

Utilising the Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning for strategic transformation

Investing in academic leadership for positive change

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1 Situation

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has more than 21,000 students studying at our main campus in Glasgow, at our satellite campus in London and, globally, on our Transnational Education (TNE) programmes. We have three academic schools: the Glasgow School of Business for Society; School of Engineering and the Built Environment; the School of Health and Life Sciences. We are a modern university grounded on strong organisational values and committed to our vision of the University of the Common Good.

Our Advance HE-accredited CPD includes the Post Experience Certificate in Supporting Student Learning (30 M, accredited to award Associate Fellow (D1), Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) programme (60 M, accredited to award Fellow (D2) and the experiential Accelerate Pathway to professional recognition, which awards Associate (D1) Fellow (D2) and Senior Fellowship (D3).

2 Task

2.1 Transformative education in a values-based culture

In 2020, GCU produced a new strategic approach to learning and teaching in the form of the Strategy for Learning (SfL) 2030. The SfL aims to deliver 'transformative education' through excellence in learning, teaching and assessment, outstanding student experience, research-led and enquiry-based pedagogies and practice, aligning with the values and principles of the PSF.

3 Action

3.1 From culture to structure

Over many years we have developed a positive culture around teaching in the university. Over the past five years, we have acted at a structural level and embedded a university key performance indicator (KPI) for fellowship and teaching excellence in our university strategies and in our school annual operating plans. This has signposted the strategic contribution of a professionally recognised teaching community in creating a high-quality student learning experience.

We used professional recognition through Fellowship as a key design feature in realising this KPI by weaving the PSF through existing institutional structures. Our senate approved an Academic Development Framework, underpinned by our Advance HE-accredited CPD, which provides developmental pathways for staff across the academic career lifecycle. Those on the new to teaching pathway engage in the PGCAP (D2) as the baseline expectation for professionalism in teaching at GCU. The complementary experiential Accelerate Pathway for more experienced teachers embeds the expectation for staff to continue and extend their professionalism as Senior Fellows.

Our university strategies expect growth in staff digital skills. The two Fellowship pathways have been woven through with embedded opportunities for staff to produce digital artefacts as part evidence for Fellowship for all descriptors

Our experienced staff on the experiential Accelerate Pathway mentor and observe new teachers on the PGCAP and staff on each pathway present their engagement in peer support as evidence of Fellowship. A consistent mentoring approach has been adopted across our teaching, research supervision and Aurora (Advance HE's leadership development initiative for women) programmes, meaning staff mentors contribute to many cross-institutional developments. This mentoring model aligns to, and champions, the PSF and Vitae (a national professional development framework for supporting the development of researchers in HE) frameworks. This year we were delighted to be the first university to receive the Scottish Mentoring Network Quality Award.

4 Result

4.1 Academic leadership and institutional success

GCU has had an Advance HE CPD framework for more than 15 years and this maturity sees more engagement and success in professional recognition as staff develop from Fellows to Senior or Principal Fellows. In 2019-20, we had great success with 37 staff achieving Senior Fellow against a sector average of 13. We feel that it is important to communicate this conversion success as annual reporting mechanisms and benchmarking tend to be less granular.

This high conversion rate is creating value in building academic leadership. In 2019, our teaching staff initiated a Senior Fellow Network, which actively seeks opportunities to engage in institutional discussions on key learning and teaching priorities.

Many Senior Fellows became reviewers for our Accelerate Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) pathway and/or offer peer support and observation to new teachers on the PGCAP. This helps Senior Fellows maintain evidence of currency and good standing and embodies that distributive leadership ethos of our senate-approved university CPD policy. They have become a valued stakeholder group in strategy consultation and the development of new learning and teaching pilots.

The sense of agency afforded by this Senior Fellow recognition is one of the less visible, or intangible, assets of Fellowship as this professional recognition creates change agents in our teaching communities and among those supporting student learning. These change agents are committed to delivering an excellent student experience.

Having Senior Fellow as a promotion criterion has also meant that heads of department are confident that newly promoted senior lecturers have the skills and experience to develop their colleagues and build programme teams and are committed to leading practice enhancement beyond their own individual practice context. This has resulted in supporting collaborative and collegiate working in our departments.

In September 2020, GCU climbed 21 places in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, due to improvements in the National Student Survey (NSS) scores on teaching quality and student experience, degree completion and graduate prospects. We would like to think that there is a strong correlation between our students' appreciation of their programmes of study, their academic success and the academic leadership we have nurtured through our use of the PSF.

4.2 Strong staff/student relationships

GCU is one of the few universities that promotes the engagement of the students' association, with elected officers participating in our accredited provision to achieve Associate Fellowship. These elected officers participate as students and report how they develop an empathic insight into the challenge of teaching. This insight informs their expectations as a students' association of how the university can continue to enhance the student learning experience. In turn, this strengthens the student-staff partnership approach that is embedded in all GCU practices and processes.

This year, as before, the majority of staff nominated for Student Association Teaching Awards hold Fellowship. It is clear that our students also value staff who are committed to continually developing their learning and teaching practice; though unfamiliar in name, the UKPSF ethos is recognised by the student body.

However, there is a challenge in making this investment in our staff and their continual development as visible to our students and other stakeholders as investment in the bricks and mortar, technology and software. HEA fellowship statistics can be presented as tangible evidence of our investment in a skilled and professional teaching community that cares about, and can deliver, an engaging and rewarding learning experience for our students.

5 Reflection

Professor Alastair Robertson, PVC Learning and Teaching

External professional recognition of teaching remains a key aspect of our institutional strategic approach to providing a high-quality student experience here at GCU. This is reflected in the requirement for our academic schools to embed targets for fellowship in their annual operating plans. Success in fellowship has been reported annually at senate for a number of years. However, this year we have extended formal annual monitoring reporting at programme board and through the university's academic governance structure to include the Accelerate Pathway as well as the PGCAP. This ensures the full value of the university's engagement with the PSF is visible and transparent to all key stakeholder groups.

The increasing percentage of staff gaining professional recognition provides the institution with a growing, engaged community of practice who are committed to delivering an excellent student experience. The university is committed to raising the profile of learning and teaching and enhancing recognition of excellence. For example, this academic year we have introduced a new Strategy for Learning innovation fund to build capacity in the scholarship of learning and teaching and project leads are expected to have HEA Fellowship. In 2022, we are refreshing our teaching awards to provide exciting new opportunities for individuals and teams to evidence and gain recognition for impact.

6 Peer reflection

6.1 Dr Letizia Gramaglia, Reader, Head of Academic Development and Director of Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA), University of Warwick, UK

While strategic focus may differ, both Warwick and GCU share a strong alignment with the values and ethos of the PSF and are committed to providing transformative education underpinned by enquiry-based pedagogies and practices. The University of Warwick is a campus-based, research-intensive university with a reputation for excellence in education. We have a devolved structure with high degrees of departmental autonomy, resulting in a richness of signature cultures and approaches.

GCU has successfully implemented a consistent mentoring approach across a range of areas. We are inspired by the way in which it supports student officers to achieve Associate Fellowship through its accredited provision and we see this as a model that would be suitable to our own context to further enhance our student-staff partnerships.

We would be able to build on established engagement channels with our elected student officers, and extend this support to our WIHEA student fellows. Fellows are selected through an application and nomination route and commit to making an institutional contribution to learning and teaching at Warwick. This would be a very effective way to socialise the PSF among the student community and enable students to develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, the standards embodied by the Fellowships.



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