

“AdvanceHE

+ Eligibility for HEA Fellowship

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This paper is updated from the original February 2018 version to reflect that the Professional Standards Framework 2023 has replaced the previous UK Professional Standards Framework 2011.

The initial work was completed in 2017-18 and published in February 2018. The author would like to thank the original 2017 working group of Jackie Cawkwell (University of Nottingham), Dr Sandy Cope (Nottingham Trent University) and Dr Sandie Dann (representing the Foundation Year Network) for their contribution to this work.

1. Background

At the time of the original paper (February 2018), the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF, 2011) formed the basis for the award of four categories of Fellowship awarded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Since then, Advance HE was formed in March 2018 following the merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Advance HE continues the work of the HEA in running the HEA Fellowship scheme and accrediting programmes for the initial and continuing professional development (CPD) of staff that teach and support learning working in higher education providers globally.

In 2022 Advance HE led a global consultation and in January 2023 launched a revised [Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023](#) (PSF 2023), which replaces the UKPSF 2011.

Individuals that teach and/or support learning in higher education (HE) are eligible to apply for one of four categories of Fellowship. The PSF 2023 acknowledges the wide variety of local and global contexts in which higher education operates, and the diverse practices and roles that contribute to high-quality learning.

For some teaching and learning support staff, 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, 2024](#)) include Foundation Year programmes, pre-sessional English courses for international degree students and professional CPD programmes.

In defining eligibility for Fellowship, Advance HE wishes to be inclusive to all practitioners that teach and/or support HE learning in a wide range of situations/institutions globally, but also seeks to safeguard and maintain the credibility and value of its Fellowships in recognising HE teaching and supporting learning practice. In January 2025, 200,000 Fellows have been recognised in over 100 countries, reflecting the value of Fellowship to individuals and institutions.

This paper sets out the boundaries of eligibility for Fellowship, based on the different contexts in which HE teaching and learning takes place.

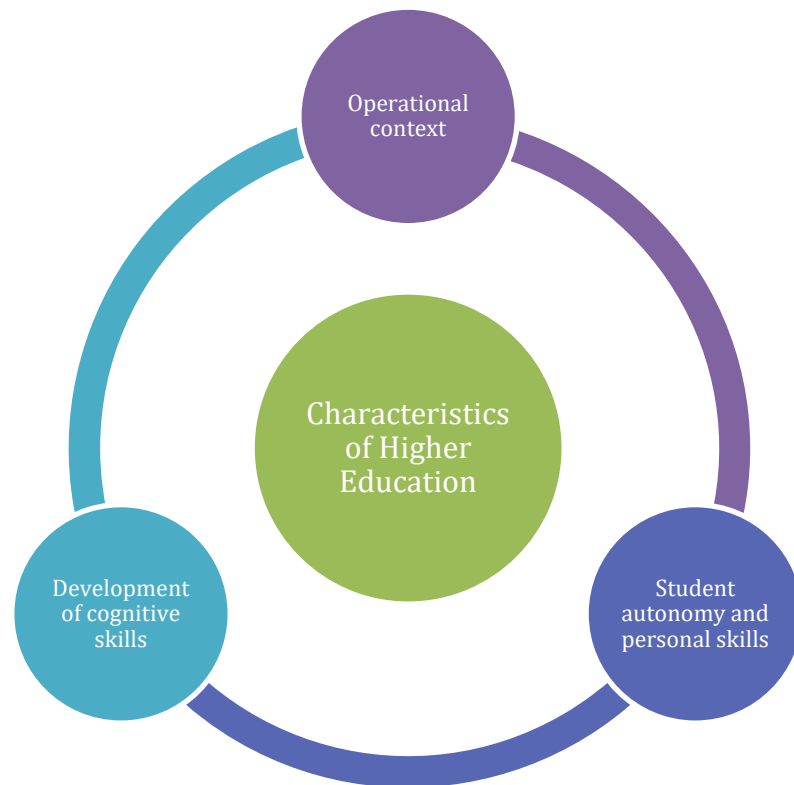
2. Defining the characteristics of higher education for the purpose of eligibility for HEA Fellowship

In comparison with national qualification frameworks that define the academic level of a full HE programme, SEEC¹ Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education ([2021](#)) “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. They provide a description of increasing levels of learning (from level 3 to level 8) categorised in relation to knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviours and values ...[and] are a useful reference point for anyone with a responsibility for benchmarking, contextualising and credit-rating learning, whether this learning derives from within or without a formal curriculum” (p4).

The SEEC Credit Level Descriptors promote opportunities for widening participation and lifelong learning, in synergy with the requirements of PSF 2023 Professional Value 2 (V2); ‘in your context, show how you promote engagement in learning and equity of opportunity for all to reach their potential’.

Drawing on the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors 2016 (and now SEEC 2021 version) and the UKPSF 2011 (and now PSF 2023), **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:

¹ [SEEC](#) is a consortium of HE providers who support student mobility and create learning opportunities through the use of academic credit.



2.1 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 Fellowship if they are an integral part of a programme defined as HE 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 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 Fellowship.

2.2 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).

2.3 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.

3. Confirmed as higher education for the purposes of Fellowship

The proposal to widen the definition of higher education for the purposes of Fellowship based on the characteristics defined in Section 2 above was discussed and approved at two Accredited Programme Leader 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. As a result, from 1 February 2018, three groups of HE practitioners were incorporated into eligibility for Fellowship and encouraged to evidence their teaching and learning practices within a claim for an appropriate category of Fellowship. These individuals are teaching and/or supporting 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.

4. Eligibility for HEA Fellowship

Eligibility for Fellowship incorporates the following teaching and learning practice in higher education, with the staff groups identified in Section 3 above being included (follow the hyperlink to 'equivalent' below):

- + level 4 or above within the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\)](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or **equivalent**
- + level 7 or above within the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) in Scotland on the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions (FQHEIS) or **equivalent**
- + 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 \(AQF\)](#) or **equivalent**
- + level 5 or above of the [New Zealand Qualification Framework \(NZQF\)](#) or **equivalent**
- + other equivalent higher education frameworks
- + activity focused on supporting learners within an HE context, providing the learner(s) are enrolled on an HE Qualification may also be considered as evidence equivalent to the higher education frameworks above
- + delivery of some **non-accredited continuing professional development** for academic and learning support staff may also be considered as evidence equivalent to the higher education frameworks.

In defining what constitutes higher education teaching and learning within different national contexts in order to determine eligibility for fellowship, Advance HE uses [UK ENIC](#) (UK National Information Centre) for information about global education frameworks and qualifications. Programmes will be defined as HE for the purposes of staff teaching and supporting learning on the programme being eligible for fellowship if they are an integral part of a programme defined as higher education within the context of the country of study.

The definition of what constitutes higher education has also been further defined for staff in [Australasia](#). If anyone is unsure whether the examples of practice within an application meets the eligibility requirements above, please contact fellowship@advance-he.ac.uk

5. References

Parry, G., Saraswat, A., and Thompson, A. (2017) Sub-bachelor higher education in the United Kingdom. Available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Sub-bachelor-Higher-Education-in-the-United-Kingdom.pdf> (accessed 6 November 2017)

Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023 (2023). Available at <https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/professional-standards-framework-teaching-and-supporting-learning-higher-education-0> (accessed 29 January 2025)

QAA Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies. Available at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/qualifications-frameworks> (accessed 29 January 2025)

SEEC (2021) Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education. Available at <https://seec.org.uk/> (accessed 29 January 2025)

seec (2016) Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education. Available at <http://www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf> (accessed 6 November 2017)

Contact us

All enquiries

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Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

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