

Guidance notes for HEA approval of resources and products to support the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education



The UK Professional Standards Framework and Professional Recognition

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) supports the initial and continuing professional development of staff engaged in teaching and supporting learning. The HEA provides a recognition and accreditation service that enables staff providing teaching and/or learning support to be recognised as follows:

Descriptor 1: An Associate Fellow of the HEA

Descriptor 2: A Fellow of the HEA

Descriptor 3: A Senior Fellow of the HEA

Descriptor 4: A Principal Fellow of the HEA

HEA approval vs HEA accreditation – what's the difference?

HEA accreditation

The HEA accredits initial and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes delivered by subscribing higher education providers. Accreditation provides external confirmation that institutional CPD programmes are aligned with the UKPSF. The accreditation criteria that subscribing institutions must meet are as follows:

- **Criterion 1:** The institution can evidence a commitment to the continuous professional development of staff that teach and support learning;
- **Criterion 2:** The programme is designed to ensure participants utilise the UKPSF to both develop their practice and evidence their success;
- **Criterion 3:** The support and guidance provided will enable participants to utilise the UKPSF to develop and evidence their practice;
- **Criterion 4:** The processes through which Fellowship judgements are made are reliable, valid and robust.

The defining feature of HEA accreditation is that upon successful completion of an accredited programme or scheme, participating individuals are automatically eligible to be awarded professional recognition at the appropriate HEA Fellowship category.

HEA approval

HEA Approval differs from HEA accreditation in that it does not automatically result in participating individuals being awarded professional recognition as a Fellow of the HEA. HEA Approval is external confirmation that the product or resource is aligned to the UKPSF and that Criterion 2 and 3 as described above (and below) have been met. As such an approved resource could positively contribute to developmental opportunities provided within an organisation's CPD delivery.

The approvals system is open to all providers of higher education, private companies, associated professional organisations and charities. It offers an opportunity for parties to gain external approval against the sector recognised framework for those teaching and supporting learning in

higher education. The UKPSF is widely used across the UK HE sector and increasingly throughout the world to inform both initial and continuing CPD for members of staff who teach and/or support learning. Achieving HEA Approval demonstrates that a resource is aligned to the UKPSF and consequently could be a valuable addition to an organisation's developmental offer or could support individual practitioners who do not have access to institutional programmes. Once achieved, HEA Approval entitles an organisation to publicise and promote alignment to the UKPSF and associated use of the HEA logo as determined by the Licence Agreement.

The HEA quality mark (illustrated right) offers assurance that a resource is fit for purpose and gives confidence to customers and stakeholders. Use of the quality mark evidences that an organisation's resource meets particular criteria and ensures the quality and reliability of such.



Obtaining HEA approval

Six steps to HEA approval are identified below:



The graphics used in this document are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

1. **Initial suitability review:** this service provides an initial review of an organisational resource which is to be considered for HEA Approval. The resource review focuses on the purpose and content of the resource and whether it has potential to be aligned to the UKPSF.
2. **Application and submission:** resources for approval are considered via documentary review. This process demands completion of an [approval application document](#) and submission of the resource itself plus any supporting documentation such as user guides, handbooks, etc. Once your application is ready, send completed approval application document(s) to the HEA by [email](#).
3. **HEA approval panel:** A panel of HEA accreditors is convened to examine the approval submission and reach an approval outcome decision (see approval panel detail [below](#)).
4. **Response:** Once an approval panel has convened, possible outcomes from the panel are as follows:
 - **Approve** – approval can be awarded with no further action. Feedback may include recommendations for future development and identification of good practice. Approval is awarded for a period of three years subject to annual review.
 - **Approve subject to conditions** – the resource can be approved subject to some minor clarifications and/or enhancements. Within the feedback, areas of good practice will be identified and an accreditation action plan will be provided. Consideration of the evidence for the conditions is considered within the existing submission at no additional charge. The organisation will then need to provide evidence that the conditions within the action plan have been met. The deadline for the resubmission of this evidence will normally be one month, at which point the revised submission will be considered by the original panel.
 - **Returned for further development** – changes and/or additions are deemed to be too significant to be considered without a further panel meeting or the resource

is not suitable for HEA Approval. If HEA Approval continues to be sought evidence of further development or changes will be presented as a new submission for which there will be an additional fee.

- **Approval and licence:** Once a resource is approved, the HEA will discuss usage and cost of the licence and quality mark over a three-year period, subject to annual review.
- 5. **Annual approval review:** HEA Approval is valid for a period of three years subject to annual review. Annual review requires completion of a HEA approved resource annual report. The annual review and evaluation ensures your resource remains in good standing. In addition to this, an audit of the latest version of the resource will be carried out by a HEA member of staff.

Criteria for approval

Application

The HEA Approval process allows you to build your submission in a structured manner before releasing it for inspection by a HEA Approval panel. The **initial suitability review** is a service which evaluates a resource/product to be considered for HEA Approval. The review focuses on alignment to the UKPSF and whether a resource/product has potential to meet the approval criteria. This service is charged on an individual basis reflecting the number and size of resource(s) presented. Should further development of a resource be required, support packages are available for purchase to facilitate this.

On submission you must ensure the resource and any accompanying documents meet the requirements of the level of Fellowship (ie [Descriptor](#)) you wish to align to.

Criteria

HEA Approval decisions are made against UKPSF alignment to Criterion 2 and 3 which are derived from the [HEA accreditation policy](#). When completing the approval application document you will be asked to provide evidence that your resource or product aligns to the following criteria:

Criterion 2 - The programme is designed to ensure participants utilise the UKPSF to both develop their practice and evidence their success

To meet the requirements of Criterion 2 (related to 'design' of the resource), you need to evidence that the resource is fully aligned to the UKPSF. Therefore, you will need to show that:

- the centrality of the UKPSF to the resource is evident;
- the routes through the resource and the relationships between it and the UKPSF are identified;
- there are explicit opportunities for participants to make clear associations between the resource, their practice and the appropriate category of Fellowship;
- the resource accurately reflects the relevant category of Fellowship.

Criterion 3 - The support and guidance provided will enable participants to utilise the UKPSF to develop and evidence their practice

To fully meet the requirements of Criterion 3 (related to 'support and guidance' of the resource), you need to demonstrate that the resource ensures:

- participants are encouraged and expected to engage with the UKPSF throughout their experience;
- participants are supported to make clear associations between their professional development opportunities, their practice and the appropriate category of Fellowship;
- participants are supported to make clear associations between assessment, their practice and the appropriate category of Fellowship.

It is suggested you write a narrative as part of the application to explain how the resource supports participants in their engagement with the UKPSF and requirements of the appropriate

Descriptor. You will need to provide 'participant guidance' (ie a handbook) to illustrate how they will be supported as well as material about the evidence participants need to produce throughout their engagement of the UKPSF process to successfully complete the resource. In order to assist preparation of evidence of engagement, organisations are required to consider these questions:

- **Where** do you introduce participants to the UKPSF within this resource?
- **Which** dimensions of the Framework are covered within this resource and where are they?
- **How** does this resource evidence engagement with the UKPSF?
- **How** have you explained this to the participants of the course?

The documentation accompanying the application should be in electronic format and may consist of PDF, Word, Excel, image files or hyperlinks to particular webpages.

Approval panel

Organisations submit their resource or product for consideration by an HEA Approval panel. Each submission is judged by a panel of three Accreditors, who are peers from across the sector. Accreditors are selected to represent the breadth of subject disciplines and types of provision offered by higher education providers. It is a requirement that Accreditors are either [Senior](#) or [Principal](#) Fellows of the HEA to ensure their expertise is appropriate to the role. Accreditors also undergo a cycle of annual training and development to ensure they remain in good standing in relation to the UKPSF and professional recognition. Panels are scheduled on a monthly basis where each panel considers up to three submissions from organisations. A pool of Accreditors is managed by the HEA, three are randomly assigned to each monthly panel and possible conflict of interest is avoided once organisations are assigned to panels with an alternative Accreditor selected if required.

Accreditors receive submissions from each organisation three weeks before the date of the panel. Each Accreditor scrutinises the documentary evidence and provides written initial feedback prior to the panel. Discussion at the panel meeting begins with consideration of the feedback each Accreditor has provided. As a result of the ensuing discussion, further consideration of the documentation and debate, a joint panel decision is reached. It is a rigorous process and each resource or product is considered individually against the approval criteria.

The approval panel is chaired by a senior member of HEA academic staff from the Accreditation, Recognition and Reward Team. The Chair ensures that the panel operates in line with HEA policy and provides advice to ensure consistency in the decision-making process across different monthly panels, but the Accreditors make approval decisions and set any conditions that must be met before approval is awarded. Conditions are captured in an action plan. It is usual to have some conditions set and these must be met and approved by the Accreditors before approval is awarded. Actions are accompanied by explanatory guidance to support the organisation in addressing the conditions set.

During the panel, the Accreditors will identify and commend any areas of particular strength and good practice and usually also make recommendations the organisation could choose to consider to enhance the experience for participants engaging with the resource or product. Commendations and recommendations are communicated to the organisation in a feedback letter which accompanies the action plan.

Licence agreement

Once your resource or product has obtained approval, the HEA will discuss usage of the licence and HEA quality mark. Licence agreements are granted and charged on an individual basis to reflect desired use of the licence (eg within or outside the UK, how many users, etc).

Annual review

To ensure that HEA-approved resources remain in good standing, the HEA requires that by 1 September each year, organisations with approved resources are to provide a brief report on the operation of their approved resource. The HEA encourages self-assessment and quality enhancement and requires organisations to produce an approved-resource annual report.

This annual report will serve several purposes. It:

- provides an opportunity for organisations to consider whether any modifications would enhance the resource/product;
- encourages institutions to evaluate strengths and areas for further development of their approved resource to lead to future improvements in the next approval cycle;
- provides a platform for celebrating the positive impact that developmental opportunities offered through an approved resource have made within the organisation;
- allows institutions to identify and inform the HEA of any areas in which minor or major changes to the approved resource are required within the three year approval cycle;
- will be used to inform opportunities for support and guidance material provided by the HEA.

Changes to resources once approval is awarded

Once HEA Approval is awarded, all resources/products must explicitly operate as approved. It is often the case, however, that when resources start to operate the annual QA/QE cycle identifies areas for development.

The HEA has a process by which any minor or major modifications that an organisation may wish to make to any resource, within the three year approval cycle, can be considered. It is strongly suggested that you seek guidance from the HEA team (accreditation@heacademy.ac.uk) in the first instance to help determine whether your revision is major or minor. To also help you in considering these categories the following may be of benefit:

Major change(s): changes must be requested by the annual review process and where it is deemed that the change requires further review by panel, an additional charge of £500 (plus VAT) will be payable and approval for the coming year will not be confirmed until this process is complete.

Major changes are defined as follows - a change to:

- the site/campus delivery or the participant group;
- planned addition or a new resource to complement the original;
- the mode of delivery and/or mechanisms of support provided for participants to engage with the UKPSF;
- the resource learning outcomes which necessitate a concomitant change to the resource structure and/or content to maintain UKPSF alignment.

Minor change(s): These are alterations to the existing approved resource that do not materially alter the resource. These are changes that do not significantly alter the design of the resource or the participant engagement with the UKPSF. The HEA Approval team will confirm that the proposed change is minor and although these are reported as part of the annual review process for quality and audit purposes, the change may then be implemented during an academic cycle.

Frequently asked questions:

1. What's the difference between HEA accreditation and HEA approval?

The defining feature of HEA accreditation is that upon successful completion of an accredited programme or scheme, participating individuals are automatically eligible to be awarded professional recognition at the appropriate HEA Fellowship category.

HEA Approval differs from HEA accreditation in that it does not automatically result in participating individuals being awarded professional recognition as a Fellow of the HEA. HEA Approval is external confirmation that a product/resource is aligned to the UKPSF and therefore may be used as evidence towards an application for HEA Fellowship.

2. What kind of resources can gain HEA approval?

Resource approval can cover a wide range of formats such as modules (online or offline), parts of programmes, supporting materials, guidebooks, etc.

3. How much does approval cost?

Approval is open to all providers of higher education and private companies. The initial suitability review, the licence and any requested consultancy services are charged on an individual basis to reflect the number, size and use of the resource(s) presented. The fixed fee for application and presentation at an approval panel is £5,000.

4. How do I submit for approval?

A completed approval application document (and all supporting evidence) must be emailed to accreditation@heacademy.ac.uk. These guidance notes and associated approval documents are available on the [HEA Approvals webpage](#).

5. How can I find out what is already approved at my organisation?

A list of approved resources is available on the HEA website.

6. Which documents will I need to submit to the approval panel?

The main submission document is the [approval application document](#) and this should be accompanied by all resource documentation (eg a narrative about resource design, participants' handbook, links to websites, etc). Approval decisions are based on how explicit alignment and participant engagement with the UKPSF is assured.

Resource documentation accompanying an application should be in electronic format and can consist of PDF, word, excel, image files or hyperlinks to particular webpages.

7. How long will it take for my application to be reviewed?

The time taken for an application to be reviewed will vary depending on when you apply within the month and whether or not it is during a period of high demand. Once your application is received, you will be given an expected response date. Normally this will be within six weeks, but during periods of high demand this could be up to 12 weeks.

8. Can I reserve a place on a specific panel?

No. All applications will be allocated to the next available panel on a strictly first come, first served basis.

9. Do I need to have an initial suitability review before I put forward an application for approval?

Yes. The review is compulsory and is charged on an individual basis.

10. Can I get extra help to develop my application?

Yes. The HEA offers a comprehensive consultancy service, and can provide expert support in relation to the UKPSF and CPD resources. This can be arranged via our Consultancy team, who can be contacted at consultancy.enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk.

If you would like to discuss the HEA Approval services, our Approval team will be happy to speak to you. Please contact the Approval team at accreditation@heacademy.ac.uk or call (01904) 717500 and ask for Approvals.