International Perspectives on the Perceptions of Impact of Gaining Fellowship Aligned to the (UK)Professional Standards Framework

People Involved

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Background

“An excellent transformational learning experience.”

“It has helped me to regain my confidence, has acknowledged the good work that I do and the experience I have. It has made me feel valued.”

“Initially a reluctant participant, but by engaging in a transformational learning experience I am now one who fully appreciates the importance and significance of this recognition for leading, managing and teaching in a challenging and changing HE landscape”

The traditional role of a university has long been viewed as one which embodies academic freedom and autonomy: academic staff are recognised as discipline experts and there has been no requirement for them to undertake a formal teaching qualification (Blackmore et al, 2010:106). However, the last twenty years or so has seen a shift in the perception of what constitutes the role of a Higher Education Institution (HEI), and the question of professionalism in the sector has come under closer scrutiny on a number of levels (Higher Education Academy, 2009:23).

From a UK perspective there is evidence that professionalism in higher education has been identified as an important issue since 1987, when the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) called for lecturers “to maintain and enhance professional standards in teaching” (CVCP, 1987: 5). Ten years later, Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) recognised that the future of higher education in the UK was dependent on the professionalism and commitment of its staff, and recommended that “institutions of higher education begin immediately to develop or seek access to programmes for teacher training of their staff, if they do not have them, and that all institutions seek national accreditation of such programmes” (NCIHE, Recommendation 13). In 2003, the government White Paper The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003) – in anticipation of the professional standards to be agreed - expected “all new teaching staff to obtain a teaching qualification which meets the standards from 2006” and the development of institutional “policies and systems to ensure that all staff are engaged in continuing professional development to maintain, develop and update their skills.” (DfES, 2003:50). This was further endorsed in the 2011 White Paper (BIS, 2011) and more recently in the 2016 White Paper which is currently under UK Government consultation (BIS, 2016). In this most recent iteration of UK
policy it is suggested that there is a need to identify and measure teaching excellence and to re-dress historical imbalances in the status of teaching and research:

“The quality of teaching should be among the key drivers of a prospective student’s investment. Great teaching increases the likelihood of good outcomes. There are providers where employment outcomes are significantly above the sector-accepted benchmark and others that are significantly below the benchmark. Clearly, good quality teaching makes a difference. But for too long, we have funded teaching on the basis of quantity, not quality. This is in sharp contrast to research, with its quality-driven funding stream allocated through the Research Excellence Framework. This has led to teaching being the poor cousin of research in significant parts of English higher education.” (BIS, 2016 p43). The aim is to address this, within the UK, through the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework. These developments have clear and strategic implications for the professionalism of staff and also for institutions as these achievements may not only be useful in supporting the development of excellent and effective pedagogic practices but may be used as a metric based proxy for teaching quality.

The High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (HLGMHE) supports this renewed emphasis on the importance of quality higher education teaching across Europe, recommending in its 2013 report that "Every institution should develop and implement a strategy for the support and on-going improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, devoting the necessary level of human and financial resources to the task, and integrating this priority in its overall mission, giving teaching due parity with research”. It further recommends that “all staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training. Continuous professional education as teachers should become a requirement for teachers in the higher education sector.”

The advent of the UK Professional Standards Framework in 2006 (Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2011), developed in consultation with the sector, allows institutions to align their professional development programmes to a series of descriptors to ensure that teaching and learning standards are being met. A sector-wide understanding of the extent of the professional development needs of those new to teaching and learning is well established within the UK, leading to the establishment of post-graduate certificates in higher education teaching practice aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in Higher Education (Higher Education Academy, 2011). Co-terminus achievement of Fellowship of the HEA is commonly achieved with successful completion of such courses.

More recently there has been significant interest and growth in the number of UK and other institutions seeking opportunities for more experienced staff to gain professional recognition for their experience and effective practice. For many, the route of choice for this has been through the development of a HEA accredited continuing professional development (CPD) scheme. As of 31 July 2016, 151 institutions in 4 countries operate such a scheme leading to the award of HEA fellowships in all categories from AFHEA to PFHEA (HEA data, July 2016). These schemes have led to the award of over 58,000 HEA fellows (HEA data, July 2016). This achievement has involved significant human resourcing within their institutions. Early evaluations have led to claims of the significant effects that Schemes are having within institutions, but to date, this is largely unpublished and anecdotal. One early study by Spowart et. Al. (2015 p1) has started to address this through questioning ‘how institutions recognise and reward individuals’ commitment to teaching and learning’ and by exploring the experiences of staff engagement with one institutional scheme.
It is timely therefore, as a growing number of schemes are maturing, to reflect on the development of this increased range of institutional routes to fellowship, and to explore perceptions of the wider and lasting impacts that engagement with them has had on participants, their students and their institutions.

Aims

This study aims to utilise a modified version of the HEA CPD Toolkit evaluation instrument (Kneale et al., 2015; PedRio, 2016) to explore the longitudinal impact that engagement with institutional routes to fellowship has had on staff in a range of institutions within the UK and Australia. The institutions have been selected to include a geographic spread, mission statement and the maturity of their HEA accredited schemes and taught routes. The study aims to involve applicants who have achieved a category of fellowship through institutional fellowship opportunities, taught or CPD, in the two years prior to the survey. The impact on applicants’ own beliefs and values will be critically analysed by examining factors such as their motivations, conceptions of teaching, impact on students and the wider institution.

Methods/ Procedures

This study is situated in Ulster University and will be conducted in collaboration with partners in a number of UK Universities representing a range of mission groups. To provide an international dimension the project will include at least one Australian partner. A multi-methodological approach will be adopted utilising;

- questionnaire responses from educators who have gained recognition through institutional routes to fellowship collected once the project commences
- reflective commentaries from the project researchers in their capacities as Leads of institutional schemes and taught provision.
- Publically available institutional data tracking successful applicants through other context specific reward and recognition processes e.g. student-led awards, excellence awards, teaching-led promotions
- Interviews with each institution’s Learning and Teaching senior manager

Questionnaire:

A modified version of the HEA CPD Toolkit evaluation instrument (Kneale et. Al., 2015; PedRio, 2016) will be circulated to applicants who have achieved a category of fellowship through institutional routes to fellowship in the two years prior to the survey. The questionnaire will be distributed by institutional project contacts using SurveyMonkey. See appended questionnaire.

Reflective Commentaries:

Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data (survey, interview and institutional data on reward and recognition) will enable the project team to use a thematic analysis approach to identify inter and intra-institutional trends and variations. Further sense making of the data will be provided through the reflections provided by the project researchers in their capacities as Scheme/Course Leads. The project data will provide a key contribution to the existing scholarly evidence on the benefits of and wider impact of institutional schemes.
Interviews:

Interviews with each institution’s Learning and Teaching senior manager will be carried out in the later stages of the project focussing on key themes that arise from the survey data.

Resources:

The research will be conducted by the team of Principal Investigators.

Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 2016</td>
<td>Establish Project Team and agree project aims and methodology, finalise questionnaire, agree potential outputs</td>
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<tr>
<td>October - November 2016</td>
<td>Gain ethical approval at Ulster (main) and collaborative partner institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2016 – January 2017</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
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<td>February - March 2017</td>
<td>Data analysis and discussion</td>
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<td>March 2017 onwards</td>
<td>Work on public outputs e.g. paper for IJAD</td>
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References:


PedRio (2016) [https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/institutes/pedagogic/hea-cpd-framework](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/institutes/pedagogic/hea-cpd-framework) [accessed 12/09/16]