

The IFL

Colin Waugh (7/10/08)

In the 26/9/08 *TES*, Stephen Jones criticised the Institute for Learning (IFL). A week later, IFL CEO Toni Fazaeli tries to rebut these criticisms ('A louder voice for FE professionals' 3/10/08).

Fazaeli's main claim to an FE background seems to be that she was an FE Funding Council inspector. This may not disqualify her from commenting, but is she wise to say things like: '. . . as teachers, how can we teach others if we are not prepared to learn ourselves?' or refer to 'the proud traditions of our FE teaching profession'?

In an effort to give the IFL a respectable pedigree, Fazaeli claims that: 'It has a proud history, begun more than seven years ago when a large trade union for the FE sector and a staff development forum researched and found strong support for creating a professional body for teachers in further education'.

Sad to say, this contains one of Fazaeli's few points with a basis in reality. Two NATFHE officials did push for lecturers to be 'reprofessionalised' by undergoing more elaborate teacher training. (I argued against this in my article "The meaning of 'reprofessionalisation'", in *PSE 2*, March/April 2001.)

Fazaeli claims that the IFL's 'code of professional practice': 'places a strong reliance on professional autonomy'. 'We' (who exactly?) 'believe that teachers . . . should exercise their own judgement and discretion about how to act'. Moreover, 'teachers should hold responsibility for their own professional development'.

Few lecturers will fall for such blandishments. Let's remind ourselves of the reality.

Fazaeli says that the IFL 'aims to give practitioners a louder voice and more influence'. She goes on: 'Our membership is more than 163,000'. Hardly surprising, is it, when everybody has been forced to join it on pain of losing their employment, and when the Government has paid the bill? (What will happen when the IFL tries to make people pay out of their own pockets, or - more likely - when colleges deduct it at source?)

Fazaeli then claims that a 'member' told her that 'receiving her membership certificate was the proudest moment of her life'. No chance that this was meant ironically, I suppose?

The IFL is an embryonic company union. The employers and the state have forced it on us. No ordinary lecturer can benefit from it. Its functionaries arrogate to themselves the right to define 'general principles' for how we should act, the right to make us do 30 hours 'continuing professional development', and the right to get us sacked if we step out of line.

People have to win autonomy for themselves. The more we let the IFL force 'autonomy' on us, the less autonomous we become.

We need to win back some of the time which is now wasted on form-filling, on 'meetings' which are really management briefings, on 'professional development' sessions where discussion is banned, and on futile observation 'preparation'. Then we need to use that time to develop our own theory and practice of teaching and learning, our own analysis of FE, and our own controls over what we do.