

Delivering PRACTICE- INFORMED LEARNING

A GUILDHE REPORT



ABOUT GUILDHE

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education.

Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private ("not for profit" and "for profit") sectors.

Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; business and law; the built environment; health and sports.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Practice-Informed Learning



“where expertise from industry is brought into the classroom to inform teaching practice, or where more hands-on learning is taken out into a professional setting”.¹

In November 2018, GuildHE published *Practice-Informed Learning: The Rise of the Dual Professional*.

Drawing on case studies from seventeen GuildHE member institutions, the report found that practice-informed learning is increasingly common, across a broad range of subjects and types of institution, from specialist creative arts courses to agriculture, initial teacher education to law. The case studies indicate that there are wide-ranging benefits resulting from practice-based teaching models, including:

- Improving student engagement and attainment, through a more interactive learning model;
- Enhancing graduate employability, through developing networks and soft skills, and entering work with direct, cutting-edge experience;
- Creating new communities for potentially isolated industry practitioners who take on teaching responsibilities;
- Encouraging practitioner-teachers to explore new approaches to their professional practice;
- Boosting local, regional and national economies by ensuring that new graduates have the skills to be work-ready from day one;
- Providing value to wider society through practice-based outreach and community engagement.

1. GuildHE, *Practice-Informed Learning: The Rise of the Dual Professional* (London: GuildHE, 2018), p.11.

The report also found that the value of practice-based learning has received little recognition to date from public policy makers. For example, although respondents to the HEPI/HEA (*Advance HE*) *Student Academic Experience Survey* consistently identified teachers “having industry or professional experience” as an important characteristic, this value was not reflected in the 2016 Higher Education white paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy*.² Nor is there reliable data on things such as assessment models, placements or the prevalence of dual-professionals in the academic workforce.

In that context, it is hardly surprising that the report identified significant challenges to delivering practice-informed learning. These ranged from a lack of senior 'buy-in' to HR difficulties resulting from multiple contracts and challenges of finding reliable placements.

This report serves as a follow-up to Practice-Informed Learning. It seeks to provide advice and recommendations to support practice-based learning. Specific recommendations have been produced for HE providers, the HE sector and policy makers. We are indebted to all the attendees of the joint GuildHE / Advance HE Practice-Informed Learning Symposium, at which many of the areas covered in this report were first discussed.

This report does not have all the answers, but we hope it will prove valuable to those providers looking to implement practice-based learning, or to support its growth, in order to better meet the needs of students, teacher-practitioners, HE providers and society.

2. A. Buckley, I. Sollemezidis & N. Hillman, *2015 Student Academic Experience Survey* (York: Higher Education Academy/Higher Education Policy Institute, 2015), p.30;
HM Government, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice* (London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016), p.44.



2. SETTING UP AND KEEPING UP

Practice-informed learning is already a key part of the HE landscape, with everything from industry placements to guest-lectures, live briefs to mentoring schemes. Others, however, are just starting to do so.

Establishing practice-based learning models in an institution for the first time will raise a particular set of challenges. These may include:

- Recruiting staff with experience of practice-based learning or training existing academic staff to effectively support students;
- Building a network of industry contacts to inform curriculum development and support placements;
- Developing a curriculum which incorporates practice-based knowledge and skills;
- Integrating practice-based assessment models alongside traditional coursework and exams;
- Ensuring that staff and senior leadership are committed to delivering practice-based learning, rather than just a small committed group;
- Clearly advertising the shift, and communicating with current and prospective students about what it will entail;
- Ensuring that the change is recognised in institutional strategy and goals, is accounted for in monitoring returns and is properly regulated.

Many of these challenges can be mitigated through high-level support and leadership, to drive forward sustained change.

It is possible for practice-based learning to be implemented at, for example, the departmental level, without direct support from senior management. However, this can place a disproportionate burden on one or two enthusiastic staff members who have implemented the new model. The loss of these staff (whether through moving to a new role, or through burnout), could then cause the new model to collapse.

Given that implementing and sustaining practice-informed learning models can represent a significant strategic change, it is also advisable to engage the governing body in strategic planning. This may include considering potential risks of new teaching models, and how they may be mitigated.

One institution reported that widespread use of staff on fractional contracts had negative effects on their National Student Survey scores for organisation and management. Possible impacts on NSS and other performance indicators should therefore be considered by senior management and governing bodies.

Community Buy-in

It is important that senior leaders take people with them. Whilst this can delay implementation processes, good engagement and consultation between senior management and front-line staff can foster cross-institutional support for new delivery models (or any other large-scale shift in strategic direction).

Similarly, student engagement in the planning and implementation of new teaching models can help ensure that the needs of students are properly met. Students should therefore be involved in consultation processes, through formal representation structures (such as departmental reps and students' unions).

Strategic Partnerships

Perhaps the greatest barrier to successfully establishing and maintaining practice-based teaching models is a lack of expertise and experience, which can impact on quality.

One way to address this would be through increased collaboration. Institutions attempting to establish practice-based learning could approach other local providers or those with a similar specialism, to explore collaboration.



Similarly, as outlined in *Practice-Informed Learning: The rise of the dual professional*, successful practice-based learning relies on strong partnerships between industry professionals and teachers, for everything from curriculum development to teaching and assessment.

Many institutions also face challenges in securing high quality placements over a long term, particularly as placements may be burdensome for partners. Here again, a partnership approach could prove valuable.

Rather than simply seeking businesses to host placements, businesses could, for example be engaged in both developing a programme or module, including key learning aims and assessment, and in delivering it.

Collaboration in teaching could also be linked to research and knowledge exchange activities. Some HE providers work closely with local innovation hubs, or have established their own incubators for new businesses, with students able to work with those businesses on live brief projects. This can enhance the role of institutions as 'anchors' supporting the local community.

Breadth and Depth

Some students may not, however, have a particular career in mind, and may simply want to develop more general workplace skills. Furthermore, in rural and coastal areas, there may be a shortage of high-quality, relevant placements.

Institutions could therefore consider investing in developing more general placements and partnerships, alongside industry focused options.

One way to achieve this would be to look internally, providing placements within professional services departments. This could give students valuable skills in areas such as HR and communications, valued across a range of future careers. It would also mean that students are more engaged with their institution, and would allow for greater oversight of placement quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- HE providers should ensure that there is support for new models of delivery at senior levels, to underwrite long-term sustainability.
- HE providers should ensure that governing bodies are properly engaged in planning new teaching models, to ensure that risks have been properly considered and mitigated. They should also take into account possible implications for recruitment, continuation rates, student outcomes, NSS and other performance indicators.
- HE providers should plan and develop new teaching models, in collaboration with staff and students, using formal engagement structures to consult on changes. This should be undertaken well in advance of proposed implementation, to ensure that agreed changes can be properly communicated to staff and current/future students.
- HE providers seeking to establish practice-based learning should consider collaborating with other institutions that have experience of delivering such teaching.
- HE providers should seek to develop deep partnerships with relevant local industries and businesses, to underpin not only practice-based learning, but wider, place-based collaboration.
- Local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Innovation Districts and other place-based organisations, should support collaboration between local HE providers and businesses.
- HE providers should explore the possibility of hosting placements internally, for students who do not have specific career plans, or where there is a shortage of high-quality, local partners.



3. ONBOARDING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

One of the key focuses of GuildHE's *Practice-Informed Learning* report was on the increasingly important role of practitioner-teachers; staff who come to teaching from a professional or industrial background, and who often maintain professional practice alongside teaching responsibilities.

While it is entirely possible to deliver practice-informed learning through a partnership between a teacher and a practitioner, dual professionals often sit at the heart of practice-informed learning. Practitioner-teachers bring their direct experience to bear in the classroom, and as such, are highly rated by students, who value their industry credibility.

Despite the value of practitioner-teachers, most HE providers view their staff through an academic lens by default. Particularly in large, multi-faculty institutions, the majority of teaching staff are likely to have followed a traditional academic career path, where teaching staff often have experience of postgraduate research.

This is reflected in the inductions and ongoing training provided to new teaching staff, which is typically academic in nature, focussing on theoretical approaches to teaching and learning. In contrast, practitioners may simply want to know how to teach effectively, and may be less concerned about the underlying pedagogy.

Such a process is unlikely to appropriately prepare staff for the reality of their new roles. It may be off-putting to staff from a more practical background, who may expect their teaching practice to be similarly hands-on. It is therefore important that new staff training takes into account the existing skills and expectations of the staff.

Many institutions also expect teaching staff to take on other responsibilities, which place them at the heart of academic life in their institutions, such as attending departmental meetings or serving as course or year coordinators.

While such roles are of course vital, applying such expectations from day one may discourage dual-professionals - who may be employed only on fractional contracts - from considering teaching in the first place. Such an outcome is bad for students, institutions and professionals alike.

An alternative model would allow practitioners to get a taste for teaching, through a 'layered' approach. This could involve shadowing another staff member, providing guest lectures or delivering a single module in isolation, before they become permanent members of staff.

It may also be beneficial to separate out teaching duties from other responsibilities, revising contracts as new responsibilities are added. This would allow dual professional staff to gradually grow in their roles.

Regardless of the nature of their involvement, whether shadowing an academic, teaching a single module, or joining the institution on a permanent basis, it is crucial that staff are properly supported to flourish as teachers.

In most HE providers, it is a welcome reality that staff training is not limited to new starters. Continuing professional development is an integral part of providing students with the skills and experience necessary for them to succeed.

However, just as they have different needs at the start of their teaching careers, practitioner-teachers are likely to have different needs in CPD. If, for example, a dual professional is primarily involved in practical, hands-on teaching, this must be reflected in their CPD.



For example, the University College of Osteopathy (UCO) has developed a Postgraduate Certificate qualification, which all staff must commence within two years of starting to work at UCO.

Other institutions reported similar requirements, with specialist PG Certificates a popular choice for ensuring that practitioner-teachers are supported to develop their teaching practice in a way which takes account of the nature of their roles.

However, it is important that such CPD is not so burdensome or onerous that it puts people off teaching.

Some institutions felt they would benefit from a recognised route within the UK professional standards framework for professional development for teachers in Higher Education, supported by Advance HE.

Another case study in the report focused on Arts University Bournemouth, which had allowed Richard Haynes, a senior lecturer in animation, to take a secondment and return to his professional practice as a stop-motion animator, working on a major project with Aardman Animation.

The secondment allowed Richard to ensure that his skills were up-to-date and relevant, giving him experience with the latest techniques and equipment as well as refreshing his passion for creative practice.

It is also important that dual professionals are able to advance within institutions, and therefore, that promotion criteria should recognise and reward professional practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- HE providers should ensure that new staff training is contextual to the role staff are entering, and to the staff members' experience and skills.
- HE providers should provide layered entry routes which allow practitioners to explore teaching, before gradually building in other responsibilities.
- HE providers should ensure that staff training and development is available which is tailored to the different needs of practitioner-teachers.
- Advance HE should develop a specific strand within the UK Professional Standards Framework to recognise and accredit practitioner-teachers.
- HE providers should provide opportunities for staff to develop their professional practice alongside their teaching skills, through CPD and sabbaticals.
- HE providers' promotion criteria should recognise professional practice alongside teaching and research activity.



4. MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Where students do not have realistic expectations of their chosen course of study, poor student outcomes, higher rates of non-completion and low satisfaction are the inevitable results.

In this context, individual providers must ensure that prospective students understand what their chosen course of study might entail. This is equally true for all types of courses, whether "academic" in nature or more "practical", involving hands-on training and assessment.

It is also important that individual backgrounds and experience be taken into account when providing information to prospective students. The expectations of someone who has entered HE via FE will differ from those who took a sixth-form route.

Similarly, a mature, part-time, commuter student with caring responsibilities will have very different experiences and expectations to an 18 year old who has gone straight from school to a university hall of residence.

Some forms of practice-based learning are likely to be very far removed from the experiences of some students. For example, while many creative arts students will have completed assessed practicals, it is unlikely that many will have worked directly with business on live briefs.

Such non-standard teaching and assessment methods therefore need to be properly explained, so that students can be prepared and make informed choices. Students who do not have experience of practice-based learning may also benefit from a short preparatory course or foundation year, so that they are prepared to learn from practitioners.

Expectation management should not be limited to prospective students, however. It is important to maintain strong channels of communication between students and institutions throughout the student life-cycle, to ensure that students can play an informed role in shaping their education.

For example, students entering a year where they may complete an industrial placement must be kept informed about the range and availability of placements, to ensure that some students are not disappointed.

Communication is particularly important where a student might be more isolated from the institution, perhaps because they are a distance learner, a part-time student, or out on placement.

In those situations, good communication routes will allow institutions to keep student informed about what is expected of them and of placements, and will allow students to highlight any concerns or problems they are facing.

Students may also benefit from peer mentoring, led by people who have already completed similar placements or modules. This not only benefits the mentees, but also gives mentors a chance to enhance their own skills.

Expectation management is also relevant for staff entering HE from industry or professional contexts.

Moving into HE may represent a significant change in what is expected, from ways of working and communities, to levels of seniority. A leading practitioner will not automatically be a senior academic, and must recognise that they are entering the sector potentially as a novice.

It is therefore important, as outlined in above, to provide routes for interested practitioners to 'dip their toes' in HE.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- HE Providers should ensure that students are properly prepared for what courses will entail, both prior to and throughout their studies. Preparation should take into account previous experience, and may range from simple communications to preparatory courses or foundation years.
- HE Providers should provide channels of communication for students who might otherwise be isolated from their institution, including with academic and pastoral tutors and peer mentors.
- HE Providers should ensure that new professional staff are aware of what will be expected of them, and how their role might differ from their preconceptions of higher education.

5. FOSTERING A COMMUNITY

All universities and colleges, no matter their structure or focus, represent communities of learning. Yet practice-based learning methods, which may rely on student placements, or staff who maintain professional practice alongside their teaching, can make it hard to develop this community.

For students, this can pose a range of challenges. Where students are regularly off-site, potentially for long periods, on industry placement, it can be easy to lose the sense of community which many institutions seek to foster.

In particular, in smaller institutions, where staff and students are more likely to know one-another, students away from the community for a prolonged period may become isolated and lose links to their peers.

Similarly, institutions may find that long placements inhibit the monitoring of and support for at-risk students, potentially increasing non-continuation rates. It is therefore important that students who undertake industry placements are given regular opportunities to re-engage with their institution, academic community and peers.

This could take the form of regular contact days, where all students return to campus for contact with academic tutors and peers, or digital engagement, for example through web-chats and video seminars, where students can discuss their experience of placements with peers and staff. It will be key to speak to these students to identify what would be helpful for them.

To further mitigate the potentially isolating effects of off-campus placements for students, HE providers should work with placement providers to embed mentoring within placements. This can help ensure that students are properly supported to succeed within the placement, and to address any personal challenges which the change in learning mode may entail.



Perhaps more significantly, where students are taught by practitioner-teachers, it can be harder to develop interpersonal relationships due to their fractional contracts.

Graham Gibbs argues in *Dimensions of Quality* that process dimensions - what happens between students and teachers, both in and out of the classroom - are fundamental to high-quality learning.³ Gibbs highlights the importance of deep student engagement, through small group discussions, detailed feedback on work and opportunities for further engagement.

It can be hard for students to access this deep engagement, and thus have the best learning experience possible, if staff are on fractional contracts and balance competing teaching and professional responsibilities. Gibbs' raises concerns that practitioner-teachers (which he refers to as 'adjunct faculty'), may be less likely to give prompt feedback, or be available to support students.

If such problems are felt by students, they are perhaps more significant for staff. Practitioner-teachers on fractional contracts may feel less able participate fully in the academic life of an institution, for example by serving on departmental committees, acting as course leaders, or serving as external examiners.

Similarly, staff on fractional contracts can potentially struggle to complete preparatory work or marking promptly, increasing their stress, and undermining the learning opportunities of students.

This may leave such staff feeling isolated, and could result in them focussing on one-or-other of their dual roles.



3. G. Gibbs, *Dimensions of Quality* (York: Higher Education Academy, 2010), p.19.

It should also be remembered that maintaining a work-life balance can be particularly challenging for people maintaining portfolio careers. They may in fact have to maintain a "work-work-life" balance. It is particularly important that non-work time for such staff is protected.

One solution to this is to ensure that non-teaching duties are included in contracts, or are covered by additional contracts. One GuildHE member institution reported having 120 staff, representing 75 FTE on over 400 contracts. This is obviously complex from an HR perspective, but does allow staff to contribute more fully to the life of the institution.

HE providers working with large numbers of part-time staff may also find it helpful to employ full-time programme managers. Programme managers can take responsibility for administrative management of courses, and can also serve as a point of contact for students in need of pastoral support and signposting to other services.

It should be noted that Gibbs does not produce evidence in support of his concern that 'adjunct faculty' are less likely to participate fully in the academic life of the community. Indeed, the 2010 report *Looking Out: Effective Engagements with Creative and Cultural Enterprise*, found that many practitioner-teachers hold key curriculum development responsibilities such as year coordinator or programme leader.⁴

This may indicate that the problem is not as significant as Gibbs suggests, however the reasons for this are unclear. Institutions would therefore be well advised to consider the implications fully and mitigate any risks.

Where institutions employ full-time academic staff and part-time dual professionals, there is a real risk that a two-tier system may develop, with groups self-segregating, and one group looking at the other as somehow less valuable or 'proper' teachers.

4. D. Clews & S. Mallinder, *Looking Out: Effective engagement with creative and cultural enterprise Arts HE and the Creative industries* (Brighton: University of Brighton, 2010), p.43.



This poses a significant threat to the place of dual professionals, who are likely to be in the minority in most institutions, and who are likely to be less well embedded in the life of an institution.

Senior management must play a significant role in ensuring that a cohesive academic community is built and maintained. While this should begin at the induction phase, it should not be limited to this. Rather, institutional, faculty and departmental leadership should take a coherent, long-term and sustained approach to developing a staff community, through team-building, CPD and social activities.

As was the case in the context of setting up practice-based learning, good engagement between senior leaders and frontline staff is crucial to building a coherent community.

Where front-line staff feel involved in decision making processes, they are more likely to support the final decision. Consultation is therefore important to ensuring a cohesive community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- HE providers should provide regular opportunities for students on industry placements to re-engage with their peers and academic community, for example through contact days or digital seminars.
- HE providers should work in partnership with placement providers to embed mentoring within placements.
- Institutions should ensure that contracts for fractional staff include time for responsibilities outside class, to allow them to properly prepare for teaching, support students, and contribute to the life of the institution.
- HE providers should consider employing full-time programme administrators alongside part-time dual professionals.
- Institutional leaders at all levels should take an active and sustained approach to building and developing a coherent academic community which engages all staff.

6. CAPTURING VALUE

One of the key challenges facing practice-based teaching is a lack of a strong evidence base for the value it adds.

From 2015 to 2017, the joint HEPI / HEA (now Advance HE) *Student Academic Experience Survey* included questions on the characteristics of teachers which students most valued, including professional/industrial experience, research activity and training in how to teach. This bank of questions demonstrated that students consistently value teachers who have professional experience.

This data-set was not without its limitations - it was not necessarily the case that those students who reportedly valued practitioner-teachers in the abstract did so in practice.

Nonetheless, it remains a great sadness that this set of questions was not included in the latest iteration of the survey.

Nor is practice-based teaching captured by any major sector data collection. HESA's staff record, for example, does not record which staff maintain professional practice alongside teaching responsibilities. The NSS, which captures student satisfaction, does not touch on practical teaching.

Newer metrics also ignore the role of practitioner-teachers. When outlining the TEF in the white paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, the Department for Education made reference to the importance of training in how to teach, but not of professional experience.⁵

The new Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) would be a sensible place to capture interactions between teaching and professional activity.

5. HM Government, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice* (London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016), p.44.



Anticipating the development of the KEF, institutions could begin to systematically capture data on value added. This could include collating information on the professional experience of staff, students' views (for example through end-of-module and end-of-year surveys) and the outcomes of students participating in practice-informed learning, with reference to the different backgrounds and prior experiences of students. This will allow institutions to better make the case for practice-informed teaching models.

There may also be some overlap in this area with the HE-Business Community Interaction return (HE-BCI). As the name suggests, HE-BCI can be used to track engagement between universities and businesses, and is a key component in calculating funding for knowledge exchange activities, through the HE Innovation Fund (HEIF).

HE providers may find that systematically tracking practice-informed learning allows them new insights into collaborations which could feed in to HE-BCI.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government should consider how best to capture the value of practice-informed learning, including through the Knowledge Exchange Framework.
- HE providers should systematically track engagement in practice-informed learning, as well as the outcomes and views of students' undertaking practice-informed learning, across the whole student lifecycle.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Practice-based learning models can bring significant benefit to students and practitioners alike, benefits which *Practice-Informed Learning: The rise of the dual professional* has shown, can spread out beyond institutions to benefit the wider economy and society.

However, delivering practice-based learning is a significant commitment, which should be undertaken after proper planning and with effective leadership and oversight.

The recommendations included in this report will help institutions successfully implement practice-based learning. They are not, however, intended to be exhaustive.

Every HE provider will face their own particular challenges, and will address them in their own ways. Many will identify challenges which are not touched upon here, while others will find that some aspects of this report are not relevant to their particular situation.

Nonetheless, it is hoped that the recommendations in this report will prove useful to institutions, allowing them to develop effective practice-based learning models in their own contexts.



8. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

SETTING UP AND KEEPING UP

- HE providers should ensure that there is support for new models of delivery at senior levels, to underwrite long-term sustainability.
- HE providers should ensure that governing bodies are properly engaged in planning new teaching models, to ensure that risks have been properly considered and mitigated. They should also take into account possible implications for recruitment, continuation rates, student outcomes, NSS and other performance indicators.
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- Local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Innovation Districts and other place-based organisations, should support collaboration between local HE providers and businesses.
- HE providers should explore the possibility of hosting placements internally, for students who do not have specific career plans, or where there is a shortage of high-quality, local partners.

ONBOARDING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- HE providers should ensure that new staff training is contextual to the role staff are entering, and to the staff members' experience and skills.
- HE providers should provide layered entry routes which allow practitioners to explore teaching, before gradually building in other responsibilities.
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- Advance HE should develop a specific strand within the UK Professional Standards Framework to recognise and accredit practitioner-teachers.
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FOSTERING A COMMUNITY

- HE providers should provide regular opportunities for students on industry placements to re-engage with their peers and academic community, for example through contact days or digital seminars.
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- HE providers should consider employing full-time programme administrators alongside part-time dual professionals.
- Institutional leaders at all levels should take an active and sustained approach to building and developing a coherent academic community which engages all staff.

CAPTURING VALUE

- Government should consider how best to capture the value of practice-informed learning, including through the Knowledge Exchange Framework.
- HE providers should systematically track engagement in practice-informed learning, as well as the outcomes and views of students' undertaking practice-informed learning, across the whole student lifecycle.

9. FURTHER READING

- Buckley, A., Sollemezidis, I. & Hillman, N., *2015 Student Academic Experience Survey* (York: Higher Education Academy/Higher Education Policy Institute, 2015).
- Clews, D. & Mallinder, S., *Looking Out: Effective engagement with creative and cultural enterprise Arts HE and the Creative industries* (Brighton: University of Brighton, 2010).
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