

# The value of HEA Fellowship

## Author

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In today's UK HE sector, individuals applying for academic positions require a teaching qualification. Some years ago, it was considered adequate if a lecturer had either sufficient experience within a particular discipline, or an academic qualification such as a PhD within the subject area, in order to teach it at HE level. The importance of possessing teaching skills has in recent years started to take on more value. The debates surrounding this shift were discussed in Eric Sotto's Times Higher Education article, 'You can lecture, but can you teach?' (2010). It can be argued that such a shift has helped to develop conversations around what makes a professional academic and professional conduct.

The desire to employ more lecturers trained in teaching led to teaching qualifications that were previously noted as being 'desirable' on academic job descriptions, to being listed as an 'essential' requirement. This may be evidenced via a completed PGCertHE or fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, or equivalent. Different institutions have their own regulations, with many asking for applicants to either have a teaching qualification before joining, or to complete a relevant course once they have started their post with the aim of achieving a teaching qualification within a set number of years.

One of my key roles at the University of Greenwich is to Co-ordinate the Greenwich Opportunities in Learning and Development (GOLD framework), an HEA-accredited professional recognition programme for all staff.

As part of this role, I deliver webinars outlining the GOLD framework, deliver guidance workshops where the applicant and their mentor discuss ideas of

what type of evidence can be included, and sit on the GOLD panel to review applications once they are submitted.

To encourage more colleagues across the university to apply for professional recognition, I helped create and deliver bespoke workshops across the university. During these sessions, I noticed that certain questions were raised repeatedly, which questioned both the need and value of gaining fellowship.

These honest and legitimate concerns raised by staff are what this blog post centres around. This blog focuses on the recurrent questions asked of me below, and which caused me to critically reflect upon my own experience of applying for fellowship and the role I play Co-coordinating the GOLD framework.

### **Questions of focus**

- Aside from the nominal letters after my name in an email signature, what are the benefits of becoming a Fellow?
- I'm not used to writing in a reflective manner, why am I asked to write the application in this way?
- If applying to be a Fellow is less time consuming than applying to be a Senior Fellow, why should I apply for SFHEA status?

It's understandable that if the only benefit of participating in applying for fellowship are nominal letters after our name, that the process would seem unnecessary. But receiving formal recognition for your continued dedication to teaching and learning highlights your ability to carry out your role to a high standard. In this way, formal recognition can also help with career progression.

Other colleagues are concerned about using 'the right tone of voice', in their application, i.e. writing in a 'critically reflective' way. Depending on a colleague's subject specialism, the process of writing in such a style can quite

daunting. Guidance on writing reflectively can help applicants to structure their activities and case studies.

The process of reflective writing can also be a very positive experience. The GOLD application, much like the HEA application, encourages colleagues to not just describe their successes but to underline the learning gained and ongoing action plans which arose from these experiences.

The word count for FHEA applications is lower than that of SFHEA so why someone should bother with spending more time working on a Senior Fellow application? Due to workloads and limited time available to spend working on applications, this a good question. But if you are a leader why not be recognised as one? Individuals clearly working at SF level will not find it difficult to elaborate upon their experiences and ways in which they have helped to support and make a positive impact on their peers, and so the word count naturally becomes less of an issue.

I hope that the blog has emphasised a few of the values and benefits which come from applying for and gaining recognition for your contribution to teaching and learning.

## **Reference List**

Sotto, Eric, 'You can lecture, but can you teach?', *Times Higher Education*, 21 January 2010.

University of Greenwich, GOLD Professional Development Framework - recognising professionalism in teaching, learning and assessment at the University of Greenwich (2017)

(<https://www.gre.ac.uk/offices/edu/he/framework>) [accessed: 19/7/2017].