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## Tertiary Education and Management

## Professional recognition: promoting recognition through the Higher Education Academy in a UK higher education institution

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# Professional recognition: promoting recognition through the Higher Education Academy in a UK higher education institution

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This study is on how one higher education institution included the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework, developed by the Higher Education Academy, as a strategic benchmark for teaching and learning. The article outlines the strategies used to engage all academic (and academic-related) staff in achieving relevant professional recognition under the framework and highlights the need for such a project to be driven by visible and consistent commitment from senior management. A survey of participants highlights the benefits to be gained by entrants to the profession from participation in an accredited course, and by more established professionals from the individual entry route. While a significant proportion of participants expressed scepticism about the benefits of work towards recognition, findings indicate a significant degree of peer development underpinning activities which enhanced individual and group confidence, supported developing practice on an ongoing basis and were believed to be relevant to students and other stakeholders.

**Keywords:** professional recognition; continuing professional development; staff development; policy

In 2011, the UK's Higher Education Academy (HEA) launched the revised UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (HEA, 2011). The framework is part of an ongoing sector-wide professionalization of teaching and support for learning in UK higher education, ensuring that staff possess formal teaching qualifications, a step seen by many as key to enhancing the student experience. In his report of 2010, commissioned by the British government, Lord Browne recommended that:

> institutions require all new academics with teaching responsibilities to undertake a teaching training qualification accredited by the HE Academy [the independent body funded by the UK higher education funding bodies, and by subscription, to champion excellent learning and teaching], and that the option to gain such a qualification is made available to all staff – including researchers and postgraduate students – with teaching responsibilities. Anonymized information about the proportion of teaching-active staff with such a qualification should be made available at subject level by each institution. (Browne, 2010, p. 50)

Although attempts to propose professionalization of teaching and learning have a long history, featuring for example in the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into

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Higher Education (Dearing, 1997), developments in this direction have quickened in pace in the past five years.

This increasing focus on professionalization as a means by which the quality of teaching in universities can be supported and evidenced has come from various quarters. The Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education, launched in December 2011, has a focus on developing mechanisms to enhance professionalism in teaching. Recent government-sponsored initiatives, of which Browne is an example, reflect policy and political priorities related to the economic importance of skills provision through higher education, and the need for improved information to applicants and students to allow for market mechanisms to drive improvements in its operation. It is in this context that professionalization of teaching and learning has gained prominence. The HEA too has been increasingly assertive in promoting the benefits of professionalization. Former Chief Executive of the HEA, Craig Mahoney told *Times Higher Education* in 2010 that 'he wanted to see every member of staff teaching in UK higher education qualified as a teacher' (Atwood, 2010). Likewise, the UK's National Union of Students (NUS), as part of its concern with the quality of teaching, has called for those teaching in higher education to have formal qualifications in teaching (Boffey, 2012). Research carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency (the independent body contracted by the UK's higher education funding agencies to safeguard standards and improve quality) and the NUS into the student experience suggested teaching ability and quality are of key importance:

> Students want academic staff to develop their teaching styles to be more engaging, interactive and use technology and props to make the subject more accessible and interesting. Developing an active learning style is a teaching skill which needs to be taught and developed over time, and 34% of students in this research articulated that they wanted their lecturers to have better teaching skills. (QAA & NUS, 2012)

It is evident that, while these trends may be more advanced in the UK, they are also becoming clearer in Europe. This is to be seen in the activity of individual academic leaders and universities, and key institutions, such as the European Science Foundation and European Commission. Recommendations to the latter have gone so far as to require, 'ensuring new staff have a teaching qualification or equivalent on entry or have access to credible teacher training courses in the early years of their career' (High Level Group on the Modernization of Higher Education, 2013, p. 15; Pleschová et al., 2012).

While some may question the possibly simplistic and mechanistic assumptions behind aspects of these conclusions, and others argue that they mask a neoliberal agenda and culture of managerialism (Layton & Brown, 2011, pp. 163–164), it is possible to adduce theoretical and pragmatic bases for such a move towards structured professionalization. There is, of course, a long-standing debate about the possible connections between professionalization and improvements in student learning experiences and outcomes. It is not the intention of this paper to address this directly, as the data and analysis required (including the disaggregation of other factors influencing experience and outcomes) are beyond the scope of this specific study. It is also acknowledged that, even more fundamentally, there is in the literature no simple consensus on what might constitute individual teach*er*, and systemic teach*ing*, excellence. Further, it is evident that there will continue to be a debate about how we might convincingly articulate the links between individual teacher excellence, or general teaching excellence in a particular context, and learning outcomes for students. It is, however,

generally acknowledged that one concentration of activity within the UK higher education sector working towards those definitions is focused on the UKPSF: the document provides descriptions of the dimensions of activity, core knowledge and professional values associated with the performance of teaching, and associated leadership, roles, and by extension is designed to assist institutions in defining threshold and excellence standards within them (Gunn & Fisk, 2013; Law, 2011; Little, Locke, Parker, & Richardson, 2007; Rostan & Vaira, 2011).

Further, while it has been argued that there is no simple correlation between being a reflective practitioner of the sort acknowledged through particular professional recognition processes and being a good practitioner, there is evidence to suggest benefits from reflectiveness, which, for example, appears as a theme within most of the contributions to Hay's *Inspiring Academics* (2011). In addition, the routes to recognition as Fellow of the HEA, discussed below, are about more than just reflection. Although the individual route, for example, requires a reflective narrative account of practice, it does also constitute evidence of practice that enacts professional standards that have a pedagogical basis (in the UKPSF), and represents more than reflection. Those who are in the process of becoming higher education professionals may need more support than is sometimes appreciated, both in developing necessary specific skills and values, and in becoming part of the 'group', and developing identities as part of that group, and therefore 'learning'. There is evidence in the literature for the importance of interpersonal sharing and support as part of a 'communities of practice' approach to teaching excellence (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009a, 2009b; Roxå, Mårtensson, & Alveteg, 2011; Shephard, Harland, Stein, & Tidswell, 2010). Structured recognition processes, whether linked to courses of study or to other forms of mentoring and development, may provide this support.

Given this, there is value in exploring the general approach to professionalization being adopted in many UK higher education institutions, and in considering a case study of one particularly extensive exercise of this kind.

## Developing reflective practitioners fit to teach

Most – if not all – UK higher education institutions now require new academic members of staff with no teaching experience to undertake a professional qualification, such as a postgraduate certificate in higher education or in academic practice. For most of these programmes, the focus is on developing reflective practitioners – not educational specialists – and they can be seen as a form of induction to the processes of working as an academic. Many of the programmes are accredited by the HEA and lead to recognition as Fellow or Associate Fellow under the UKPSF.

An example would be the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education from the University of Kent:

> The intention of the programme… is not just to give you a qualification but to support you in your work as a member of academic staff and to help you to build on and learn from your experience. It seeks to balance theory and practice. It is intended not for educational theorists but for reflective practitioners. It will draw on theories of teaching and learning, and on educational research, but will bring these to bear on your own work and experience. The work which you do for the programme should therefore be continuous with your own work in teaching, research and administration, providing an added dimension to it. (University of Kent, 2013)

It was, therefore, not surprising that a recent review of the UKPSF conducted for the HEA concluded that one of the main ways in which the framework had impacted

on the sector was in supporting the development of professional development frameworks in higher education institutions, although it also uncovered a significant degree of ignorance about the framework itself even amongst staff who had undertaken development mapped against it (Turner et al., 2013). This potential discrepancy in understanding of the nature of the UKPSF, as opposed to professional development and recognition per se, is not, however, the subject of this article.

The take-up of recognition across the UK has quickened significantly in the past four years. In 2004–2005 the total number of individuals with recognition against the framework reached 14,950; by 2009–2010 this had grown to 26,324. At the end of April 2014, the total had just passed 50,000, at 50,225.

Several UK universities have recently committed, publically or as an internal target, to percentage recognition goals against the framework. The HEA understands 35–40 institutions have set some form of target, and as a result some form of encouragement or enforcement of compliance. The emphasis on recognition is often strongest with new entrants, as seen, for example, in the policy at the University of Exeter, which requires new members of academic staff to complete a course leading to recognition before they can be considered to have successfully completed probation:

> As a Lecturer on the Professional Development Programme (PDP) you are required to obtain Fellowship of the HEA. If you do not already hold this membership, it can be obtained through successful completion of the PCAP programme.

Meanwhile experienced colleagues are strongly encouraged to achieve recognition through other routes (University of Exeter, 2014).

## HEA Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning

The UKPSF is a guide to recognizing and benchmarking teaching roles and learning support roles within Higher Education, and was designed for higher education institutions to use in developing professional development programmes so they could evidence that they met professional standards. The professional standards outlined in the UKPSF are articulated in three inter-related dimensions of practice, which are intended to reflect the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the professional role of staff teaching and supporting learning.

The dimensions consist of three sets of statements outlining the:

(1) *five areas of activity* undertaken by teachers and supporters of learning within higher education.
(2) *six aspects of core knowledge* that are needed to carry out those activities at the appropriate level.
(3) *four professional values* that someone performing these activities should embrace and exemplify.

The framework can thus inform an accredited course for new members of staff, or provide reference points for the assessment of established staff members seeking recognition if they apply via the individual recognition route. Applying as an individual through this route means that, for a member of staff to become a Fellow of the HEA, they must write a reflective account of their practice which evidences successful engagement across the five areas of activities and demonstrates how they apply the six areas of

core knowledge as well as their commitment to the four professional values, and have this supported by two referees who know their practice.

As an example, considering area of activity A1, the design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study, for those aspiring to Fellowship, there would need to be a demonstration of appropriate skills and understanding in anything from specific module design to a whole programme of study. It would be expected that the design would reflect developing knowledge and understanding of the core knowledge and professional values dimensions. How this was demonstrated would depend on whether the candidate was being considered through an accredited programme, in which case this would be embedded in learning outcomes and appropriately assessed, or through the individual recognition route, where it would need to be referenced in the claim and supported appropriately by reference.

Further, in a development to the UKPSF in the edition published in November 2011, descriptors now differentiate between the types and levels of activity of staff involved in teaching and supporting learning. The descriptors within the framework differentiate between the expectations to be demonstrated by an Associate Fellow, against descriptor 1, for individuals who 'do not engage in the full spectrum of activities that might define academic or academic related practice, but who have a specific role in teaching and supporting HE learning', and a Fellow, against descriptor 2, the 'expected descriptor for all staff who undertake substantive teaching as part of their role'. Descriptors 3 and 4 address expectations for those with 'a considerable level of expertise, developed over time, in supporting high quality student learning', and those 'widely respected for their effective teaching and who have progressed into senior roles'.

## Professionalism in teaching and learning: a strategic objective

In spite of these developments, in almost all cases, the proportions of academic staff in UK higher education institutions with professional recognition in teaching and learning remain relatively low. This paper considers the experience of the first institution to achieve universal recognition, the processes involved and the implications of the initiative for staff attitudes.

The objective of achieving 100% recognition under the UKPSF for academic and academic-related colleagues was set in the University of Huddersfield Teaching & Learning Strategy adopted in 2008. The university was at that point already one of the larger UK universities, with approximately 24,000 students at three campuses, in Huddersfield itself, in Barnsley and in Oldham, each of them large towns with a varied industrial heritage in the north of England, as well as in a wide network of collaborating partner colleges and other organizations. Originating in 1841 as part of the Mechanics' Institute movement, it had for long been a pioneer in offering technically and vocationally focussed education, eventually becoming a polytechnic and making the transition to university status in 1992 (O'Connell, 1992). In 2008, the university identified that, in order to achieve the stretching objectives set in its strategy (which included significant improvements in student retention, achievement, satisfaction and employment rates), it needed to ensure colleagues were 'high achieving reflective people, at the forefront of their fields both as individuals and as team players' (University of Huddersfield, 2008b). That meant they would be active in appropriate professional practice, research or enterprise, evidenced by minimum qualifications standards: in the case of professionalism in teaching and learning this was to be through the UKPSF and recognition via Fellowship of the HEA.

This objective, set for achievement in the summer of 2013, was in 2011 brought forward to summer 2012 in recognition of the rapid pace of change already achieved and the UK policy context placing ever greater emphasis on the subject.

The initiative formed part of the university's overall strategy for 2008–2013. The strategy-making process was led by the vice-chancellor and defined a focus on 'an inspiring, innovative university of international renown' (University of Huddersfield, 2008a). Within that, there was a recognition of the importance of enhanced professionalism in teaching and learning. The process of strategy formation was a highly inclusive one, involving the vice-chancellor talking directly to senior colleagues as he formulated the initial draft, and then consulting on that draft with staff groups at a variety of levels and across the institution, developing the document as he went along. The Teaching and Learning Strategy itself was widely consulted upon, with engagement focussing on the university's key Teaching and Learning Committee, as well as the equivalent committees with devolved responsibility in each of the schools. The overall strategy was approved through the university's Senate (its highest-level academic board) and then at its governing Council. While all elements of the strategy stimulated vigorous discussion, there was no widely articulated opposition at this stage, and the proposals for increased emphasis on professionalism in teaching and learning were welcomed by representatives of the main academic staff trade union, the Universities and Colleges Union. One sign of the effectiveness of strategy making in the institution is the long-standing accreditation held by the University of Huddersfield under the UK's 'Investors in People' scheme, at the highest 'gold' level (most recently assessed in late 2011), and the comments of assessors over the years as to the inclusiveness and effectiveness of communication and decision-making at the institution.

Behind this 2008 initiative lay a longer-term commitment to the use of the UKPSF at Huddersfield – Richard Latimer, who was a learning development coordinator in the Staff Development Unit in the late 1990s, was an influential figure in the development of the framework nationally. He was responsible for ensuring that the university's existing programme of development for new staff was accredited under the framework in 2008. The university also achieved validation for its MSc Health Professional Education in 2011 and MSc Multimedia and E-Learning in 2011. The university's pro vice-chancellor (teaching and learning), the author of this article, in a previous role as dean of the university's School of Music, Humanities and Media, had already used the UKPSF as a focus for the development of colleagues' professionalism in teaching and learning, setting a goal for 100% recognition in the strategic plan for the school in 2006.

A human resources policy stipulating in great detail the requirement for all eligible academic staff to secure HEA recognition was developed in 2012, addressing the specific issues of colleagues affected by special circumstances, and ensuring a supportive approach to equality and diversity in the professional workforce, while ensuring 100% engagement.

## Supporting the recognition of teaching and learning at the University of Huddersfield

When in July 2010 the university's Teaching and Learning Institute first got involved in monitoring the level of membership, the university had 324 Fellows and 4 Associates; as of 31 January 2013, there were 777 Fellows and 23 Associates. Already, on 23 November 2012, a ceremony at the university involving the chief executive of the HEA

and the vice-chancellor had marked the achievement of 100% recognition amongst colleagues with substantial teaching and learning support roles.

As noted, the university had run an HEA-accredited Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Development (Higher Education) (known as the PCPD) since 2008, aimed at early career staff. In 2010, because the university had a large number of staff that had not been through the PCPD course but were already extensively experienced higher education professionals, it was decided that the individual recognition route would be recommended for remaining experienced staff. Recognition fees were paid by the university, removing a disincentive which might have deterred staff from applying.

A variety of support options were developed. These ranged widely. Many colleagues attended intensive writing days where staff came, often with colleagues from their own area, for an overview of the UKPSF and the recognition form requirements, and worked with facilitators who could offer feedback on drafts of reflective accounts. There was also a strong emphasis on peer support in the process, with colleagues discussing and comparing notes in the sessions. Not all staff who achieved HEA recognition attended development sessions, however; some preferred the more ad hoc feedback that was provided by Teaching and Learning Institute staff, while others were able to develop their submissions in informal discussion with colleagues.

These processes had their complexities. While many colleagues found they not only had the relevant experience but also a ready ability to understand how this could be shaped to respond to the process, some staff found the HEA application process and UKPSF confusing and had to work hard to translate, for example, the professional values into something that made sense in terms of their practice and what it meant to support this with evidence. Much of the facilitation was about ensuring that colleagues understood the language of the UKPSF and in particular the areas of core knowledge and the professional values.

In order to evaluate how staff felt about the process of applying and what their experiences had been, the Teaching and Learning Institute developed a short survey. The survey was sent to all academic staff in the seven academic schools and to relevant colleagues in other support services, like computing and library services. The survey was anonymous and all questions were optional, including potentially identifying responses such as gender and school.

The survey was launched on 11 December 2012 and closed on 5 February 2013. The survey received 267 responses, which were broadly gender-balanced (51% men, 47% women, 3% not declaring), representative of the university's population by school of study, and characteristic in terms of age profile (with just over a third of the total population in each of the age 40–49 and 50–59 years brackets).

The survey responses were provided by staff who had taken different routes to HEA recognition, such as transfers from previous Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) membership (obtained during its existence in the years 2000–2004), completing an accredited course at Huddersfield or elsewhere, or by applying directly to the HEA on the basis of their experience through the individual recognition route.

## Routes into professional recognition and HEA Fellowship

The survey confirmed that by far the most common route to recognition for the university's staff had been the individual recognition route (see Table 1). The importance for more recently appointed colleagues of the validated programme, the Postgraduate

Table 1.    Routes in professional recognition identified by survey respondents.

|  | N | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| HEA application (individual recognition route) | 170 | 63.7 |
| Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development (Higher Education) at the University of Huddersfield | 51 | 19.1 |
| Was member of ILTHE and transferred to the HEA | 29 | 10.9 |
| Other HEA-accredited course | 12 | 4.5 |
| Other | 5 | 1.9 |
| Total | 267 | 100.0 |

Certificate in Professional Development (Higher Education), was evident, accounting for a further 19% of the responses. It was also notable that transition from ILTHE membership to HEA recognition was a significant factor, to some extent a result of the importance of group membership for some of the health professions early in the life of the ILTHE.

### Sources of advice

We asked the respondents who had not completed a course to tell us where they had sought advice. They could choose as many options as they wanted and the five most frequently chosen were:

(1) Colleagues.
(2) Teaching and Learning Institute Intensive workshop.
(3) Staff development workshop led by Richard Latimer.
(4) Received information/feedback from Teaching and Learning Institute staff.
(5) Line manager/Teaching and Learning Institute briefing session.

This does suggest that, although the structured support offered by the university had been widely drawn upon, in practice the extension of recognition across the whole of the relevant population had been significantly enabled by peer support and activity, as had been hoped.

### Why did they apply for professional recognition?

The top three reasons that staff applied were:

(1) For their professional development.
(2) The vice-chancellor required staff to apply.
(3) To gain recognition for their commitment to teaching and learning.

As with the findings in relation to sources of advice, these data suggest that, while a clear institutional lead was important in motivating colleagues to act, it was not the prime reason identified, and this was far more clearly related to a sense of the benefits to their own professional development and commitment to teaching and learning.

### Did staff see a value in professional recognition under the UKPSF?

We asked whether staff themselves valued the professional recognition status under the UKPSF; whether in their opinion recognition is valued by their colleagues; and whether

they thought the higher education sector as a whole values the professional status that recognition under the UKPSF represents.

While approximately a quarter of those answering did not value their Fellowship status, about 75% responded that they valued the status of being a Fellow of the HEA. We also asked respondents for their opinion on whether HEA Fellowship is valued by their colleagues and by the higher education section (see Figure 1).

One significant perception was that the professional recognition would be important to students:

> It is an indicator for current and future students that my teaching has been externally checked and validated.

> I immediately put the certificate on my office wall. It may have gained some sarcastic comments from colleagues but I wanted students to see that a professional is teaching them.

Although a clear majority believed that their recognition status would be valued by colleagues and by the sector as a whole, there was a small but still relatively numerous minority of staff who did not believe that recognition is so regarded, this being most pronounced in relation to the question about colleagues' valuation of the process, where this minority represented just under a quarter of those responding to the survey. The latter of the two comments just cited points to this: a belief that colleagues may not rate the status as highly as students (about which, in these questions, respondents were not directly asked).

There was some scepticism as to the nature of the recognition process and what this implied for the standing of recognition itself amongst colleagues:

> I didn't find the process of joining especially challenging or enlightening and I can't think of ways in which membership has informed my teaching.

> The status is neither necessary nor sufficient for being a good teacher. In fact, I think there is an inverse relationship between how quickly you get status and how good a teacher you are. Good teachers are generally too busy trying to produce high quality teaching and helping students to take the time out to apply for fellowship.
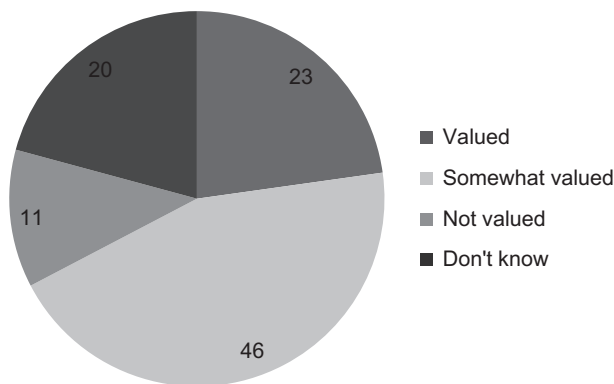


Figure 1.   Is HEA recognition valued by the higher education sector (%)?

## Recognition and impacts on practice

We also asked whether staff had made any changes to their teaching practice or the way (s) they support learning as a result of the application process. There were 155 open text box responses to this question.

About 27% of respondents indicated that they had made some changes to their practice or used the opportunity to reflect on their approaches as a result of the process:

> Yes. I feel that I have to live up to my professional status so have done more training and read more articles about pedagogy since I applied. As a concrete example, this has changed the way I talk about feedback with students and the emphasis I place on it.

> It made me more conscious of what I do and the techniques I used. It gave me a focus of conscious reflection.

> I have learned to be more analytical about what I do and also question the approaches I take with a view to doing things better. I am more inclined to consult with colleagues.

The majority (65%) of respondents said they had not made any changes as a result of engaging in the process. Most of the responses simply said no but 10% of this group (i.e. 10 of 100) elaborated slightly to say that they were continually engaged in developing their practice in any case already, by for example, getting feedback on their practice from students and colleagues.

There were disparities between the responses to this question of those in the sample who had achieved recognition through the individual entry route and those who had completed the PCPD. Of the 26 respondents who said they had gained recognition via the PCPD route and who commented on whether they had made any changes to their practice, 12 indicated they had made some changes, 9 said no and 4 responses were classified as other. Of the 106 respondents who said they had gained HEA recognition via the individual recognition route and who commented on whether they had made any changes to their practice, 24 indicated they had made some changes, 79 said no changes and 3 responses were classified as other. As might be expected, those whose role in the profession was new or in the early stages of development were more likely than others to see the recognition process as changing their practice, but only by a margin of 46% to 25%.

## Further comments on the process

Although the focus on Fellowship of the HEA had been a key objective since 2008, for some staff this message had not quite filtered through early in the process and therefore the decision to seek 100% engagement by 2013 and then 2012 appeared to them to be a short deadline.

There were different perceptions of the approach adopted and the enforced deadline. This is evidenced in the two comments below, where one respondent considered the approach to lack a developmental focus, thus becoming a tickbox exercise, while another saw the approach as evidencing a commitment from the top and offering a format that fitted around their workload:

> The achievement of HEA fellowship is something that could, for some people, be the culmination of a fulfilling journey of reflection and self-improvement. Sadly, the factory-farm

approach adopted by the university to get everyone through the arbitrary hoop set by the VC on this issue devalued the whole process.

Personally, it has been a wholly positive experience. It made me reflect on the way I already teach, but has also made me reflective about my practice and keen to continue learning how to be a better teacher. I was so pleased that the university put on the intensive workshops because it demonstrated the institutional commitment to the scheme and was a time-efficient way of getting the job done.

A number of staff members recognized that the professional recognition had a part to play in a changed higher education landscape:

I think the fact that we now have 100% recognition is a powerful message for the institution to use.

I agree that the HEA is a good selling point for the university and provides a 'kitemark' of teaching quality for the students/applicants. No other such kitemark exists.

In the few cases where colleagues had recently undertaken the PCPD but had not achieved recognition as a result, and therefore had to use the individual recognition route, there was a preference for the benefits offered by the accredited course (and some frustration that it could not, later, be translated into recognition more simply). One observed of the extent of change to their practice:

Not as a result of the application, but yes as a result of some of the issues explored on the accredited course. Although many people do not really value the course (or say they don't) and it is difficult to find the time to do this in practice it does have some effect on your practice. Therefore, I think that to gain fellowship you need to either do an accredited course or show some other form of objective measure of teaching quality – more than the application form and references which seemed to be little more than a formality.

## Discussion and conclusions

The initiative at Huddersfield has demonstrated that colleagues in many instances have clear perceptions of the importance to the developing environment in higher education of recognition against the UKPSF, and in particular its relevance to the need to meet external benchmarks accessed by students and other stakeholders.

The survey data suggest some of the expected positive benefits from reflection, prompted by the individual recognition route, in prompting innovation and increased engagement with teaching and support for learning, and the importance of interpersonal sharing and support as part of a 'communities of practice' approach to teaching excellence, even if some of the leadership of the initiative came from university senior management.

It was indicated in the introduction that it was not the intention of this paper to address directly possible connections between professionalization and improvements in student learning experiences and outcomes, given the complexity of disaggregating the factors influencing these. It is important to record that this project has occurred alongside improvements in metrics for student performance and satisfaction, even if no direct correlation is possible. In the period during which the initiative under discussion was undertaken, the average satisfaction score recorded by University of Huddersfield students in the UK National Student Survey (NSS) increased significantly, as did the

proportion of students achieving first-class or upper-second classified degrees. In 2009, the average score across the 22 questions of the NSS stood at 76%, and by 2013 this had increased to 82%. In the academic year 2008/2009, 54% of students achieved first-class or upper-second classified degrees; in 2012/2013 that proportion had risen to 61%.

It is also possible to see some patterns in the data which suggest impacts arising specifically from the management initiative. Where institutional leadership was evidently the prime cause for engagement with the professionalization agenda, in a small but still significant minority of cases respondents nonetheless also stated that they valued the professional recognition status that they had subsequently achieved. Since survey respondents were not required to rank the importance of the different motivating factors leading to their submission for recognition, it is not possible to make extensive judgements as to the implications for those where the vice-chancellor's lead was highly influential. It is, however, notable that, where this was the *only* factor identified, which applies in 29 cases, in 11 of them the respondent also indicated s/he valued recognition. The data are harder to interpret in relation to the implications for teaching enhancement through reflection amongst this group apparently motivated solely by the vice-chancellor's leadership, but nonetheless there is some sign of benefit in this area too. This group included three who chose to make free-text comments suggesting that their practice had been enhanced in some way through the process of reflection and engagement required by the submission for recognition.

One group which seems to have gained particularly from the exercise is that of staff involved in teaching and supporting learning but not in conventional lecturing roles. As one commented:

> I value it particularly as a member of support staff who doesn't (officially) do any formal teaching; to have gained FHEA status for my work supporting learning behind the scenes is a significant achievement for me. It's given me a lot more confidence that I really do understand how learning works (as I don't have any formal teaching qualification) when discussing T&L issues with colleagues.

Much of the scholarly discussion on the subject of teacher excellence has been about recognition and reward, with a clear implication that this is about choices made by some academics to seek that recognition and reward, or by elements within university management to select colleagues considered most worthy for that recognition and reward. These processes are generally perceived to have made only a limited impact on the relative prestige associated with teaching and the support of learning, as against the prestige associated with research (Davidovitch, Soen, & Sinuani-Stern, 2011). This case study stands in contrast to this trend, since the initiative was adopted institution-wide and involved all academics, including those whose orientation was primarily towards research. Only those without even a limited engagement in research student supervision were excluded. The exercise therefore offers an interesting challenge to the research–teaching binary, in suggesting that even research-oriented academics might express pride and increased confidence associated with a teaching-related recognition scheme. There are, indeed, interesting implications in suggesting a possible challenge to the self-identification and distinctiveness of a 'teaching-focussed' academic when professional recognition schemes of this type are successfully accessed by 'research-focussed' colleagues.

There is no question, however, that a small but still relatively numerous group of academic colleagues see such steps as being of limited value, and are confident in their own capacity to develop their teaching and learning practice. There is even a small

minority who are actively hostile and sceptical towards such exercises, although their willingness to become engaged in some form of it when institutional leadership and direction are clear is also notable.

There are also clear differentials between those for whom acquisition of recognition is part of the process of becoming a higher education professional, and those for whom professionalism may have been developing for many years and who are seeking a means to achieve recognition while at the same time accessing a new framework for reflection on their practice.

The evidence of this study would suggest that such initiatives requiring staff to achieve professional recognition, such as that against the UKPSF through the HEA, work most effectively when they are part of embedding a culture of professional development. It is clear from the responses that a course such as PCPD can have a significant impact on practice, and for many colleagues this is the logical route to pursue. For those colleagues with extensive and ongoing teaching practice, however, the individual recognition route does offer great benefits. Even where this approach was clearly led at an institutional level with the vice-chancellor's authority, there is the potential for such an effort to be a positive element in the structuring of the university's learning communities: for the process to be 'owned' by a significant proportion of those involved, for it to be effected as a peer-supported initiative, and for it to enhance colleagues' confidence as teaching and learning professionals and their willingness and capacity to innovate and develop.

## Acknowledgements

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