

# Engaging with the UK Professional Standards Framework for Fellowship: A guidance note for college HE

**Dave Collins**

## Introduction

Colleges in the UK have been consistently providing higher education to around 10% of the HE student population since the Second World War. Today, this means that around 150,000 students are studying on higher education courses in around [200 colleges](#).

The introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the UK means that, across the higher education spectrum, providers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of excellence in teaching and learning in their institutions – something of course which is not new to college practice. This commitment to excellence in teaching and learning is central to the Higher Education Academy, now known as Advance HE, which works in partnership with institutions and individuals to support student success, by ‘improving learning outcomes by raising the status and quality of teaching in higher education’. This mission is enshrined in the [UK Professional Standards Framework](#) (the UKPSF or now known simply as the PSF), a framework for benchmarking success within HE teaching and learning support.

In Spring 2018, the Fellowship Scheme of Advance HE, linked to the UKPSF, celebrated awarding 100,000 fellowships across the UK and globally.

In mid-2018, the following fellowships had been awarded to college HE practitioners (with the total number in HE stated in brackets):

135 Associate Fellows (20,700)

1081 Fellows (70,200)

169 Senior Fellows (8130)

7 Principal Fellows (880)

## The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)

The UKPSF has been enthusiastically embraced by the university sector, but – given that college HE represents some 10% of provision – there is clearly more work to be done in colleges. There may be many reasons for the smaller numbers in colleges, but it is clear, through the work of Scholarship Development Managers as part of the AoC 2015-18 Scholarship Project, that an increasing awareness of the benefits of engaging with the UKPSF is taking place in colleges.

So, what are these benefits to individuals and institutions engaging with the UK Professional Standards Framework? The Advance HE outlines the following advantages:

- It consolidates personal development and evidence of professional practice in one's higher education career
- It demonstrates commitment to teaching, learning and the student experience, through engagement in a practical process that encourages research, reflection and development
- It provides a valuable measure of success and is increasingly recognised by international institutions
- Fellowship is increasingly sought by employers across the education sector as a condition of appointment and promotion
- Fellowships are an important indicator that your institution is fully aligned with UKPSF practice and a badge of assured quality throughout the institution
- It identifies expertise with the entitlement to use post-nominal letters (AFHEA, FHEA, SFHEA, PFHEA)

### Some comments from Fellows and colleagues at North Lindsey College:

*'If I'm being honest, I was a little bit sceptical about doing my fellowship application as I didn't want to just 'tick another box'. It ended up being a lot more than that for me, personally. When I engaged with the different sections of the applications, it made me realise, and actually reinforced many strengths of my teaching and coaching practice. While I advocate and promote reflective practice to the students studying for a BSc in Sport & Exercise at the University Centre, North Lindsey, I find that so much happens within the academic year that I rarely find the time to step back and take stock of my teaching practices. Apart from considering what works well and what doesn't work so well in certain sessions, the academic year tends to fly by so quickly that even I can be guilty of engaging in the superficial and descriptive style of reflection that I give as feedback to sports students as part of their assessments. Completing my fellowship application ensured that I looked beyond individual sessions and individual modules and really brought to light the many good practices that I engage with as a lecture/teacher in general and in relation to college HE with a strong emphasis on widening participation. Having been in my most recent*

*post for nearly two years now, it has also been a timely intervention that has helped to inform the planned re-validation of the sport degree in 2018-19 here at the University Centre, North Lindsey.'*

- Darryn Stamp – Programme Leader BSc Sport & Exercise, FHEA
- 

*'Being new to teaching in HE having worked for 21 years in FE, this opportunity has helped me to develop myself, think about HE provision, students and learning and teaching from an HE perspective. I would highly recommend other professionals to 'go for this' as it has really helped me to feel part of the HE community of practice — to feel like I belong.'*

- Janet Bee – Programme Lead, FdA Counselling, AFHEA
- 

*'I would definitely recommend undertaking an application to anyone working in HE as it makes you sit back and think about your practice. The process is reasonably simple; good information and advice was made available to me that allowed me to reflect effectively on many of the day-to-day things that we do not always associate with scholarly activity. It helped me take pride in my practice and encouraged me to continue to seek opportunities for personal and professional development.'*

- Sarah Mullins – Programme Leader, BA Social Science, FHEA
- 

*I undertook the application for Associate Fellowship in my first year of teaching after the idea was initially suggested during a Scholarship symposium at the University Centre, North Lindsey College, and I had then explored the Higher Education Academy's website and learned more about it. The process became a good opportunity to reflect and read wider literature on teaching practice. I was also keen (and slightly nervous...) to test out whether my practice was considered good enough by HEA! Writing my application was very rewarding, especially as our Scholarship Manager organised block writing sessions and I enjoyed chatting to the other member of staff who were applying for fellowships. It was great for sharing ideas and helped me to appreciate the work I had been doing, celebrate the parts of my teaching I felt especially pleased with and identify new ways to deliver content which had not been the most successful previously. I submitted the application in summer and gained Associate Fellowship before the end of 2017 – it gave me a real confidence boost! This year I have enjoyed further experimenting and reflecting on my teaching as I begin to put together my application for the next category of Fellowship. I hope getting started with reflective practice so early in my career will help me to build it in as regular activity. I would recommend others to apply and think it will help develop stronger courses based in College HE which are now evaluated on a par with more traditional Universities, in terms of teaching standards.'*

- Dr. Kate Simpson – Academic Advocate, Construction and Engineering, AFHEA
- 

## My own journey to Fellowship and beyond

Prior to working in the college higher education sector I had spent some twenty years in secondary education, with a substantial percentage of these years working with children with special educational needs, particularly in the area of autism and other communication disorders. It was this experience which became formative to my career

---

as a lecturer in higher education and ultimately as a strategic leader in higher education with responsibility for teaching, learning and scholarship.

Moving from a degree course leader through to Reader, then Dean of Research and then with more strategic responsibilities as Deputy Director of Higher Education offered me an increasingly wide and challenging range of responsibilities. In 2008, as part of my management and leadership role in college higher education, I began to introduce the Boyer Model of Scholarship into the staff appraisal process, in order to enable college practitioners to 'see outside the box' of commonly-held understandings of what it meant to be scholarly, with its emphasis on traditional academic research.

Staff found this to be helpful, but over time I felt that the Boyer Model of Scholarship was not adequately developmental, so over a couple of years I developed the [Curriculum Model of Scholarship](#) which has now become a resource in the Scholarship Framework. In 2014, I thought perhaps that I should apply for a Fellowship, and after some months wrangling with my application, was successful in being awarded Principal Fellowship. After that, more work for the HEA followed: in 2016 I was asked to write the [Dimensions of the Framework – College Based Higher Education](#) and then – in line with my subject specialism – the [Dimensions of the Framework – Music](#), which are now both HEA resources for applicants for Fellowship.

As an Associate and Accreditor of the HEA I began sitting on panels for Fellowship applications, the National Teaching Fellow Scheme, and the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence, as well as offering consultancy to higher education music providers (such as the Royal College of Music, London), and taking part in panels for institutional accreditation.

All this has been possible from my first tentative and modest steps as a college-based practitioner towards seriously engaging with the Professional Standards Framework, and like the above descriptions by colleagues of their own journey to professional recognition, I would very much encourage those who are working in colleges to explore routes to Fellowship. This can be done in one of two ways, either by applying [directly to the HEA](#), or through undertaking an accredited programme (for example PGCertHE) at a partner university. Good luck!