching and learning to improve teaching and learning. People who had complementary weaknesses were given a luncheon voucher so that they could meet to talk about teaching and learning over lunch. The scheme had worked really well, for example, for a hairdressing teacher and a painting and decorating teacher.
- Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) was IfL's biggest selling point for some, given that it meant one could teach in a school.
- Teaching, learning and assessment should be at the heart of everything.

The second discussion concerned ideas for regional activity. Suggestions included:

- Meetings to explore pedagogy, along the lines of Dylan Wiliam's reference to a learning community as a team-based approach to educational improvement where one is accountable to a community of peers, based on 10–12 volunteers per community meeting once a month.
- Monthly meetings at which people across the college could talk about assessment for learning opportunities.
- Formalising such meetings brought the issue of CPD centre stage, acknowledging its importance as a legitimate and important thing to do.
- Nominating a regional chair to act as the catalyst for regional events: finding a supportive organisation to host the event, contacting IfL members and CPD managers etc in the region to invite them to participate in a session focused on teaching and learning.
- The Education and Training Foundation had issued an invitation to join practitioner groups, to principals, CPD managers and HR managers – hardly a practitioner among them. IfL would contest this and work to make the case to the Foundation to include practitioners. Advisory Council members should apply by email to felicia.frost@etfoundation.co.uk to join the group, by 30 October 2013.
- Becoming a curriculum mentor for a specific region, covering a wide range of offender learning providers, for example, as one Advisory Council member does.
- Piggybacking on other events, for example, the CRADLE [Centre for Research and Development in Lifelong Education at the University of Wolverhampton] events on 20 November 2013, 15 January 2014 and 30 April 2014.

5. REfLECT+ taster session

Jan Leatherland, IfL's CPD programme manager, led a short session about the new REfLECT+, IfL's online personal space for members.

The new software was more streamlined and ran on more platforms, including tablet computers. Using the Puffin web browser instead of Safari allowed one to do on a tablet computer what one could do on a PC.

The new version made use of drop-down menus, and some things were done differently, for example, selecting "Add new" instead of "Create asset".

All the assets from the previous version would be brought into the new version, except for the QTLS application, if done in a webfolio, which would be resolved in due course.

Other features included:

- More compact view
- Hints of what you should be doing on a particular page
- The ability to share with peer reviewers and other options for sharing with colleagues
- Full screen preview
- The facility to put assets such as last year's CPD in a hidden folder
- A resources section to which learners may be given access, by virtue of being registered on a course.

6. Policy update

IfL policy officers Rachel Cooke and Shane Chowen gave overviews of several IfL's work in several policy areas.

16–19 study programmes. From September 2013, new 16–19 study programmes were introduced, whereby all students aged 16 to 19 in full or part-time education were expected to follow a study programme tailored to their individual needs, and their education and employment goals. IfL's survey of members in the summer showed that teachers did not really know much about the programmes, and their feeling was that they may not constitute a significant change in practice at subject level, although they may at overall programme level. IfL was creating a toolkit, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), which should be ready for publication as an interactive toolkit over the coming weeks.

Ofsted. The new inspection framework had been in place for a year, and the new chief inspector's report was expected in November. IfL's activities had included keeping an eye on inspection grades, especially teaching and learning; and producing *A practitioner's guide to Ofsted inspection*, which had involved a number of IfL members and would be published in the near future.

Initial teaching qualifications. IfL maintained its position, namely that every learner deserves to be taught by dual professionals who are qualified experts in their subject or vocational area as well as in teaching methods. This government was not going to bring the regulations back, so IfL needed to look at how it could work with partner organisations. It was talking with the National Union of Students (NUS) about launching a pledge or quality mark along the lines of "Dedicated to brilliant teaching and learning".

Traineeships and apprenticeships. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Chamber of Commerce had said that employers should get the funding for traineeships and apprenticeships. IfL's stance was that providers were best placed to allocate resources and decide on the curriculum.

Deregulation bill. The introduction of the 2007 regulations had been possible only because of parent legislation in the form of the 2002 Act, which would be removed if the deregulation bill became an Act. IfL had discovered that one of the reasons for the government's stance on teachers not needing to be qualified was that it believed that the state had no business telling private organisations whom they should employ, although this is not the case in other areas, for example, hospitals.

The Education and Training Foundation was going through a procurement process in relation to work on teaching standards.

General policy update. Shane Chowen had attended the three main party conferences, for the fourth year. Apprenticeships would be high up in the agenda before next election, and there was quite a bit of misinformation about them. There had been a lot about starts, but not so many completions or genuine new jobs – many of the apprenticeships had been created for existing employees in workplaces. The opposition parties were forming policies about public procurement and the need for those receiving public funding of more than £1m needing to engage apprentices. Further cuts in public expenditure were expected in the autumn statement, and policy and funding changes were changing the nature of what it meant to be a teacher or trainer.

It was suggested that further policy updates should be provided to set the context for the next Advisory Council meeting. The suggestion that the policy slot should be in the morning, to ensure the allocation of sufficient time, was agreed by all.

7. Actions for members

Penny Petch gave a brief summary of the day.

Sue Crowley had drafted a letter to all new Advisory Council members to help overcome any difficulties in getting time off work to attend meetings. Senior managers were generally supportive, but line managers were not necessarily, and insisted on getting cover for classes. Advisory Council members were asked to read the letter and see whether they had anything to add that might help, before the letter was issued.

8. AOB

Sue Crowley had edited a book, *Challenging Professional Learning*, with chapters by Toni Fazaeli, Dr Jean Kelly and Sue Colquhoun at IfL, as well by other leaders, practitioners and academics specialising in education and further education and those specialising in other professions. The book was due to be published by Routledge on 22 October 2013 and would be available to buy online.

9. Close

After a short address by Penny Petch, the meeting closed at 16.00.

10. Appendix

Attendees

Member representatives

- Stella Austin
- Sue Banting
- David Carpenter
- John Chorley
- Sue Crowley
- Lisette D’Cruz
- Bea Groves
- Jan Hanson
- Wendy Henwood
- Jacki Hughes
- Pankaj Kishore
- Jennifer Morley
- Ros Pearson
- Penny Petch
- Sue Rhodes
- Ed Sallis
- Lynda Snowden.

Stakeholder representatives

- Jill Lanning
- Gemma Painter
- Rosemary Sloman
- Mark Wright.

Apologies received

Elected members

- Tony Armstrong
- Dick Cervantes
- Karen Gray
- John Grocott
- Kath Gundle
- Phil Hodgkinson
- Paula Jones
- Steve Lane
- Charlotte Nancarrow
- John Williams
- Stakeholder members
- Maren Deepwell
- Martin Freedman
- Christine Lewis
- James Noble Rogers
- Dan Taubman
- Alastair Thomson.