

CASE STUDY: RUNSHAW COLLEGE

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Background

Runshaw College is a General Further Education (FE) college based in the North West of England. It is rated 'outstanding' (1) by Ofsted. Runshaw has two campuses, one in Leyland, predominantly educating school leavers in a wide range of A-levels and vocational courses, and one in Euxton which specialises in apprenticeship delivery, Higher Education (HE), and adult further education, as well as some professional qualifications such as AAT. Runshaw has approximately 6,000 learners across both campuses - 500 apprentices, 500 adult FE students, 150 HE students, and just under 5,000 A-level/vocational 16-18 students.

Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

At Runshaw College, advanced practitioners are called Professional Tutors. The role is firmly separated from management structures and is a support mechanism to help teaching staff improve their professional practice in teaching, learning and assessment.



The primary responsibility of Professional Tutors is to support the development of other teachers. They are the experts, the go-to people who you can work with on a one-to-one basis or as part of a small group.

Head of Department

The term Professional Tutor was chosen to emphasise its importance to teaching as a profession, the Professional Standards and professional practice, and the wider role the position has to support assessors, demonstrators, trainers and support workers. In addition, the job title was chosen to make it clear that the role is not more senior than other teachers and to clearly delineate it from other roles such as Advanced Lecturers.



Why are Professional Tutors important at Runshaw College?

- They act as a link between institutional strategy and frontline teaching staff.
- They cascade excellence and innovation in teaching and learning, which helps to ensure that the college keeps teaching, learning and assessment highly effective, exciting, creative and innovative.
- They support other staff to improve and develop their professional practice.

Full time teachers at Runshaw have a teaching caseload of 773 hours over an academic year. Professional Tutors have 150 hours of remitted time from their teaching caseload and a £2,243 salary uplift per year in recognition of the role. Although these benefits can easily come under scrutiny at a time of acute financial pressures in the sector, the college believes there is a clear business case for the role and that this remuneration is essential for staff to deliver their responsibilities to their full ability, as well as to recognise the important role Professional Tutors

play in the continuous improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.

Runshaw College has five Professional Tutors. Each Professional Tutor works with nominated schools (curriculum areas). As a result they are generalists with a fairly broad remit across a number of different disciplines. However, they will also play to the strengths of each person. For example, one of the current Professional Tutors is a maths specialist (teaching from Level 2 to Level 5) so takes the lead on work with mathematics and numeracy across curriculum areas, as needed.

The Professional Tutors are line managed by The Head of Professional Studies and The Teaching School. Appraisals are carried out by the Professional Tutor's Head of Department. The Head of Professional Studies and The Teaching School agree targets for the Professional Tutor, who shares these with the Head of Department for inclusion in their Appraisal document.

Activities

Professional Tutors have a number of different roles, which can be broadly categorised as:

- One-to-one advice, guidance and support.
- Leading communities of practice for each school.
- Supporting staff who are undergoing performance management processes.

First, staff can access one-to-one support which can be formal, semi-formal or informal and may be one-touch or ongoing. Typically, it involves developmental peer observations, feedback and coaching sessions, and signposting to resources, research and guidance. One-to-one support is generally initiated by teaching staff, but Professional Tutors and line managers can also be proactive and encourage self-referral. It may be connected to formal observation or development of new teaching staff, but may also be where staff need a bit of a confidence boost or are interested in a new area of practice. Aside from safeguarding and other serious issues, the content of any correspondence is confidential. This is essential so staff trust Professional Tutors as a safe space to share concerns.



I'm a good neutral person to talk to – I just listen to them.

Professional Tutor

Secondly, Professional Tutors have a pivotal role in continuing professional learning. The college recently moved to a 'communities of practice' model where each Professional Tutor has a caseload of schools assigned to them and delivers at least two bespoke training sessions per school, per term. This model has been particularly effective because support is highly tailored and therefore focused, tangible and meaningful for staff. Sessions are devised by the Head of Department and Professional Tutor based on needs identified through observation feedback and institutional data. However, staff in the department also input into the process, highlighting where they would like development and which aspects of teaching, learning and assessment learning would have the most positive impact on students.



They'll look at all the staff, performance management, identify what they need to be doing to get better and they'll put forward to us... tell us exactly what they want in that department.

Professional Tutor

Examples of these sessions include questioning techniques, behaviour management, growth mindset, positivity, body language, assessment for learning and gendered attainment gaps. Sessions range from 10-minute 'takeaways' to longer half-hour meetings. Short, snappy sessions which are highly practical are often the best received.

Thirdly, if tutors are struggling to meet the standards expected, Professional Tutors are part of formal arrangements to support staff to meet their goals. Professional Tutors will work with teachers on an on-going basis, using developmental observations and feedback sessions *'until they're confident, line manager's happy and I can see a distinct improvement'*.

Capability

Most development of Professional Tutors comes from personal secondary research into innovations, research and good practice in the sector. However, there is quite a high degree of flexibility and autonomy for Professional Tutors to scope out other opportunities that they think will support them in their role. Off-site development such as seminars, conferences and provider visits are critical to keep Professional Tutors on top of recent developments and highly motivated.

The College is a designated National Teaching School. As part of The Teaching School Alliance, Professional Tutors meet with practitioners from the 8 Alliance Partner organisations twice per term that are also in advanced practitioner-type roles. These meetings are particularly valued by the Professional Tutor team, as they allow PTs to keep up to date with the latest innovations in teaching and learning, share training materials and resources, and are also an opportunity to network with practitioners in a similar role.



You come back and you're full of excitement and new ideas... you're so inspired with what's trending now and new ideas, and so that cascades down.

Professional Tutor

To support effective delivery, Professional Tutors hold a weekly mandatory meeting which is chaired by the Head of Professional Studies and The Teaching School. This allows Professional Tutors to share learning from events, courses and secondary research, and ensures that delivery is consistent across the different faculties. The meetings are also a platform to discuss any challenges Professional Tutors may be facing and an opportunity to offer peer support and guidance in a safe space based on a counselling supervision model.

Outcomes

Many outcomes that the college have identified are qualitative. It can be hard to quantify the large positive benefit that the role brings. Generally, Professional Tutors have inspired and maintained real excitement and passion about excellence in teaching and learning.



When you walk through the college ... you feel it... sense it, it's something that quantitatively would be really hard to prove, but qualitatively that's about the buzz around teaching and learning and the Professional Tutors are essential in keeping that buzz, keeping it fresh.

Head of Professional Studies and The Teaching School

That's one of the main parts of the job – making people feel positive about teaching and remembering that teaching is a great job, and it's worthwhile.

Professional Tutor

There are some clear changes in teaching, where positive differences are evidenced throughout lesson observation feedback that staff are now receiving. In addition, teachers are excited about trialling new approaches and have a renewed appetite for developing their practice. This is supported by the large volume of usable, practical and engaging teaching resources co-ordinated by Professional Tutors which have helped to drive forward strategy and make lessons creative and captivating.

There are some quantitative markers as well. For example, one of the clearest things is the proportion of staff with 'effective' rather than 'not yet effective' observations. In addition, quality of assessment feedback, student performance and qualification results are positive. For example, one department has found that gender-based attainment gaps are narrowing after some focused work with a Professional Tutor. Similarly, student surveys highlight increased student satisfaction and engagement and there is a year on year improvement in student success rates for the vast majority of courses across the college

Shared learning



Think very carefully about what you want these people to do and the sort of person you're looking for. Then support them to help them do that effectively, whether that's through time, through financial recognition, through upskilling them, and allow them time to flourish. This won't happen overnight. For an effective professional tutor model to embed itself... I'd probably say it took five years, five years from its introduction to being absolutely embedded and these people not being seen as any sort of threat but as highly approachable, useful and supportive change agents.

The greatest – and perhaps most powerful – change we have seen over time is the number of teachers self-referring to Professional Tutors for advice and support rather than being directed by their line manager to do so.

Head of Professional Studies and The Teaching School



Top tips for other providers

- Have a clear and well-communicated vision of the role.
- Create accurate, detailed and carefully designed job descriptions to account for the teaching excellence and wide range of skills and personal attributes that the role requires (e.g. coaching, emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills).
- Make sure there is a clear separation between advanced practitioners and management structures.
- Ensure that there is a strong mentor and support system in place to ensure that advanced practitioners settle in to the role quickly and feel supported.
- Use current practitioners to fill the roles that have a sustained track record of excellent practice and outcomes for students.
- Ensure that training and development is tailored to the different needs of different schools and curriculum areas and that it is delivered in a timely fashion, on a day and at a time that is agreed by the school / curriculum area.