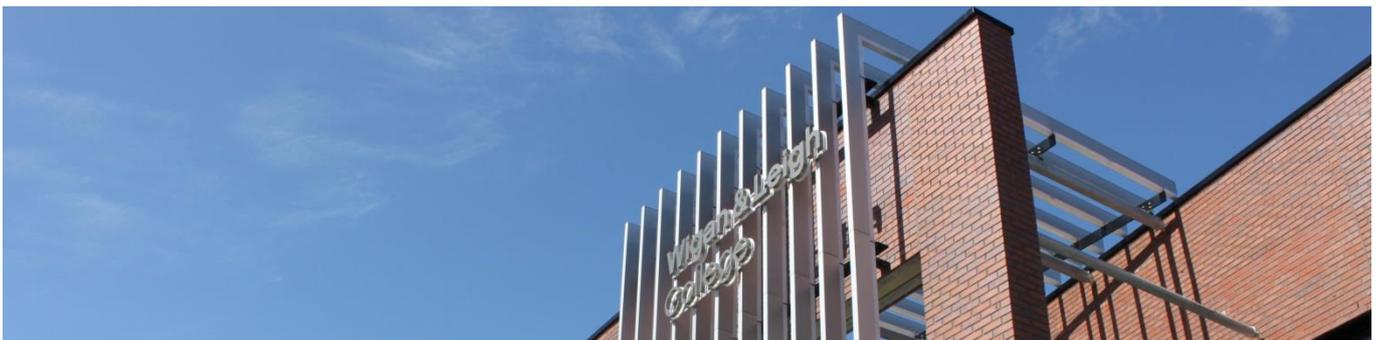


# CASE STUDY: WIGAN AND LEIGH COLLEGE

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## Background

Wigan and Leigh College is a multi-site General Further Education (FE) college based in the North West of England. It was rated 'good' (2) by Ofsted in 2016 and has around 14,000 students. The college offers vocational education, apprenticeships, A-level programmes, higher education courses and adult courses. The College has recently achieved university status.

## Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

At Wigan and Leigh College, advanced practitioner-type staff are called Professional Tutors. Prior to the Professional Tutor role, the college had Advanced Practitioners (APs) for a number of years, however the role was management facing and APs were part of the formal observation process. In contrast, the role of Professional Tutors is peer-facing and developmental. Their remit is to support staff to develop their teaching skills and to share good practice.



I think it's a positive move away from that, because we are there to support. We'll do supportive observations, developmental observations with staff; some staff ask us to go in... The staff know us quite well in the college, and they trust us.

### Professional Tutor

For me, it's more like a support network. So it's being a coachee... I've had somebody there who can inspire me to try new and different things.

### Tutor

Professional Tutors emphasise the importance of offering peer-to-peer support. Critically, they support teaching staff, rather than managers, and feel this is the most effective way to implement management objectives.



We're here, not for management; we're here for our peers. We're not critical, we don't grade officially.

### Professional Tutor

Professional Tutors receive a 20 per cent timetable remittance and are allocated one day a week to conduct observations and one-to-one support sessions. Additional weekly development sessions take place on a Friday morning for all staff. While Professional Tutors have their own subject specialisms, they work cross-college to deliver staff development, supporting staff both pedagogically and personally.



I'm no engineer but I can see what's being delivered in the classroom and I assess the learning, so it doesn't really matter does it?

### Professional Tutor



The focus is on learning progress, so as long as we can see that students are learning that is what fundamentally matters, everything else is a side issue. So we can put ourselves in their shoes and if we're not learning from the lesson then there's an issue, so it doesn't really matter which subject it is.

### **Professional Tutor**

#### **Activities**

Professional Tutors have a number of different roles, these include:

- Conducting developmental observations and providing one-to-one feedback.
- Inviting teaching staff to observe good practice in their own lessons.
- Providing one-to-one individualised, tailored and bespoke support to teaching staff.
- Facilitating staff development sessions.
- Supporting new staff during their induction period.

Staff can access support through a number of different channels. Tutors can approach Professional Tutors for advice and guidance, Heads of Department can request support for staff who may be struggling, and new staff will be signposted to a Professional Tutor during their induction. Generally, support involves: developmental observations, joint reflection and feedback, and working together to develop an action plan. The tutor will then receive a copy of the action plan to take away and implement.



I think observing staff in an informal way, then having that conversation and going back in... sometimes you might go back in two or three times and sometimes it's about confidence building. If we're supporting a member of staff who's been observed by the formal process and [rated] a Grade 3 or 4, often their confidence is knocked. So a lot of the things we do are about building that confidence, giving them strategies that will help them get through that initial "Oh my goodness, what's going to happen to my job and my career?"

### **Professional Tutor**

Staff feel comfortable working with a Professional Tutor; being able to share ideas, being able to sit down and discuss how they appear and what improvements need to be made in a safe environment.

### **Senior Manager**

Additionally, tutors are regularly invited to observe good practice in a Professional Tutor's lesson. This can be particularly useful if a tutor has already tried, or is not familiar with, a particular teaching strategy put forward during a one-to-one meeting.



So I went to watch one of his lessons, and it was so inspiring, it was brilliant. The way he did it [peer assessment] was, he'd have timed activities but he'd use cards, charts on the wall. It wasn't a maths lessons, but it gave me some really good ideas about how I could implement it with maths as well.

### **Tutor**

Every Friday morning Professional Tutors lead development sessions for all teaching staff cross-college. This time is protected in staff timetables and sessions are viewed as an opportunity to share good practice, ideas and tips with each other. A number of different groups exist throughout the college, but the framework and materials are standardised. During each session a theme is selected, for example, setting learners a 'SMART' target, and managers and Professional Tutors look for the implementation of this theme when conducting future walkthroughs.



The quality and the impact of the Friday morning sessions are the best I've ever seen. The reason it's the best I've ever seen is because it doesn't feel management-led... every session you feel like it's something you're going to take away and use in your day-to-day job. That's when staff get fed up, when they feel that they're ticking a box. What they like about it is that they're working with people who understand where they're coming from, they're sharing ideas, and these are things that they can immediately try in their own classroom.

### **Senior Manager**

New staff are sent the contact details of a Professional Tutor as part of their induction process and are informed of the support available to them, for example, the new staff community group. The group acts as a supportive network and specifically tackles aspects that new staff may find challenging.



When you're so busy, especially when you're new, you can feel like you're having a bit of a meltdown and everyone else seems to be coping fine. But when you come to these meetings and you talk to other people, you find out that there are a lot of people in the same situation.

### **Tutor**

## **Capability**

Professional Tutors feel they are given sufficient time to upskill and feel supported by the college to develop. Professional Tutors are invited to specialist Transforming Learning training sessions which focus on teaching, learning and assessment. For example, in one session Professional Tutors were trained by an Ofsted employee to conduct observations effectively. This was followed by a meeting and 'professional discussions'.

Professional Tutors have additionally received training to observe student teachers through a University of Central Lancashire teacher training course.

## Outcomes

At an anecdotal level, Professional Tutors have noted an 'aspirational impact' throughout the college. Tutors no longer think of promotion as just going into a management role, they associate promotion with being a better teacher and having an impact on students. For example, a new staff member went through the new staff mentor programme with a Professional Tutor, and has become a Head of Department after just two years.



Grade 1 tutors in the college, they're waiting to see when an opportunity comes up because they want to step up. It is an aspirational title isn't it, and it encourages more Grade 1 tutors.

### Senior Manager

Tutors feel that learners are more actively engaged in lessons; more learners are progressing into employment and advanced college courses; learners are happier to take exams this year, and that there are more consistent teaching standards cross-college.

On a more formal basis, the college conducts an annual student survey, focus groups and has student ambassadors who provide feedback to management. While the student survey does not ask any questions directly related to Professional Tutors, focus group feedback is often linked to the areas a tutor and Professional Tutor have worked on. In addition, when Professional Tutors conduct peer observations they record a grade before and after tutors receive support. This allows the college to track the impact of Professional Tutors on teaching quality over time. Generally, records are positive, with tutors moving up grade levels cross-college.

The greatest personal impact, however, appears to be on new staff and NQTs:



Without being too dramatic, I'd go as far to say I think there's probably a good chance I wouldn't still be here now. Because at times this year it's been so stressful and so kind of difficult, that if I hadn't had somewhere to go and vent and get told "actually, you're not the only person"... there's a good chance that I might have got up one day and not come back. And that's not an understatement – it could well have been the difference.

### Tutor

## Shared learning

- Peer-to-peer support from Professional Tutors is more effective than formal observations.
- It is important that Professional Tutors are not in a management facing role.
- It is important that Professional Tutors still teach in the classroom to maintain credibility.
- Professional Tutors offer staff a safe space for new ideas without judgement.
- Organisational change is easier when staff feel part of something and are invested in the bigger picture.
- An 'open door policy' where staff can observe Professional Tutors has a positive impact on perceptions of the role.

Professional Tutors feel that their move away from the formal observation team to a more

supportive role has had a big impact. Some commented that they could not do the role if it involved formal observations rather than peer-to-peer support. Additionally, moving away from formal grading has made tutors feel more relaxed and has improved effectiveness.



It's important to still be teaching, because that gives you credibility.

### **Professional Tutor**

You've got to have people who are really, really invested in the big picture, and really see the benefit to the organisation.

### **Senior Manager**



### **Top tips for other providers**

- The role of advanced practitioners should be peer-facing, not management facing.
- Timetable remittance is essential to give advanced practitioners sufficient time to follow up on lesson observations, give one-to-one feedback, and plan development sessions.
- Ring-fencing time for weekly staff development sessions is key.
- Involving advanced practitioners in staff inductions and the mentoring of NQTs sets the standard for quality early on, builds relationships, and introduces staff to the development opportunities available within the college.
- Staff need to be on board with change, they need to feel part of something and be invested in the bigger picture.