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+ The impact of the Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023: Strategy, Policy and Practice

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The university is a founding member of the Russell Group of 24 UK research-intensive universities 'working to deliver wide-ranging social, economic, cultural, health and environmental impacts'¹. The student population is 31,200 with almost 8,000 international students.² Liverpool has a range of global partnerships and has established the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) near Shanghai, China. The University is a leading provider of online postgraduate degrees and offers a commercial online Advance HE accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

Over 7,000 staff contribute to Liverpool's 'supportive, high-quality learning environment'³. Three Faculties cover a range of disciplines: Health and Life Sciences (including dentistry, medicine, veterinary science and nursing); Humanities and Social Sciences (including management, music, history and politics); and Science and Engineering (including aerospace engineering, chemistry, physics and computer science)⁴.

¹ From <https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/who-we-are>

² The data in the section is partly derived from Liverpool's submission for accreditation, April 2024.

³ From 'Teaching': <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/about/the-university/rankings-and-reputation/>

⁴ From <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/departments/>

Professional Standards Framework-based provision

The University of Liverpool runs the following Advance-HE accredited pathways to Fellowships including the commercial pathway:

- + **Foundations of Learning & Teaching in Higher Education (FLTHE) Descriptor 1**
- + **University of Liverpool Teaching Recognition and Accreditation (ULTRA) Descriptors 1–4**
- + **Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) Descriptor 2**
- + **Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) (Online, Commercial Pathway 2) Descriptor 2.**

These lines of provision were accredited in July 2024. Feedback from the Advance HE accreditation panel identified many areas of good practice and commended the University for their ‘clear commitment to the development of all staff that teach and support learning’, noting that:

‘The Professional Standards Framework (PSF 2023) is clearly embedded within institutional structures and policies, with explicit and concise links between the Education Strategy Action Plan and the framework’

‘The [PSF] Professional Values are at the heart of institutional policies; for example, the People and Culture, and Sustainability pillar in the University Strategy 2031’.⁵

There were 1,644 Fellows at Liverpool in 2023, with an increase of 483 Fellows between 2020 and 2024, and the university was awarded a prestigious ‘Gold’ rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)⁶ in 2023.

Strategy and policy

Liverpool’s strategic approach to achieving their aims, especially to ‘develop our colleagues in stellar educational practices that generate student success’⁷, is underpinned by flexible and inclusive initiatives for enhancement. Gavin Brown, Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, charted the emergence of the emphasis on education in 2015 and subsequent transformational change across the university. He explained:

⁵ Extract from ‘Accreditation Panel Outcome and Feedback’ letter to Professor Gavin Brown, Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, 1 May 2024.

⁶ [TEF](#) is a national scheme run by the [Office for Students](#) (OfS, England). It evaluates teaching and learning and student outcomes.

⁷ From <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/about/the-university/strategy-and-vision/liverpool-2031/people-and-culture/>

‘There was an intention to have a new strategy... we were putting education and research on a level footing, and that’s true in our new strategy as well... the previous strategy was very research-focused... we had to build up a new confidence in teaching and learning’.

This included professional services staff, PhD students and technicians.

The ‘strategy for education was an ambition for 100% of our staff to have professional recognition for their teaching, [a] teaching qualification. Advance HE accreditation and alignment with the Professional Standards Framework is a large component of that’.

A major incentive was promotion criteria:

“Staff cannot get promoted without showing engagement in professional development for teaching and getting [a] teaching qualification”. That has ‘helped drive engagement up’.

The resultant enhancement of ‘teaching quality, the student experience’ was pivotal. As the PVC mentioned:

“Our students pay our wages”. The aim has been to ‘invigorate’ programmes, ‘aligned with the PSF, everything from our foundations programme right through the PGCAP and the full Master’s and our ULTRA recognition programme... it is working’ as ‘there is now an embracing of the true breadth of an academic job’ and there’s ‘something for everyone in their roles that they see as relevant’.

The most challenging group to motivate had been the heads of department and deans, but they had now recognised ‘the commitment we’re making as an institution’ so that even staff at professorial level were beginning to appreciate Fellowships as ‘part of our strategy, a good thing’ and had become ‘keen to lead by example’.

Synergy between Liverpool frameworks and the PSF

The alignment of institutional frameworks such as the Liverpool Curriculum Framework with the PSF is powerful in providing staff with the skills and knowledge to ‘deliver on what we want to deliver’. The PVC mentioned authentic assessment, how research can inform teaching, digital fluency, and graduate attributes, adapted to the Liverpool context.

Spreading the good word, positive outcomes and communities of practice

The PVC pointed out that:

‘critical mass’ is key to spreading enthusiasm, ‘...penetration now is so great... people who’ve been through these programmes... [spread] the good word... word of mouth is helping generate more and more interest’. Participants had ‘changed their teaching practice, it’s made them reflect on things’.

They had forged ‘new collaborations’ with the colleagues they had met.

Gavin Brown had evidence of the positive impact of Fellowship schemes. During promotion panels, he had asked applicants how their pathway to Fellowship had changed their teaching practice. He found their informed responses impressive, for example:

‘I’ve completely redesigned my assessment’, ‘I’m running seminars in a different way’ or ‘I’m involved with changing the curriculum in my department’. He concluded: “From these answers, I’m confident there are tangible benefits. Our students are the benefactors, as are our staff. ... we invest a lot of time, effort and money... and it’s very worthwhile”.

The PVC also valued the communities of practice created as a result of PSF-based provision. He had spearheaded the organisation of the Liverpool learning and teaching conference and the pedagogical research conference, creating ‘more of an ecosystem around this now than there’s ever been before’.

Accreditation: ‘a sanity check’

The PVC valued the accreditation process as ‘a periodic sanity check, to make sure that we’re still trying to do the right things at the right time and in the right ways and that’s always helpful, so it’s good to get that validation and therefore revalidation back’. He commented that the:

‘smooth process in terms of the judgement’ reflected ‘the quality of the underlying provision’ and ‘[the team’s] work... in designing and developing the courses and making sure that they’re well mapped onto the PSF and our local and national ambitions’.

As a university with a range of professionally accredited programmes, senior management is aware that ‘it’s always a lot of work’ to gain accreditation.

The PVC’s advice to colleagues was to engage with relevant aspects of the educational ecosystem at Liverpool. He valued the range of opportunities tailored to the needs of diverse categories of staff.

Central aspects of the implementation of Liverpool's strategies through accredited educational development provision follow.

Practice

The PVC emphasised the key role played by the Leadership, Organisational, Professional & Academic Development Academy (the Academy) in achieving institutional goals for education. He said:

'The quality of the offer needs to be good' and 'all credit to my colleagues in the Academy for designing programmes that are interesting'.

Sue Bolt, Head of Academic Development, explained how Liverpool's strategies and policies played out at grass roots level⁸. This section is annotated with the PSF Dimensions to illustrate how relevant the Framework is to practice. She described how gaining Fellowships became the motor for educational development from 2017, enabling realisation of the step change highlighted by the PVC, whereby teaching and research were to be equally valued. As the PVC emphasised, Liverpool has ambitious goals for educational excellence underpinned by the PSF:

"All those who teach and/or support learning should have a teaching qualification and/or professional recognition."

'Connected CPD', the Liverpool approach to provision, is strongly people-centred to appeal to diverse groups of staff. Sue Bolt explained that this is:

'because I'm trying to connect it with the strategy, connect it with people, connect it across different institutions or different departments, ... so that they see it as a whole. And I wanted to put people first' (V1, V2).

This is evident in the [online presentation](#) of pathways for different categories of staff (A2). Motivation for staff to engage is underpinned by Sue Bolt's guiding 'people first' principle; provision is adapted to need (K2) and participants are 'working from values rather than requirements'. This is reflected in her [overview of provision](#). She explained:

"The new PSF has got 'in their context', but for me, that has always been important because I've always thought one size workshops don't work, one size doesn't fit all... so you need to be flexible the entire way ... inspiring people will motivate them and then it takes on a life of its own."

⁸ Interview, 3 March 2025

Compelling options for [diverse staff roles](#) lie at the heart of the design of [CPD options](#). These informative websites help ‘line managers to be able to have discussions’ about each individual’s development options.

Alumni with a positive experience of participation in PSF-based CPD seek to maintain contact with the teaching and learning community. The range of opportunities is impressive: ‘Postgraduate Diploma and MA Academic Practice, the Pedagogic Research Conference, the Developing Academic Practice Journal and Developing Practice Podcasts’. University staff can also ‘access networks, communities of practice, and teaching awards’ and a variety of workshops on topics such as Peer Observation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion⁹.

The PVC encourages these approaches, offering substantial Strategic Education Grants ‘designed to support teaching staff in improving student engagement and outcomes’ (V2). Sue Bolt echoed the PVC’s positive perspectives on the profound impact of PSF-based programmes. She also stressed that engagement with educational development is:

‘very collaborative’ (V5); ‘it’s transformational, it’s not transactional’. Staged learning opportunities promote ‘teaching excellence, leadership and scholarship’ (K2), the evolution of learning, resulting in increasingly significant contributions to pedagogy and the support of learning across the institution.

PSF-led CPD provision offers staff varied opportunities to facilitate high quality student learning by respecting their individual contexts as they work towards the award of Fellowships and importantly also sustain professional development beyond and outside programmes.

⁹ From the Institutional Accreditation Submission, Parts A-C, 2024

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