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# **Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

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**Gill Nicholls**



**London and New York**

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Higher education is facing increasing demands for teaching excellence and as a result new lecturers are now expected to have training and induction in teaching and learning strategies. This book provides new lecturers with an easy and accessible guide to planning and preparing teaching sessions, teaching a diverse student population and assessing students' progress and achievement. Furthermore, the book recognises the demands of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) and guides the lecturer through the process of reflection and development required to become a member of the ILT.

The book addresses key areas, as recommended by the ILT, including:

- planning and preparation;
- conducting teaching and learning sessions;
- assessment and evaluation;
- revising and improving teaching;
- leadership, management and administration;
- continual professional development.

This accessible, user-friendly book is directly related to most induction programmes which new lecturers attend. It is essential reading for all new and established lecturers, and academics keen to develop their teaching and learning strategies.

**Gill Nicholls** is Professor of Education and Director of the Institute for Learning and Teaching at King's College, the University of London.



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## **Chapter I**

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# **The changing context of teaching and learning in higher education**

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### **Introduction**

The increasing demands for teaching excellence in higher education have led to new academics needing induction into what it is to teach and how students learn. In the United Kingdom in particular, the creation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) has increased the pressure on universities to provide and deliver courses that meet the demands and recommendations of the ILT within the domain of teaching and learning.

This book recognises the demands of the ILT, but also demonstrates that teaching and learning require a positive approach, one that encourages diversity, creativity, enthusiasm and commitment to the art of teaching. It also suggests that the individual approach to professional development within the context of teaching and learning is essential if effective learning environments are to be created and sustained. The book recognises and encourages the way in which teaching is understood and pedagogical relationships practised, and that these are different across subject areas.

Underpinning this book is the recognition that ILT membership is advisable for new and established academics alike. However, new academics will require help in a different way from established academics, part of which is an appreciation that teaching is a fundamental way of learning their subject and that it is closely linked to research and scholarship. The key elements to achieve membership are for all academics to demonstrate:

- 1 Knowledge of their subject and its pedagogy;
- 2 Practice that is underpinned by a range of professional values.

In order to help new academics, existing lecturers and planners of courses achieve these goals, this book has been constructed in such a way as to facilitate learning and development. The design is progressive in approach, with diagrams, tasks, and points for consideration and exemplars to assist development.

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The book addresses six basic generic issues as recommended by the ILT. These are:

- 1 Planning and preparation;
- 2 Conducting teaching and learning sessions;
- 3 Assessment and evaluation;
- 4 Reviewing and improving teaching;
- 5 Academic administration, management and leadership teaching;
- 6 Continual professional development.

Within each of the identified areas, tasks and points for consideration are given to help the new academic deal with complexities of developing teaching and learning in higher education. Although the six areas of the ILT guide the framework of the text, the book takes a more in-depth view of teaching and learning. The perspective given is one that aims to help the new academic understand the reasons for engaging in some of the activities such as planning and preparation that are key to successful and effective teaching and learning. The ILT expects academics to collect evidence and through this evidence to illustrate development within the six categories by showing they have knowledge and understanding of underpinning knowledge associated with their subject. These include:

- the subject material that they will teach to their students;
- how their subject is learned and taught;
- how students learn, both generically and in their own subject;
- teaching approaches;
- the use of learning technologies;
- techniques for monitoring and evaluating their own teaching;
- their institution's mission and how it affects teaching and learning strategies;
- implications of quality assurance for practice;
- regulations, policies and practices affecting their own work;
- the professional values underpinning practice.

The main aim of this book is to provide new academic staff with the opportunity to reflect upon their teaching and academic experiences in a way that enhances and possibly changes their teaching and learning environments within their academic practice. It suggests and thus focuses on teaching, learning and academic practice as a complementary set of ideals, aspirations or outcomes that include student learning outcomes and the advancement of knowledge. The book takes each element identified by the ILT but tries to link and make connections between the various components and the implications and consequences each component may have on the other. Thus the book integrates theory and practice in a pragmatic and helpful

way. Throughout the book there are stopping points, entitled ‘points for consideration’; these have been placed strategically to assist and enhance reflection on teaching, learning and academic practice.

In order to understand why teaching and learning now takes such a prevalent place in higher education debates it is necessary to examine, albeit briefly, the history and inception of the Institute for Learning and Teaching.

### **Brief history of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT)**

University teaching might be called the hidden profession. It is practised as a secret rite behind closed doors and is not mentioned in polite academic society.

(Mathews, quoted in Layton, 1963, p. 8)

Prior to the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), it might have been possible to support this view of teaching in many British universities, a view that assumed teaching skills to be conferred on lecturers as a postgraduate gift that was neither appropriate nor necessary to enquire into or closely scrutinise. Communication of knowledge was considered secondary to its advancement, the balance between teaching and research being heavily biased towards the latter. However, Dearing challenged this perspective by stating that:

Institutions and their staff face a great challenge if our vision that the United Kingdom should be at the fore front of world practice in learning and teaching in higher education is to be realised.

(Paragraph 8.56)

### **Demands of the ILT**

These have changed and continue to change as this book is being written, and for this reason it is necessary to explore what the demands were, how they have changed, what they are now, and what they may be in the future. The demands will, and already have had, implications for those involved in teaching and learning in the higher education community.

### **Early requirements and recommendations**

The proposed functions of the ILT following the Dearing Report had three main purposes:

- 1 The accreditation of programmes of training for higher education teachers;

#### **4 The changing context of teaching and learning**

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- 2 The research and development in teaching and learning;
- 3 The stimulation of innovation.

This proposed approach is intended to provide a framework around which individual institutions (or consortia) can plan and develop their own pathways and programmes.

#### **Levels of membership**

Within the national framework the proposed structure was to have three levels of membership: associate member, member and fellow. The criteria for higher levels of membership are shown in Table 1.1. The criteria focus on mainstream teaching and learning activities that have been broadened to include activities carried out by other staff in support of teaching and learning. The specified requirements for ILT membership are explained in terms of a range of teaching outcomes that include knowledge, understanding and a range of skills and values a teacher acquires through training and/or experience. The categories of membership are distinguished by the range of outcomes achieved by individuals and their level of professional autonomy and responsibility.

*Table 1.1 Booth membership framework*

<i>Category or level of membership</i>	<i>Illustrative range of responsibility</i>
Associate Part 1	Classroom practice, marking, evaluation of teaching
Associate Part 2	In addition to above: Design of a module, unit or series of teaching sessions, design of assessment, evaluation of modules
Member	In addition to the above: Curriculum/programme design (e.g. across a degree), improvement of curricular/programmes, innovation in own course practice, evaluation of programmes, supervision of associates
Fellow	In addition to the above: Leader of change (across institutions or disciplines) in teaching or curricula, through research, publications, work on disciplinary or professional bodies

Five broad areas of responsibility associated with higher education (HE) teaching have been identified, and members are expected to achieve all or most of the outcomes linked under the five broad headings. These are:

- 1 Planning and preparation;
- 2 Conducting teaching and learning sessions;

- 3 Assessment and evaluation;
- 4 Reviewing and improving teaching;
- 5 Academic administration, management and leadership teaching.

Continual professional development is the sixth element that all academics must be actively involved in.

## **Routes to membership**

The ILT, having been set up as a professional body for higher education staff involved in teaching and the support of learning, is envisaged in time as being the main source of professional recognition for those engaged in teaching and learning support in higher education.

As a member of this professional institution a member would be able to:

- obtain recognition for the professionalism of their teaching;
- keep updated on developments in teaching and learning in HE and on methods of self-evaluation and improvement;
- obtain information and guidance on implementing new learning and teaching strategies, including information communication technology (ICT);
- have access to new research, publications and conference seminars.

The proposed routes to membership and the criteria by which routes are identified have the following key features that are based on five areas of professional activity:

- 1 Teaching and/or supporting learning in HE;
- 2 Contribution to the design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study;
- 3 Provision of feedback and assessment of students' learning;
- 4 Contribution to the development of effective learning environments and student support systems;
- 5 Reflection on personal practice in teaching and learning and work to improve the teaching process.

Within these five professional areas it is also stated that:

- Initial membership routes would be designed to recognise and reflect the current expertise of experienced staff.
- That there would be both individual and institutionally based routes that reflect the diversity of educational contexts within the sector which individuals will be able to apply for membership directly to the ILT, rather than through an institution, if they so wish.

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- The membership criteria will be informed by underpinning knowledge and professional values including commitments to learning and scholarship as an integral part of teaching.

In Appendix 1 of the ILT's document on accreditation it is stated that:

Courses seeking accreditation should be designed with an awareness of the core knowledge and professional values that are expected of members of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

Consideration of the core knowledge and values is a means to understanding the nature and context of teaching development that the ILT will be looking for.

### **Core knowledge**

Members of the ILT will be expected to have knowledge and understanding of:

- the subject material they will be teaching;
- appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme;
- models of how students learn, both generically and in their subject;
- the use of learning technologies appropriate to the context in which they teach;
- methods for monitoring and evaluating their own teaching;
- the implications of quality assurance for practice.

### **Professional values**

Members of the ILT will be expected to adhere to the following professional values:

- a commitment to scholarship in teaching, both generally and within their own discipline;
- respect for individual learners and for their development and empowerment;
- a commitment to the development of learning communities, including students, teachers and all those engaged in learning support;
- a commitment to encouraging participation in higher education and to equality of educational opportunity;
- a commitment to continued reflection and evaluation and consequent improvement of their own practice.

The core knowledge and values are clearly described and laid down by the ILT. This book attempts to cover all the areas specified by the ILT. However, the book goes beyond these basic requirements. It suggests ideas and alternatives for the new academic practitioner to engage with, both in the context of institutional development, but most importantly personal development.

### **Using the book to its best advantage**

The book is structured so that the elements of appropriate theory are incorporated and often introduce each element of learning and teaching in higher education. The theory is interwoven with points for consideration designed to help you identify key features that relate to behaviour or issues. A variety of methodologies are used to help you generate evidence of teaching, learning and academic practice (e.g. reflecting on elements of course design and development, observation of other lecturers' teaching, student evaluations and your own planning and preparation techniques).

The nature of the evidence collected is aimed at generating your portfolio of evidence for accreditation. This portfolio will be a personal record of teaching, learning and academic practice. It will represent your development in the areas of teaching and learning and demonstrate areas of competence and areas for future development. The evidence identified is collected throughout your programme and should show a developmental approach.

The book is designed to be used in a number of ways. It can be dipped in and out of as a means of a reference point to help with a specific problem, question or issue that you may need to consider and to help you reflect on a problem or issue encountered in a teaching/learning scenario.

Finally, the book attempts to transmit the professional elements that are required by a teacher in higher education. The need to understand and interpret professional knowledge, professional judgements and discipline knowledge are all tackled. It emphasises that in order to become effective, teaching needs to be seen as a continuous creative and problem-solving activity. Each student group is different, as is each individual within that group. Each student and each group of students will have their own identities, learning styles and approaches to learning. Planning and preparing teaching and learning environments that complement such diversity are a constant challenge to the teacher in higher education. This book attempts to make that challenge less stressful and more achievable.

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