

University of Sydney: Accreditation drives culture change and educational excellence

The University of Sydney's strategic approach to achieving educational excellence is informed by their institutional Academic Excellence Framework (AEF). **Professor Adam Bridgeman, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning)**¹, stressed the centrality of the PSF 2023 to the AEF. All the university's learning and teaching priorities including sustained leadership feature in the PSF. The perception that you 'could get promoted all the way to professor just by being a star in the classroom [is] clearly not enough in 2025'.

Adam said that in the past 'research was more important, was more recognised, was more valued' than teaching. His goal has been 'to at least get the status of teaching and educational leadership on a par with research or maybe above research, given that ... our income actually derives from teaching'. This 'cultural aspect' of transformational change presented a major challenge. Adam sees promotion criteria as key to achieving that cultural shift and highlights his initiatives on 'getting the promotion policy ... and the drivers for academics to align with the educational vision of excellence and innovation. Fellowships are now embedded in the key performance indicators and career progression is guided by the AEF, underpinned by the PSF, especially in relation to educational leadership...The PSF has been useful'. Adam advises Heads of Schools and Deans to have conversations along the lines of 'You are applying for promotion to level E [senior post] and you've not got a fellowship... we're not going to promote you'. Fellowship is 'recognised as an expectation and a measure of performance and potential'.

A variety of strategies have been adopted to achieve educational excellence across career stages and roles and in diverse contexts. Staff engagement with accredited provision has been impactful: 'we have good stories; good data associated with our fellows and our graduates from the graduate certificate and our MPLF (Modular Professional Learning Framework) graduates'. There was no doubt that the impact on the student experience was positive: 'We have ... quantitative data where we can demonstrate the classrooms of the people who are engaged... not only are they better, but ... we can see marked improvements in individuals pre- and post-engagement... This has been fundamentally successful'.

Advice to senior colleagues

When asked what advice Adam would give to a colleague in his role, he recommended:

- 1 **Use the 'multi-dimensional and international benchmarking' afforded by the PSF to evaluate your institution's performance in education.**
- 2 **Develop promotion criteria that act as drivers for academics to align with the educational vision of excellence, innovation and leadership.**
- 3 **Gather data that demonstrates the impact of staff engagement in accredited provision to the student learning experience.**
- 4 **Grow active educational networks to enable alumni to collaborate, innovate and contribute to the development of their peers.**

¹ Interview on 15 May 2025

Contact us

All enquiries

Email: enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk

Advance HE helps HE institutions be the best they can be, by unlocking the potential of their people.

We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

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.

We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Company limited by guarantee registered in Ireland no. 703150. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Registered Office: Advance HE, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.

© 2026 Advance HE. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advance HE. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the copyright owner. Such permission will normally be granted for non-commercial, educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given. The Advance HE logo should not be used without our permission.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact Advance HE: enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk

advance-he.ac.uk

in **X** **f** **@AdvanceHE**