

Teaching and learning issues

How well do we know our learners, and is it important?

Most of our learners enrol through the web for our classes so we know little about them beforehand.

Finding out about our learners - their previous experience in the subject, needs and motivations - is essential for course planning. Usually, the information does not lead to huge changes to a regular course. It does, however, help us make the small tweaks, adaptations and topic shifts that make a course best suited to the learners before us.

In the box on the right are some ways we can informally find out about our learners in the first session or two. You may have your own. From a RARPA perspective all methods are fine, as long as, if oral, you keep notes. We know many learners are reluctant to complete the Individual Record of Learning, especially online. One of these other methods might work.

But my learners come year after year.....

Some learners are regulars so we feel we know them. But of course things can change. One



Informal ways of finding out about our learners

Questionnaire

A simple questionnaire is a straightforward way of finding out about your learners. The standard Individual Record of Learning is designed for this, but you can also design your own. The IRL can now be shared digitally, and you can adapt it for your subject. If you get back to the group about what you have found out, learners are much more likely to appreciate its purpose and complete it willingly.

Digital IRLs - guidance is [here](#)

Icebreaker

A common icebreaker at the start of a course is asking learners to share information about themselves, why they are there, and what they hope to get out of the course. Simply taking some notes will provide evidence for RARPA.

Initial assessment quiz

In some subjects you might devise a google quiz or similar to give you more detailed information about learner's existing skills or knowledge eg knowledge of grammar, digital skills, etc

Please chat to me in the break

An open invite to everyone to let you know confidentially if they have a learning difference or disability. You can also use this as a moment to check what would help.

experienced colleague did not realise that a long time student of hers was losing her hearing

and was starting to struggle in class. She only found out when she used a new digital initial assessment 'quiz' which the student filled in confidentially at home. The tutor was able to make adjustments accordingly.

The standard IRL has a box that can be ticked by learners continuing with the same tutor - where they only need add anything that has changed.

Where learners enrol each term, but are effectively attending 3 modules of the same course across the year, you can do the initial assessment in September, and then just with new people in the second and third terms. It is still

important to do an icebreaker each term though to make sure new people do not feel excluded.

Updating personal goals/challenges

If people are returning regularly to the same class, year after year, then its important they update their personal goal/challenge each time so that they continue to extend their learning. This avoids classes becoming 'clubs'. Personal goals or challenges can relate to personal or study skills development, as well as subject based goals. Common ones are maintenance of fitness levels, improved digital skills, taking more creative risks, presenting, or contributing more in discussion.

Learning

Professional development

Tutors growing through reflection, sharing and discussion.



Teaching is an art that needs constant adjustment and development. Different groups, different topics, different contexts - there is always something more to learn.

We have moved away from our old system of using lesson observations as a quality check. For many of us the most valuable way we have developed our confidence and skill in teaching is by discussing with, and learning from, other teachers. We are now creating opportunities for tutors to reflect on their teaching and discuss their practice with professional colleague/s.

The end of observations as quality control

In 2013, Matt O'Leary published the results of his research into the effectiveness of graded Lesson Observations in FE. He found that they had minimal impact on teacher's professional development. Senior leaders liked them because it gave them bar charts showing how many of their tutors were 'good or better'. But grading had the effect of de-professionalising teachers, creating much anxiety, was notoriously inaccurate and was no use in helping teachers develop their practice. O'Leary argued instead for an 'expansive' ungraded approach to lesson observations which led to professional dialogue, support and development and in which tutors could have some control of the process.

Within 2 years, Ofsted had stopped grading individual lessons. In 2018 at City Lit we started on a journey to change the way we supported tutors through class visits - away from judgement and towards creating opportunities for professional dialogue to help tutors grow and thrive.

*O'Leary, M. (2020 2nd ed) Classroom Observation: A Guide to the Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning, Routledge.

Class visits are now a precursor to dialogue not judgement. In 21-22 this will involve:

- a. visiting classes but focusing on learning rather than teaching. This is a recognition that there is no 'one' way how to teach. Each tutor has their own style and their own approach. Through dialogue we can reflect on how to enhance that learning.
- b. engaging in more short drop ins rather than the old 2-3 year class visit cycle. The purpose of drop-ins is for departments to gain a picture of their learners' experience of learning across our provision, rather than making judgements about a tutor's individual 'performance'.
- c. giving tutors an opportunity after drop-ins to meet together to share ideas and collaborate in developing ideas for adapting their teaching to make it even better.
- d. changing the approach to longer class visits so that they are now followed by professional dialogue rather than 'feedback'. This is an opportunity for tutors to reflect on their learners' progress and their course structure with a colleague.

Tutor Comment:

I was a little nervous about having my very first observation, but it really couldn't have been a more positive experience. ..The review session after the class was full of light-bulb moments on everything from technical fixes to pedagogical practices..... I'm really grateful for this professional development activity, as it's made me feel calmer and more confident about this term's class and those in the future. (Patrick Allies, Music)

The visitor and tutor can share strengths and how to build on these further.

Join in the process in 21-22

As last year, departments will be dropping in to as many classes as possible during the year for a short time.

Tutors will then again be invited to paid Tutor Conversation Meetings which are helpful in many ways - sharing ideas and inspiration and offsetting the isolation of teachers. They are extremely helpful in gaining professional support for your work and any ideas for, often very small, tweaks that will make a difference to your learners.

3 stages of class visits using drop ins



1..Drop ins to classes

2.Tutor conversation meeting

3. Impact Review - tutors reflect on actions/ upload resources

Tutor comment:

This (collaborative tutor project), was very useful in enabling me to reflect on my teaching..... I discovered the value of Zoom breakout rooms and group work as a means of continuing to provide learners with the social space that they value so highly as part of their City Lit learning experience, something which I have continued to incorporate fully into my online teaching. (Paul Sutton, Humanities)

This year we will also be following up with a review of the impact of these meetings. We will ask you to reflect after 3 or 4 months on the, often small, changes you have made as a result. We will ask you to post your reflections and any new resources on a communal site, and/or come to a meeting to share what you have done. City Lit will be paying tutors £75 for taking part in this process.

Tutors, even very experienced ones, find these meetings very useful and supportive and we do encourage everyone to join.

Tutor comment:

The (peer project) was useful to learn, reflect and think about different ways to do feedback and correction, to get new ideas on how to do it. Also to do it with a colleague feels less stressful. (Amaia Ibarquen, Languages)

Another feature of class visiting this year will be involving teams of tutors teaching the same type of subject in an '**area spotlight**' to consider the area as a whole and how it might be further developed. Departments will do a mixture of full class visits and post visit discussions with some extended drop-ins to other classes. The whole team, including tutors, will discuss how the subject area is progressing and any ways it can be developed . Your department will let you now if your team will be involved in this process.

If you are a new tutor - to the City Lit, to the curriculum area or to level - we will continue to do **advisory visits**. These are designed to help you get to grips with a new area of teaching with the help of an experienced colleague.

Online City Lit Tutor Toolkit

If you are a recently appointed tutor to City Lit, and are new to adult education, you should find the new City Lit Tutor Toolkit useful. It's open to all and can be found on the Staff Access pages of the website. The link is [here](#)

Experienced tutors may also find it useful to dip into

New tutors can receive a small payment for completing the toolkit. If you think you may be eligible, contact your line manager or tutor.development@citylit.ac.uk

Finally, if you are stuck with an aspect of teaching, do ask your department to visit you and offer support.

What does it feel like to learn at City Lit?



As part of our shift to thinking about learning and learners we have developed some principles for what we aspire to.

We have attached our new *Principles of Learning at City Lit* and *Characteristics of Effective Learning* along with this edition of Teaching and Learning Issues.

There are not checklists of what we will look for on visits, but a vision of what we aspire to for City Lit learners and a start for reflection and debate. We are inviting departments and tutors to think through together what this will mean in their subject area. We hope you will join the debate.

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