

Berthiaume, Denis; Morrison, Mary

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peDOCS  
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Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung  
E-Mail: [pedocs@dipf.de](mailto:pedocs@dipf.de)  
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## **The professional development of teaching staff in UK universities. National considerations and insights into practices at one university**

Denis Berthiaume and Mary Morrison

**Abstract** In this article, we examine the link between national measures to encourage the professional development of university teaching (academic) staff and the practices of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom. More specifically, we look at how one UK institution (the University of Southampton) has responded to the demands of the national standards set with regards to teaching and learning. The main argument of the article is that a national context which encourages and values the development of pedagogical knowledge and skills by university teaching staff is essential for HEIs to adopt institutional policies and practices in that regard. The article ends with some thoughts for the future development of university teaching and learning in Switzerland.

### **Die berufliche Entwicklung des Lehrpersonals an englischen Universitäten: Nationale Grundsätze und Einsicht in die Praktiken einer Universität**

**Zusammenfassung** In diesem Beitrag untersuchen wir den Zusammenhang zwischen den nationalen Massnahmen, die das Ziel haben, die professionelle Entwicklung des Lehrpersonals (akademisch) an Universitäten zu fördern, und der praktischen Umsetzung durch die höheren Ausbildungsinstitute/Lehranstalten (HEI) in Grossbritannien. Konkret beobachten wir, wie eine Institution (Universität von Southampton) im Hinblick auf das Lehren und Lernen, auf die Anforderungen der nationalen Massnahmen reagiert hat. Um die institutionelle Politik und deren praktische Umsetzung zu gewährleisten, ist ein nationaler Kontext, der die Entwicklung von pädagogischem Wissen und die Fähigkeiten des Lehrpersonals sowohl fördert wie auch wertet, absolut notwendig. Der Beitrag endet mit einigen Gedanken zur zukünftigen Entwicklung von Lehren und Lernen an Universitäten in der Schweiz.

## **1. Introduction**

There are few countries around the world where university teaching staff<sup>1</sup> are expected to take on formal pedagogical training once hired by a higher education institution

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<sup>1</sup> We use the expression «university teaching staff» to mean all academic staff with teaching responsibilities. These might include professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, or readers, but also postgraduate assistants, academic librarians, or research staff with limited teaching responsibilities. However, it is important to note that, as is the case in Switzerland, most university teaching staff have both research and teaching responsibilities as part of their remit.

(HEI). The United Kingdom can be seen as progressive in that regard, since most academic staff in its HEIs are expected to complete, within their first few years of employment, the equivalent of a postgraduate certificate in university teaching and learning. In comparison, university teaching staff in Switzerland might be encouraged to take on formal training activities organised by the learning and teaching unit at their HEI, but there is no expectation that this should happen.

In this article, we describe the overall measures taken in the UK higher education system to encourage such practices. We also look at specific practices undertaken by one HEI, namely the University of Southampton, in order to illustrate how the national context (with regard to the professional development of university teaching staff) affects specific institutional policies and practices. Our main argument is that a national context which encourages and values the development of pedagogical knowledge and skills by university teaching staff is essential for HEIs to adopt institutional policies or practices in that domain. If the national higher education system does not do that, individual HEIs are not likely to invest resources, both financial and human, into supporting the development of university teaching staff. To illustrate our argument, we first present some aspects of the UK higher education system, in particular with regard to the professional development of university teaching staff. This would constitute what one could call the «macro» level of professional development initiatives. Then, we look at responses by UK HEIs, what most of them have put in place to meet the national or systemic expectations, and we look at the practices at one specific institution, the University of Southampton. This would constitute the «micro» level of professional development initiatives. Throughout the paper, we emphasise the linkages between the macro (national) policies and the micro (institutional) applications of such policies.

## **2. The UK higher education system and the professional development of university teaching staff**

The last major examination of the higher education system in the UK dates back to the mid 1990s when Sir Ron Dearing led a review which examined various aspects of the system, from the characteristics of the student body to the management and governance of HEIs, including funding issues. When it reported, the Dearing Committee<sup>2</sup> addressed the issue of professional development of all university staff, including teaching staff. Recommendation 48 of the Report states the following:

We recommend to institutions that, over the medium term, it should become the normal requirement that all new full-time academic staff with teaching responsibilities are required to achieve at least associate membership of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, for the successful completion of probation. (National Committee, 1997)

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<sup>2</sup> Formally known as the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997).

The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was set up a few years earlier to provide formal recognition of the pedagogical knowledge and skills of university teaching staff. The tone was therefore set: the whole higher education system was strongly encouraged to recognise and provide for the development of pedagogical knowledge and skills of university teaching staff.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA)<sup>3</sup> took over from the ILTHE in 2004, when the latter merged with the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), as the instance charged with ensuring that a given level of professional development would become the standard across the higher education system. It is thus today the national organisation that provides guidance on matters of learning and teaching in the UK. Its mission and strategic aims are:

To support the sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students.

(...)

1. Identify, develop and disseminate evidence-informed approaches
2. Broker and encourage the sharing of effective practice
3. Support universities and colleges in bringing about strategic change
4. Inform, influence and interpret policy
5. Raise the status of teaching. (Higher Education Academy, 2009)

No such organisation exists in Switzerland, mainly because of the high level of decentralisation that can be observed in the Swiss higher education system. For instance, there is a great differentiation across the sector between so-called «traditional» universities and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen* or *hautes écoles spécialisées*) with each group depending upon different government departments. Furthermore, even within the group of «traditional» universities differences exist. Some are very much «cantonal» in that they are predominantly financed by the local (*Kanton*) government whereas the two federal engineering schools are predominantly financed by the confederation. This configuration of the Swiss higher education system does not foster the rise of national standards or organisation responsible for teaching and learning as opposed to what can be seen in a more centrally-organised system such as in the UK. Nonetheless, other national organisations such as the Rectors' Conference of Swiss Universities (CRUS) and the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Swiss Universities (OAQ) provide some input into teaching and learning at the national level, although not to the same extent as the HEA does in the United Kingdom.

One of the specific programmes of the HEA is the accreditation of formal training programmes for newly-appointed university teaching staff. The HEA helps HEIs develop professional development programmes that meet national standards as expressed in the Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2006). The latter is a research-based framework that details the various levels of professional development expected of university teaching staff in the UK in relation to six areas of activity, six

<sup>3</sup> More information can be obtained on the HEA by visiting their website: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>.

Table 1: The Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education

Level	Descriptor	Targeted Staff
Level 1	Demonstrates understanding of the student learning experience through engagement with at least 2 of the 6 areas of activity, appropriate core knowledge and professional values...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Postgraduate teaching assistants</li> <li>- Staff new to university teaching with no prior experience</li> <li>- Staff with limited teaching responsibilities</li> </ul>
Level 2	Demonstrates an understanding of the student learning experience through engagement with all areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff who have a substantial role in learning and teaching to enhance the student experience</li> </ul>
Level 3	Supports and promotes student learning in all areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values through mentoring and leading individuals and/or teams...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experienced staff who have an established track record in promoting and mentoring colleagues in learning and teaching to enhance the student learning experience</li> </ul>

domains of core knowledge and five professional values. More specifically, it details three levels of professional development (shown in Table 1) in the area of university teaching that certain categories of academic staff should meet.

The framework thus exists to guide both the HEA in its accreditation scheme and individual HEIs wishing to develop programmes to support their academic staff. The HEA's accreditation scheme is organised around these three levels (shown in Table 2).

Table 2: Link between levels of the Professional Standards Framework and accreditation titles of the Higher Education Academy

Level of the Professional Standards Framework	Title obtained through accreditation by the HEA
Level 1	Associate Fellow
Level 2	Fellow
Level 3	Senior Fellow

According to the Professional Standards Framework, newly-appointed university teaching staff usually enter at the Associate Fellow or Fellow levels. These individuals usually lack basic knowledge and skills in the area of teaching and need to acquire these to develop as teachers. In some cases, the knowledge and skills needed are more limited, which corresponds to the Associate Fellow level, but in other cases it is more extensive, which corresponds to the Fellow level. The Senior Fellow level is generally reached by individuals who have met the requirements for the Fellow level and have built upon those by becoming specialists of teaching and learning in their disciplinary area or with regards to certain aspects of teaching and learning at university level.

The Professional Standards Framework is therefore the backbone of the system of recognition for university teaching staff. The HEA provides the professional recognition (via Associate Fellow, Fellow or Senior Fellow status) and accredits programmes on request, to enable HEI staff to achieve the appropriate status. HEIs have tremendous freedom to operate in the sense that they can decide what to include in their programmes and they can decide upon the format. However, all accredited programmes must work towards the knowledge and skills identified in the framework. This is how the articulation between the national (macro) level and the institutional (micro) level of professional development initiatives take place. But let us now examine general practices to that effect across the UK.

### **3. UK HEIs and the professional development of university teaching staff**

There has been no comprehensive review of the 200<sup>4</sup> plus UK higher education institutions and their policies and expectations on the training of new staff. However, there has been some research completed in the recent past which helps us to understand the current situation. Prosser et al. (2006) carried out an impact study of accredited programmes in 32 HEIs, and in doing so developed a partial profile of their expectations. Others have completed informal surveys among groups of institutions (Blackmore, 2008), or partial surveys have been made to sample national practice within parts of the sector, such as amongst the UK research-intensive universities (Drew & Lintern, 2008).

Generally, it is true to say that training or induction of new teaching staff of some sort is expected, certainly if it is their first teaching appointment. There is a broad range of expectations. At the most flexible, in the absence of a compulsory programme, there may be an expectation that the new staff member attend some sessions or events which are of particular interest or value to the individual (e.g. University of Cambridge). At the most formalised, the new staff member is expected to complete an accredited programme of training, leading to the award of a certificate, often at master's level (e.g. University of Southampton). The majority of HEIs expect the completion of a programme of some sort, but there is considerable variation as to the length and work expected. In some cases, the certificate is not master's level (e.g. University of Liverpool), in others, attendance at a programme of sessions is expected but assessment is light and completion of the full certificate is optional (e.g. University of Bristol).

The content of these programmes varies – some are more skills-based, others have a higher theoretical content. Some are certificates in learning and teaching (e.g. University of Birmingham), or in higher education (e.g. University of Nottingham), but others

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<sup>4</sup> There are over 200 in the UK (approximately 130 institutions in England, 63 in Scotland, and a few more in Northern Ireland and Wales).

are certificates in academic practice, which should have a broader focus than merely teaching, including aspects of research management (e.g. University of Warwick, University of Southampton). Those which have been accredited by the HEA (which appears to be the majority) will have mapped onto the Professional Standards Framework and the outcomes will be consistent with (but not limited to) those. The HEA is also encouraging HEIs to consider the development of an accredited framework, which would enable a variety of pathways to reach a similar level of development. Such a framework could contain a standard programme-based pathway, alongside more flexible ones, where participants could ensure they meet the same learning outcomes but do this by attending sessions or events of their choice, or undertaking specific activities, and documenting these and their learning experience in a portfolio.

The completion of a teaching and learning programme (or a specified part) is usually a probationary requirement for new lecture staff, and is occasionally also linked to promotional pathways<sup>5</sup>. In many cases, new staff may have the option to demonstrate prior learning by a process known as «accreditation of prior learning» which may be experiential or certificated. The HEA allows individuals to apply directly to them for Fellow status and this effectively requires that individual to demonstrate in the application form how s/he meets the outcomes specified in the PSF. HEIs (such as the University of Southampton) can interpret a successful application for HEA Fellow status as proving consistency with the PSF and may not therefore require that staff member to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP).

#### **4. The University of Southampton: a case study**

The University of Southampton is a research-intensive university enrolling approximately 21'000<sup>6</sup> students and a teaching body of approximately 2'300<sup>7</sup> academic staff. It has been offering a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) since 2000. The provision of this level of staff development is consistent with the 2006–2010 Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy which states that «all staff in Schools and Professional Services will have access to appropriate initial training with opportunities for reflective practice, the sharing of good practice and continuing professional development that will enhance curriculum design, assessment, and student support» (University of Southampton, 2006).

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<sup>5</sup> In the UK higher education system, new teaching staff (lecturers) are eligible for promotion to the academic ranks of senior lecturer or professor after having worked for a number of years at a given rank and developed a proven track record in both research and teaching. This is similar to the Swiss system of appointment to professorship, either through the traditional route or the accelerated, tenure-track route.

<sup>6</sup> As of December 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Using 2005/6 figures – from University of Southampton Key Performance Indicators 2007.

The PCAP is a master's level certificate consisting of two modules each worth 30 CATS credits or 15 ECTS credits.<sup>8</sup> It is accredited by the HEA and is mapped onto the areas of activity, types of core knowledge, and professional values identified in the PSF. Therefore, successful completion of PCAP Modules 1 and 2 leads to Fellow status in the HEA accreditation scheme (completion of Module 1 only leads to Associate Fellow status). It is currently expected that all newly-appointed full-time teaching staff complete both modules as part of their probationary requirements. In 2006/7, 33 participants were registered for Module 1, but in 2007/8 this had increased considerably to 99 for Module 1 and in 2008/9 there are likely to be around 75 participants. Those on part-time contracts may need to complete Module 1, and other staff (with very limited teaching responsibilities) may be able to take the programme on an optional basis, depending on numbers and capacity.

Module 1 is called *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* and «aims to develop competent and confident reflective practitioners capable of evaluating and developing their own teaching and learning support practices in the context of theory and practice» (University of Southampton, 2008a). Module 2 is called *Academic Practice* and «builds on Module 1 and encourages participants to critically examine a wider variety of approaches through which they can facilitate high quality student learning and to think strategically about teaching and learning processes and activities» (University of Southampton, 2008b). Both are underpinned by a set of professional values (details of the learning outcomes and values are shown in Table 3).

In addition, participants are encouraged to attend optional sessions which may be related to university strategic priorities (such as internationalisation of the curriculum) or be a result of requests for particular sessions from participants (such as supporting students with dyslexia).

The content, format and delivery has been changed and refined based on feedback from participants, mentors and external examiners (University of Southampton, 2007). Originally, each module was delivered via a series of five afternoon workshops on alternate weeks over a ten-week period. Many staff expressed a strong preference for an intensive delivery option, and this was introduced in 2007/2008. Staff may therefore choose between the two modes of delivery, which have identical content and assessment requirements. The programme is based on the assumption that participants will be teaching as they study, so that they can test or implement what they learn on the programme. It has always been the assumption that the discipline-specific input for PCAP would be acquired via collaboration with a mentor selected from the participant's academic school in order to situate educational theory and experience within the relevant context. In the past, mentors were also involved in assessment, although it was recently

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<sup>8</sup> Two credits within CATS (the UK credit accumulation and transfer system) are normally assumed to be equivalent to one in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).



Table 3: Learning outcomes and professional values of the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice, University of Southampton

<b>PCAP Module 1 Learning Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critically review the design of a teaching module or similar scheme of learning support activity including the rationale, learning outcomes, teaching &amp; learning activities, assessment/s and method of evaluation.</li> <li>2. Make appropriate and effective use of teaching and learning support methods and resources to facilitate quality learning.</li> <li>3. Critically review the design of assessments of a teaching module or similar scheme of learning support activity including summative and formative assessments.</li> <li>4. Evaluate the effectiveness of your own teaching and learner support through evidence derived from self, peers, students and other sources.</li> <li>5. Reflect on your own professional practice and development, and assessed future development needs in order to improve effectiveness.</li> </ol>
<b>PCAP Module 2 Learning Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critically review an existing teaching module or similar scheme of learning support activity, using evidence derived from literature and a range of evaluation sources and propose, with justification, a strategy to improve it.</li> <li>2. Critically evaluate the appropriate use and potential of new and innovative learning, teaching or support methods and tools (including learning technologies) within your own subject-specific teaching and learning context.</li> <li>3. Provide and contribute effectively and inclusively to the academic and pastoral support of students.</li> <li>4. Reflect critically on your own professional practice and development, assess your future development needs and make a plan for your continuing professional development.</li> </ol>
<b>Professional Values for PCAP Modules 1 &amp; 2</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A commitment to scholarship in teaching, both generally and within the discipline.</li> <li>2. A respect for individual learners and for their development and empowerment.</li> <li>3. A commitment to work with and learn from colleagues.</li> <li>4. The practising of equal opportunities.</li> <li>5. A commitment to continued reflection and evaluation, and consequent improvement of your own practice.</li> </ol>

agreed that this compromised the role of the mentor and that is now no longer the case. The assessments are structured to ensure that all the learning outcomes are met at the appropriate standard, and there is opportunity for participants to present evidence to demonstrate commitment to the five professional values. In the past, there were a larger number of short assessments, but acting on feedback from participants, these have been streamlined, and there are now just four more substantial (3'000 word) assessments.

University teaching staff may be newly appointed as full-time staff members, but have gained substantial experience as research students or temporary teaching staff. The University of Southampton therefore believes it appropriate to allow those who feel they have adequate experience to demonstrate that in a detailed interview with the PCAP programme director or substitute. This process has led to a number of exemptions being given to staff, although some may still choose to attend PCAP sessions, but not complete assessments. Individuals also have the option to apply directly to the

HEA for Fellow status and success in that regard would give them automatic exemption from PCAP.

The University of Southampton was one of the first HEIs to establish promotional pathways to professor level for education (teaching), and education and research combined, in addition to the traditional research-related pathway. The educational criteria take into account initial and continuing professional development. University teaching staff applying for Senior Lecturer or Professor status must in the future have completed a PCAP or equivalent, or have demonstrated appropriate achievements, for instance by gaining fellowship of the HEA. This does not say that university teaching staff can base their career solely on teaching. Rather, all university teaching staff must combine both research and teaching in their activities. However, the ratio of research to teaching activities might differ from one person to another, depending upon their context (e.g. faculty, institute or department).

Additionally, the University of Southampton offers a Postgraduate Induction to Learning and Teaching (PILT), which consists of two credit-bearing units of study that enable PhD students to gain up to 30 credits towards a master's level educational qualification. The PILT is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and will lead to HEA Associate Fellow status (University of Southampton, 2008c).

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper, we looked at the relationship between national policies with regard to the professional development of university teaching staff and the institutional applications of such policies. We have done so by looking at the UK higher education system and one British HEI, namely the University of Southampton. We have seen that this latter HEI has developed a series of measures intended to support the development of university teaching staff, measures that are adapted to the requirements set in national regulations.

In their examination of accredited programmes in the UK, Prosser et al. (2006) found that these programmes were apparently effective in both developing the knowledge and skills of university teaching staff and, ultimately, in improving the learning experience of students. We would argue that such programmes, with all their differences, have been successful because they are offered within a national context that clearly sets out standards for the professional development of university teaching staff. Without these national standards, it would be much more difficult for individual HEIs to devote resources, both financial and human, to that area of activity.

In the case of Switzerland, most HEIs have now developed their own policies and practices with regards to the professional development of university teaching staff.

Some are more advanced than others in that regard mainly because of the vision of each rector. Taking into account the positive aspects of the UK experience, it might be useful for the Swiss higher education system to move a little bit more in that direction and adopt certain national standards. This could encourage HEIs that have been at the forefront in that domain to continue their efforts and convince others of the importance of supporting the development of pedagogical knowledge and skills of their teaching staff. At the moment, very little is done in that regard other than the informal exchange of information taking place through the Swiss Faculty Development Network (SFDN), the network of centres for teaching and learning.

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## Authors

**Denis Berthiaume, Dr.**, Centre de soutien à l'enseignement, Université de Lausanne, 1015 Lausanne  
**Mary Morrison, Dr.**, Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, University of Southampton,  
SO17 1BJ Southampton, United Kingdom