

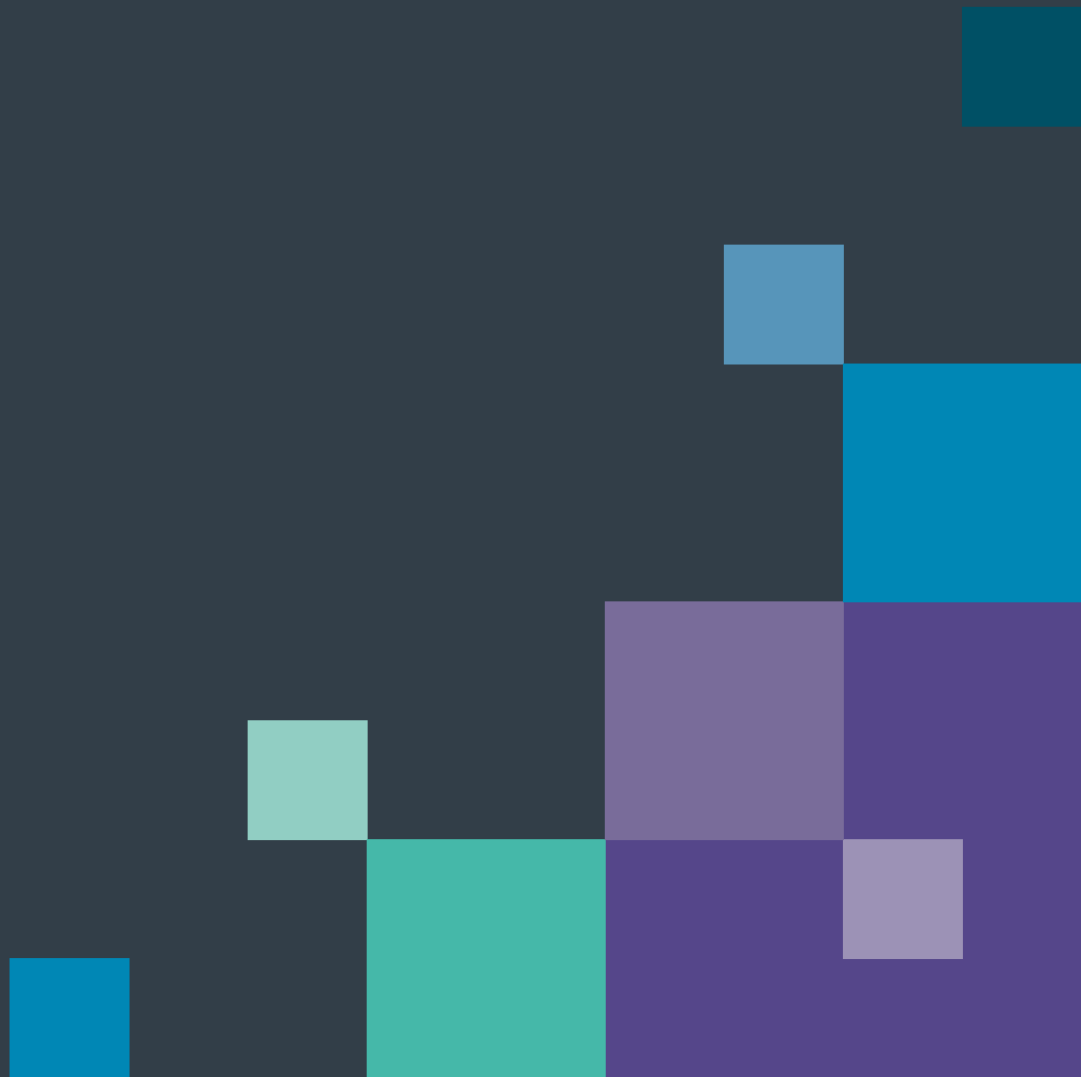
“AdvanceHE



Windows into practice

**Embedding excellence: A decade of professional
development and recognition**

Harper Adams University, UK



Institutional Context

Harper Adams University is a distinctive and specialist higher education provider, based in Shropshire, UK, with around 5000 students. With extensive specialist facilities including a University Farm, our mission is to advance knowledge, to inspire and equip learners in specialist areas to deliver real change and contribute to a sustainable future. They have award-winning teaching and research, and sector-leading graduate outcomes, all of which reflect an ambition to make a difference. Their subject areas include, but are not limited to: Agriculture, Animal Sciences, Business Management, Data Science, Engineering, Environment and Conservation, Food Science and Innovation, Property Management, and Veterinary Sciences.

Harper Adams achieved TEF Gold in the last three submissions, reflecting the commitment of the institution to learning, teaching and the wider student experience. At the heart of all of their provision are distinctive graduate attributes which focus on applied learning, digital skills, care for the people and planet, global perspectives, personal growth and development, and the use of research for advancing knowledge. These attributes are the educational embodiment of their values: Curious Minds, Practical Hands, Courageous Hearts, Growing Together.

Overview of reward and recognition of teaching and learning expertise

Reward and recognition for teaching at Harper Adams University includes opportunities for promotion, an established teaching awards scheme, and moments of community celebration.

Promotion processes include specific pathways recognising specialisms: Teaching and Supporting Learning; Research and Scholarship; Knowledge Exchange and Industry Engagement; and Academic Service and Leadership. The language around the teaching-related promotions process is explicitly aligned to Professional Standards Framework (PSF) to ensure that the standards are fully embedded. The inclusion of 'and supporting learning' in the teaching pathway is deliberate, to ensure that the diverse responsibilities associated with teaching are reflected, for example the work of personal tutoring (called Course Tutoring at Harper Adams) is included. The expected category of Fellowship recognition is clearly specified for each promotion category.

To demonstrate the criteria set for promotion staff present evidence; Harper Adams' policy offers 'indicators of assessment' to help illustrate what types of evidence may be appropriate. These act as exemplars rather than as the only evidence that may be considered, as the policy recognises a staff community with diverse responsibilities,

professional strengths, and experiences. The method of presenting evidence for promotion uses a range of formats including a written submission, presentation, and professional discussion to ensure a holistic exploration of evidence through various modes (written, presentational, and dialogic) recognising individual preferences.

The Professional Standards Framework is thoroughly embedded across the institution as a marker of recognition. Notwithstanding annual fluctuations, Harper Adams' Fellowship rate is consistently between 75-85%. Additionally, it is a standard accessed by professional service colleagues and PhD students as well as academic colleagues, reflecting a one-team approach to teaching and supporting learning. The university has an expectation that new teaching staff will achieve Fellowship within three years, while professional services teams often encourage staff to seek Fellowship, even from the stage of appointment. Pathways to achieve Fellowship are well established with individual mentoring, and a postgraduate certificate route too. Fellowship is celebrated widely – including with a roll of honour at their annual Learning and Teaching Conference. Individuals gaining Fellowship are recognised personally by the Vice Chancellor who writes to everyone achieving this marker.

Teaching awards at Harper Adams are well-established, and the awards or nominations are often cited within promotions as a source of evidence of impact. Initially developed as part of the Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning in 2006, the awards have evolved. Students now annually review the award categories so that they remain current. Students convene the selection panel and work with the university on an event to celebrate. Everyone who is nominated receives a letter of thanks so that they receive recognition and appreciation, and benefit from personal feedback. The awards currently include Innovative Lecturer of the Year, Excellent Teaching, Inclusion and Community Impact, Assessment and Feedback Hero, Student Support Champion, Hidden Gem, and Exceptional Commitment to Sustainability. They also include a Colleagues Choice award, nominated by staff to recognise collegiality as a valued part of the teaching and learning community. The awards are designed to recognise staff from all parts of the university. Past winners have included new academic staff, experienced academic staff, learner support specialists, IT service desk colleagues, housekeeping staff, academic leaders, and technicians.

What is working well?

Ten years of PSF accredited provision at Harper Adams means that many academic managers and leaders have themselves been through the process of professional growth and development scaffolded by PSF; a shared understanding of teaching excellence, PSF, reward and recognition has had time to embed.

A strong system of professional development provides foundations for teaching recognition. In addition to the postgraduate certificate and an individual PSF route, the university offers a

rich learning and teaching events programme with introductory teaching courses for researchers and professional services staff, quarterly university wide development days (called Learning and Teaching Forums), funding to engage externally with signposted events, and engagement with specialist organisations including the UK Advising and Tutoring Association. A longstanding commitment to educational action research through postgraduate programmes and beyond, has also strengthened the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching, which has led to publication or wider dissemination (see for example Arnold & Croxford, 2024; Toogood, 2023). Staff growing into leadership, often associated with Senior Fellowship, have created communities of practice (for example in digital accessibility, active learning and exemplars, artificial intelligence in teaching, as well as specialisms such as poultry teaching) to provide opportunity for growth and development.

The University is confident that the professional development provision, including Fellowship recognition, is impactful. A survey of 59 staff who gained Fellowship between 2018-2021 sought to track the value of this activity. It found Fellows valued the activity's contribution to building professional support networks (75%); increased confidence in teaching (70%) and brought about changes to practice (70%).

Reflections and future directions

Harper Adams University has established principles and practices for professional development, reward and recognition. The world around us is changing and so there is a need for continued review of our professional development— in terms of the content and the types of opportunities available. The University will continue to work to find ways to recognise, develop and reward those whose careers are diverse —often at the intersection of teaching, research, academic leadership, and knowledge exchange. And they will build on the one-team approach to develop and recognise all who teach and support learning, particularly in relation to utilising PSF. Critically, they will work to ensure that feedback is at the heart of our approach, ensuring that feedback supports those working on applications, or receiving awards, and that systems and processes are continually refined through acting upon feedback.

Arnold, L., & Croxford, J. (2024). Is it time to stop talking about authentic assessment? Teaching in Higher Education.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2024.2369143>

Toogood, C. (2023). Supporting students to engage with case studies: a model of engagement principles. Educational Review.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2281227>

Contact us

All enquiries

Email: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

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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.

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).

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