

Eligibility for HEA Fellowship – February 2018

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1. Purpose

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF, 2011) forms the basis for the award of four categories of HEA Fellowship. Individuals that teach and/or support learning in Higher Education are eligible to apply to become an HEA Fellow. The UKPSF acknowledges the variety and quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices that support and underpin HE student learning in diverse academic and/or professional settings (UKPSF, 2011; p2).

The HEA recognises that Higher Education (HE) operates in diverse and complex global contexts which are subject to change. Many Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are adapting to offer greater flexibility and work based learning opportunities.

In defining eligibility for HEA Fellowship, the HEA wishes to be inclusive to all practitioners that teach and support HE learning in a wide range of situations/institutions globally, but also seeks to safeguard and maintain the credibility and value of HEA Fellowships in recognising professional HE practice. This paper aims to set out the boundaries of eligibility for HEA Fellowship, based on the different contexts in which HE teaching and learning takes place.

2. Current eligibility for HEA Fellowship

To be eligible to apply for HEA Fellowship, individuals must evidence their teaching and learning practice in Higher Education (HE) which is currently defined as:

- level 4 or above within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) England and Wales;
- level 7 or above within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF);
- first cycle or above of the Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA);
- level 5 or above of the Australian Qualifications Framework;
- level 5 or above of the New Zealand Qualification Framework;
- other equivalent higher education frameworks;

- activity focused on supporting students within a Higher Education context, providing the student(s) are enrolled on a Higher Education Qualification (see standards listed above), may also be considered as evidence equivalent to the higher education frameworks;
- delivery of non-accredited continuing professional development for academic and learning support staff may also be considered as evidence equivalent to the higher education academic frameworks.

In defining what constitutes HE teaching and learning within different international contexts, in order to determine eligibility for HEA Fellowship, the HEA uses [UK NARIC](#) (National Recognition Information Centre) information about international education frameworks and qualifications.

For some staff teaching and supporting learning, defining the level at which they practice can be problematic as national academic qualification frameworks generally define the level of a full HE qualification, such as an undergraduate degree. In the UK, Parry et al (2017) state that “there is no standard definition or consistent terminology to describe higher education at levels below the bachelor degree” (p.1), which provides a barrier to HEA Fellowship for practitioners that teach or support learning on a programme that appears not to directly result in a full HE qualification being awarded.

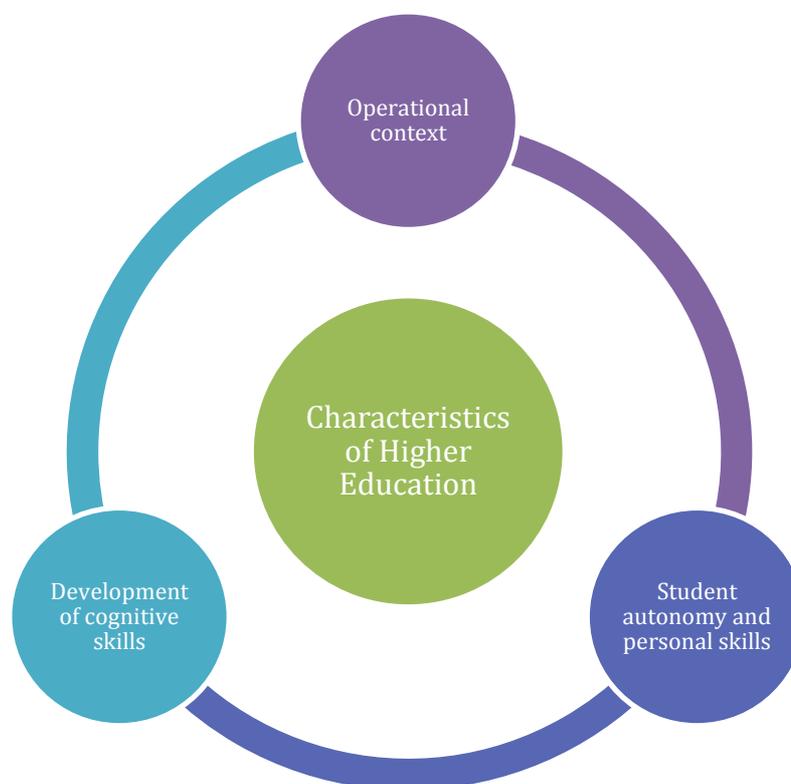
Some examples in the UK where programme ‘level’ is not clearly defined by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications ([QAA, 2014](#)) include Foundation Year programmes, pre-sessional English courses for international degree students and professional CPD programmes.

3. Defining ‘Higher Education’ learning for the purposes of eligibility for HEA Fellowship

In comparison with national qualification frameworks that define the academic level of a full HE programme, see¹ Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education ([2016](#)) ‘define the level of challenge, complexity, and autonomy expected of a learner on completion of a defined and bounded learning activity such as a module or programme of learning’ (p.1). These Credit Level Descriptors promote opportunities for widening participation and lifelong learning, in synergy with the requirements of UKPSF Professional Value 2 (V2).

¹ [seeec](#) is a consortium of universities and HE providers working together to advance the use and practice of academic credit, widening access to learning. seeec is a registered charity with a formal purpose ‘to advance education for the public benefit by developing credit accumulation and transfer and promoting lifelong learning, at the higher education level’.

Drawing on the seec Credit Level Descriptors (2016) and the UKPSF, **some characteristics of HE learning** (in comparison to school-based education or other post-compulsory education such as Further Education) can be identified as follows:



3.1 Operational Context

In defining what constitutes HE learning, it is useful to consider the operational context of the programme of study. To be defined as HE, programmes will be validated by a Higher Education Provider (HEP) or approved by a recognised Higher Education awarding body operating at national/international level. Quality monitoring systems relating to these programmes will normally be in line with other HE level programmes operating at the HEP.

Programmes will be defined as HE for the purposes of staff teaching and supporting learning on the programme being eligible for HEA Fellowship if they are an integral part of a programme defined as Higher Education within the context of the country of study and are subject to the institution's HE validation or course approval/ progression/award rules and regulations, etc..

Students engaging on an HE programme of study will normally enter into a recognised HE 'contract/agreement' with the institution. For example, in the UK students take out a four year loan for their studies on a Foundation Year programme (rather than a loan for a single year of study), which clearly indicates

that the Foundation Year of study forms part of an integrated degree programme with the usual progression entitlement/requirements between years. Foundation year students can choose to transfer to another HEP at the end of the Foundation Year but this forms a normal part of credit transfer arrangements, possible between other years of study on degree programmes.

International students studying pre-sessional language courses *immediately prior* to enrolling onto HE programmes can also be classed as engaging in an integrated HE programme if they have already met the minimum language requirements and are completing a pre-sessional language programme that is designed to improve language skills within the context of developing academic study skills to prepare them for HE level study at the international HEP. For example, in the UK these students will have received a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) letter.

Staff delivering professional development programmes (credit or non-credit bearing) designed to update/extend knowledge and understanding for professionals operating at graduate/postgraduate level can also be included in eligibility for HEA Fellowship. For example, staff delivering professional development programmes provided for graduate medical practitioners (e.g. doctors) that relate to professional body requirements ('fitness to practice') may evidence their teaching and learning practice on these programmes in an application for HEA Fellowship.

3.2 Student autonomy and personal skills

Higher Education is designed to promote independent learning; significant time is built in to HE programmes for independent study. Study will require reading beyond standard text and students will investigate a range of different perspectives, developing a personal viewpoint and an increasingly complex understanding of the subject, whilst appreciating that the knowledge base is open to ongoing debate and reinterpretation.

Academic scholarship, ethical awareness and academic integrity are developed; students will use academic referencing protocols.

HE programmes are designed to incorporate personal development; for example time-management, planning and self-evaluation skills. HE programmes require students to adapt interpersonal and communication skills as appropriate to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity (seec, 2016; p.20).

3.3 Development of cognitive skills

HE programmes are designed to develop higher level skills and to develop students' cognitive skills in the following areas:

- Conceptualisation and critical thinking;
- Problem solving, research and enquiry;

- Synthesis and creativity;
- Analysis and evaluation. (seec, 2016; p. 6)

HE level programmes will require students to apply theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study, to take different approaches to solving problems, to apply research methods, to judge the reliability of data and to be able to present findings in an appropriate format.

Conclusion

After further discussion and approval at two accredited programme network events held at Goldsmiths University of London in November 2017 and Manchester Metropolitan University in January 2018, involving more than 80 accredited programme and scheme leaders and Heads of Educational Development/Academic Practice, eligibility for HEA Fellowship has been widened to include eligibility for three groups of practitioners that teach and support learning on the following types of programmes in the UK:

- Foundation Year programmes
- Pre-sessional English courses for international degree students designed to develop academic skills
- Professional CPD programmes that are designed to develop and extend existing graduate/postgraduate level skills, knowledge and understanding, e.g. GP training, etc.

From 1 February 2018, the HEA endorses the opportunity for these HE practitioners to evidence their teaching and learning practices in developing a claim for an appropriate category of HEA Fellowship.

References

Parry, G., Saraswat, A., and Thompson, A. (2017) Sub-bachelor higher education in the United Kingdom. Available at

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UK Professional Standards Framework (2011). Available at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/ukpsf_2011_english.pdf (accessed 6 November 2017)