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'Left with a title but nothing else': the challenges of embedding professional recognition schemes for teachers within higher education institutions

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ABSTRACT

With increasing moves globally towards the professionalisation of teaching in Higher Education, there is growing interest in the role of accredited professional recognition schemes that provide professional development for established university teaching staff. In the UK, There are now over 120 professional recognition schemes, resulting in institutionally focused evaluation studies examining their impact. This article contributes to this emerging body of work; it draws on cross-institutional data and Foucauldian theorising to address two important questions. In what ways does engagement with an institutional professional recognition scheme impact on participants' teaching development, and *how* does institutional culture influence that engagement? The data illustrate that whilst institutional culture drives engagement, it did little to promote teaching development. Across the case-study institutions, neo-liberalism agendas were apparent. Some staff felt pushed to achieve professional recognition in response to the increasing use of metrics to measure the student experience and to inform institutional standing in league tables. Whilst evidence shows the process of seeking accreditation *can* lead to an enhancement in teaching practices, caution must be taken to ensure that the professional development opportunities offered by accreditation schemes are fully realised.

Introduction

The professional development of those involved in leading and supporting teaching, learning and assessment in higher education (HE) is established practice globally (Gosling, 2010; Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009). Courses to introduce new lecturers to the practices and principles of HE teaching are the mainstay of educational development work (Gibbs, 2013; Gosling, 2010), complemented by activities such as pedagogic research, teaching and learning conferences, peer review and mentoring. In the UK, the 2011 re-



launch of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) created sector owned standards that provide a scaffold to shape the practice and development of those working to promote and support student learning (Higher Education Academy, 2011). The UKPSF is a well-established mechanism for providing professional accreditation of the postgraduate teaching qualifications new lecturers undertake (Gosling, 2010). However, it is also a route for established HE professionals to gain recognition. Through institutional recognition schemes, they can make an application to gain fellowship of The Higher Education Academy (HEA) as either an Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow or Principal Fellow (HEA, 2016).¹ Each category of Fellowship is articulated with clear descriptors, with increasing levels of responsibility for leading and supporting teaching and learning as you move from Associate Fellow. To gain Principal Fellowship you would need to demonstrate significant strategic oversight for teaching and learning.

With more than 111,000 Fellows across the world, HEA Fellowship is 'an internationally recognised badge of professional success for those who teach and support learning in HE' (Advance HE, 2019). Other countries, such as Australia and Lebanon, have drawn on the UKPSF and developed their own 'framework of good practice principles and evidence-based measures of performance' (Chalmers et al., 2014, p. 5). Schemes are also emerging in Africa and the Middle and Far East. Whilst this article focuses explicitly on data collected in the UK context, its findings have implications for the development of HE teachers internationally.

There has been considerable appetite for established HE professionals, working across a diverse range of roles, to gain recognition (Turner et al., 2013), and currently there are 129 institutionally based recognition schemes in the UK (Pilkington, 2017). Engagement of staff in these schemes is often used to demonstrate institutional commitment to teaching and learning (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009), though the extent to which this is evidenced is contested (Gibbs, 2013). As the number of recognition schemes has increased so too has the attention paid to evaluating the role, impact and operation of these schemes (Botham, 2017; Spowart, Turner, Shenton, & Kneale, 2016; van der Sluis, Burden, & Huet, 2016). These studies mainly represent single institutional data sets (e.g., Botham, 2017; Spowart et al., 2016; van der Sluis et al., 2016), and though common themes are emerging (e.g., around the development of reflective practice), they tend to focus on impacts realised in the context in which they operate. The fact that the authors are often evaluating their own in-house schemes could potentially lead to inherent bias and can therefore have limited generalisability.

This article draws on cross-institutional data to address two important questions:

- In what ways does engagement with an institutional recognition scheme aligned with the UKPSF impact on participants' professional development, teaching practices, values or beliefs?
- How does institutional culture influence engagement?

Foucault's ideas regarding discourse and power afford a useful heuristic for examining conversations about the process and experience of gaining recognition. Crucially, Foucault identified discourses as being historically specific. What is possible to say and do, and who is considered to be the authority on a topic, is contingent upon the status of the speaker and the 'truth' (or dominant discourse) of that historical moment. In order to address the



above questions, we position the processes of gaining teaching recognition within a power framework. We examine the power relations that both define and develop, and are articulated through, these processes.

In this article, we expand on the evaluation study reported in Spowart et al. (2016) which analysed academics' motivations and perceived gains from engaging with the institutions' recognition scheme. It found that in the main participants were not seeking professional development but were instead motivated to respond to institutional agendas. This created a set of conditions aligning recognition with probation and promotion to encourage participation. However, at another institution, Botham (2017) found that the main motivator for engagement was a desire to gain personal recognition. Given that findings may vary, and over half of UK HE providers administer their own in-house recognition schemes, the research team identified the need to look beyond institutional boundaries to provide a more robust analysis of their impact and the extent to which the original ambition of the UKPSF regarding professional development is realised.

Historical context: why the drive towards teaching recognition in HE?

Discourses underpinning teaching quality are complex and problematic (Botham, 2017). What is considered the 'truth' is largely dependent upon the status (and hence power) of the speaker. In the UK, policy discussions around the professionalisation of university teaching have been ongoing for several decades, gaining impetus following the Dearing Report's (HMSO, 1997) recommendation of the establishment of a professional body for lecturers. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) was formed in 2004 subsuming the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and was tasked with delivering educational reforms outlined in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003) white paper 'The Future of Higher Education'. Key to these reforms were new teaching quality standards upheld by teaching qualifications.

The dominant discourse emerging from these policy requirements can be understood as the development of a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1994). Such a regime both influences and reflects the views of members of the public (in particular students, prospective students and their parents) and 'experts' in HE. This regime of truth extends well beyond the UK context. Acknowledging this power dynamic, Foucault argued that "truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power which it induces and which extends it' (Foucault, 1994, p. 132). As Foucault indicates, this relationship between the authorities and other individuals comprises '... a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operations of statements ... [and] is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it ...' (Foucault, 1994, p. 133).

The circulation of these new 'truths' underpinned the creation of the UKPSF developed through lengthy consultation across the sector (Law, 2011). The UKPSF is recognised as sector-owned with the HEA as steward (Purcell, 2013) and it provides the framework for recognition, but each institution has the authority to make judgements about whether the criteria have been met (Spowart et al., 2016; van der Sluis et al., 2016). In the case of new lecturers, these judgements are based on the successful completion of an accredited course aligned to the UKPSF, or for established HE professionals through the submission of an application, or professional dialogue, which demonstrates engagement with all aspects



of the UKPSF (Asghar & Pilkington, 2018). In all cases, the UKPSF philosophy and process is intended to be progressive with emphases on reflective practice and 'good standing' (HEA, 2016).

While addressing concerns regarding teaching quality is significant, we argue that these processes represent socially constructed, problematic discourses, developed largely in response to the agendas of policymakers articulated through the 'need' for professional recognition. It is the use of institutional-based professional standards frameworks and the tensions that emerge between the requirement for recognition as an indicator of a commitment to teaching and learning, and the conditions for professional development that is the specific focus of this article.

The degree to which the framework fulfils its developmental potential depends on its widespread adoption and utilisation within HE institutions (Purcell, 2013) and this is variable across the sector. HE providers have taken very different approaches with some demanding that every lecturer has recognised status, some embedding qualification status into promotion criteria (Cashmore, Cane, & Cane, 2013), and others having a more egalitarian voluntary approach.

There is evidence that the UKPSF has had an impact on the sector. Turner et al.'s (2013) evaluation found that it had influenced teaching, often strategically, through for example, shaping accredited courses, and continuing professional development (CPD) practices, supporting reward and recognition and influencing institutional strategy and policy. Spowart et al. (2016) found that experienced academics participating in recognition schemes were not usually seeking development but were instead responding to an institutional agenda. This highlights a tension between the developmental intentions of the UKPSF and the way HE providers manage its use. Despite mandatory teacher training in other educational sectors and over 40 years of educational development work in the UK (Gibbs, 2013) recognition for teaching is not usually obligatory, and indeed is an on-going challenge for many research-intensive universities (Fung & Gordon, 2016; Gosling, 2010). Educational development has therefore evolved in these conditions as a support function for enhancing teaching practice amongst those who are intrinsically motivated to develop (Gibbs, 2013).

However, there are a number of converging influences across the sector that are challenging this premise; influences which assume a relationship between teacher recognition and enhanced performance of teachers and students (Kneale et al., 2016) and driving HE providers towards demanding the wide-spread professional recognition for teaching staff. In the UK these influences are often described as the 'marketisation of HE' (Brown & Cassaro, 2013) which has escalated with the introduction of fees in 1998. The introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2015, in which the monitoring and assessing of teaching in England's universities is undertaken by central government (Forstentzer, 2016), arguably best illustrates the pervasive nature of discourses around teaching quality in HE. Assessment of each institution is based on standard metrics and a provider written submission that affords additional evidence of teaching excellence (HEFCE, 2017). The TEF assessment criteria, emphasising on-going enhancement in curriculum and student support, are likely to prompt further engagement by academic and professional staff in CPD for teaching. Strathern (2000) argues that audit and accreditation of HE are part of modernity's quest for order and transparency and policy developments in UK HE suggest that both governments and students are seeking more accountability (Hibbert & Semler, 2015).



Research design

This study focuses on three post-1992 teaching-focused universities and former polytechnics in the UK. Each participating institution had collected empirical qualitative data to evaluate in-house recognition schemes. It is these data that were re-analysed in light of this study's objectives.

Although each individual study had its own aims and outcomes with respect to evaluating local provision, the alignment of recognition frameworks to the UKPSF meant that there is overlap. Consequently, each evaluation study had a similar remit in relation to investigating the impact HEA accredited CPD schemes have on teaching practice and professional development.

The re-use of existing data to address new research questions is established within the social sciences (Bishop, 2007; Hammersley, 2010). Concerns that data become 'divorced' from the original research context are largely overcome, as there is growing recognition that studies using data in this way are not attempting to recreate the original research but rather to recontextualise new perspectives or themes (Hammersley, 2010). Indeed, advocates argue that all data represents a construction of phenomena, and that any data represent an interpretation of reality (Bishop, 2007; Hammersley, 2010). Others identify benefits including the potential for extending sampling populations and overcoming logistical data collection issues (Mauthner, Parry, & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

In each HEI the local research team provided interview question schedules, anonymised interview transcripts and provided access to institutional documentation. In an effort to avoid misinterpretation of local data members of all research teams participated in the re-analysis of the data. In total 32 interview transcripts were included in this study; 6 were drawn from HEI 1, 19 from HEI 2 and 7 from HEI3 – the differing sample sizes from each institution reflects the differing scale and scope of the original evaluation work. Participants represented different roles, disciplines and levels of recognition (see Table 1). Given that our interest was in experienced staff members we focused solely on those who had gained Senior and Principal Fellow.

Each institution had gained ethical approval for their original study prior to data collection. A second submission for ethical approval was then sought from the lead institution for this study. Retrospective permission was obtained from the participants involved in each of the original studies to gain consent for their use of their data in this new study.

Limitations

In order to overcome the difference in sample population size and to prevent scheme specific themes dominating, the analysis focused on themes common to all institutions which resulted in some individual institutional themes becoming diluted. There are potential limitations present in a data set consisting only of teaching-focused universities. However, these institutions each have a long history of teaching-related CPD; indeed Fung and Gordon (2016) highlighted the concerns research-intensive institutions currently face in terms of ensuring the sustainability of a high quality student experience given the predominance of a culture that values research over teaching. These institutions may benefit from the lessons presented here in order to foster a culture change that values teaching.



Table 1. Summary of interview characteristics.

Institution	No. of interviews	Gender	Previously held Fellowship?	Role	Discipline	Level of Fellowship Sought
HEI1 (a-f)	6	2 female, 4 male		Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Head of School and Course Directors	Social work, Health & Social care, Science	Senior Fellow
HEI2 (a-m)	13	5 female, 8 male	6	Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer, Programme Lead, Educational Developer	Business, Finance, Science, Geography, Nursing, Educational Development, Marine Science, Computing, Maths, Medicine	Senior Fellow
HEI2 (n-s)	6	3 female, 3 male	2	Head of School, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dean of Faculty, Head of Educational Development	Arts, Engineering, Science, Geography, Medicine, Education	Principal Fellow
HEI3 (a-f)	6	2 female 4 male	2	Academic Leader, Head of School Principal Lecturer, Senior Lecturer	Arts, Business, Health care Science History, Nursing, Social Care,	Senior Fellow
HEI3 (g)	1	female	1	Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow	Health	Principal Fellow
TOTAL:	32					

Data analysis

All data were transcribed in full. Each transcript was reviewed by a research assistant to reduce potential for bias (Hammersely & Gomm, 1997). Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and cross-cutting agendas (Saldaña, 2015). The outcomes of this initial work were presented to two members of the research team, who reviewed the provisional coding framework in light of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. This led to the development of the analytical framework, which was piloted on a sample of transcripts, and following minor revisions applied to all transcripts (Saldaña, 2015). Through this process three themes emerged as discussed in the next section.

Findings

Institutional culture and the motivation to engage in professional recognition

As Clegg (2003, p. 42) observed: ‘top down institutional and quality agendas shape the context for much CPD’. Recent work (e.g., Winter, Turner, Spowart, Muneer, & Kneale, 2017) echo this. This is evidenced by the expectations for new lecturers to complete post-graduate teaching qualifications (Smith, 2010) and experienced academics to gain recognition of their teaching experience (Asghar & Pilkington, 2018). These recognised institutional drivers are well established; here attention was paid to how participants reconciled institutional drivers with their own personal motivations for gaining recognition. Participants talked about the institutional ‘push’ towards recognition, and were acutely aware of the power relations surrounding HEA accredited CPD frameworks and the external drivers for engagement:



I think money is a driver but I think some of the surveys are a driver[...] the fact that they're public knowledge now on Unistats, so you can't bury your NSS scores any more ... students, and pre-students go into Unistats, they look at what universities, you know how they're matching up ... because we are in a more consumer orientated culture. (HEI3e)

Being absolutely candid, one of the main motivations was through the management of the school and the appraisal process. I guess the message from the University, through the head of school was that this was something that was a requirement [...] particularly for people of different grades that would correspond with different levels of fellowship and this was something slightly stronger than an expectation. (HEI1a)

It's something that in my heart of hearts I'm not really interested in, but if I'm going to do this organisational change work and work with [the Pro VC Teaching and Learning], I need to ... (HEI3b)

In these extracts the strengthening accountability and accreditation agendas of neo-liberalism are evident. Neo-liberalism calls upon the individual to enter into the process of self-governance through processes of endless self-examination, self-care and self-improvement (Petersen, 1997, p. 194). This is often monitored via university appraisal processes. Those that do not gain HEA recognition are ultimately likely to feel a level of 'discomfort' which is problematic to sustain amidst increasing pressure to conform. The circular nature of power is evident here as staff are influenced by discourses that in turn influence student choice of institution. The external influence is palpable in the language of 'requirement' and 'obligation' evident in these quotations. Whilst Foucault (1984) suggests that individuals always have the opportunity for local resistance as Hollander and Einwohner (2004, p. 549) point out 'even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place'.

Interestingly, staff from HEI2 expressed mixed views, with some conveying a greater sense of localised autonomy, and others recognising the steer from University management to engage. Their responses are related to their positioning within the institution, and their role in the management of others:

I'm keen for my department to be able to say that 100% of the staff here have some form of accreditation. I just think it's a really good marketing tool. (HEI2c)

We are a learning and teaching institution and I suppose fitting with that ethos we feel that we should be supporting the institution as well. (HEI2a)

These institutional differences are also evident in the guidance that supports the HEA recognition schemes and the presence of institutional targets for the numbers of 'qualified or recognised staff'. One of the study institutions documents school level targets for engagement that are reviewed annually. Instead, HEI2 adopts a 'softer' approach, and the interview data reflected this. As one Head of Department illustrated below, the culture in their area of the University at least is one of encouragement rather than enforcement:

I've been encouraging quite a few [staff] recently, and saying at their PDRs [professional development reviews] two things really: What's achievable? Because obviously you want to set some goals and targets. What is genuinely achievable in a period of time? (HEI2b)

Whilst top down managerialist approaches to organisational change are often regarded negatively (Gosling & Turner, 2014), to initiate a change in culture there needs to be



leadership and value placed on the activity. As Fullen and Scott (2009, p. 102) comment: 'the ideal way to change a culture is for a critical mass of key leaders – centrally and locally – to intentionally model in their daily behaviours the attributes and capabilities they want the university to develop'. That said it does not follow that leaders gaining recognition necessarily model the behaviours that give credence to the activity. Whilst staff may engage in the process of gaining Fellowship, they may simply be doing so due to the external motivation from institutional leaders, or as a way to further their careers.

Ticking boxes? Perceptions of value

The perceived value of the recognition scheme was questioned by Senior and Principal Fellows from all three institutions. Simply put, participants felt that the achievement of Fellowship had more to do with institutional goals, staff promotion and/or recognition than enhancing teaching. There was little sense that the process of applying and gaining recognition was regarded as a CPD activity. This was surprising since there is a need to reflect on practice and engage with pedagogic literature as part of the application process:

Academic staff just see [gaining recognition] as a 'tick a box', and that's a reflection of a traditional approach to teaching. "How dare anyone challenge my ability to bore students to death" ... alongside [the process of applying for recognition] we are looking to Peer Reviews of teaching and wherever I've been before that was custom and practice, but it was a facilitative process. What's happening here at this point in time is a contentious issue because it's seen as a management discipline tool. (HEI2g)

The use of the term 'box ticking' by this Head of Department illustrates the strong sense of tokenism that can be evoked when CPD activities are driven by managers without conveying the real purpose and value. Also implicit within the above quote is that activities used widely across the sector to promote teaching enhancement and stimulate CPD, such as peer review, and UKPSF recognition schemes, become perceived as management tools rather than offering real developmental opportunities, that may in turn benefit the student experience. This view was endorsed by a Dean of Faculty who reflected 'most of my colleagues see [gaining Fellowship] as a hurdle to getting employment' (HEI2o).

Whilst there are potential limitations of recognition schemes when regarded by management and/or teaching staff as simply a technical exercise, within Foucault's framework, staff also have a limited opportunity to 'opt out'. Although Foucault (1984) suggests that individuals always have the opportunity for local resistance, this freedom is somewhat constrained within the current climate of recognition. The quotations below further illustrate the disconnect felt by some between the process of gaining a Fellowship and the actual business of teaching students.

They [the central teaching and learning unit] talk about learning and teaching, we do it! A lot of people tend to be worried about being dragged into some very bureaucratic exercise ... it is perceived by many of us as not having anything to do with quality at all. (HEI3d)

The tide comes in again really quickly ... and you have built this from sandcastles, and it's difficult to sort of protect them from getting washed away and be left only with the title, and the fact that makes me more secure in terms of my career, but nothing else, you know. I don't really remember anything else from the process and there is a danger in that. (HEI1g)

There is little published literature that evidences the impact of teaching-related CPD on student learning (Kneale et al., 2016). This is in part due to the complex nature of impact



assessment (Winter et al., 2017). Studies have instead tended to focus on the impact on teachers' conceptual development, attitudes, knowledge and skills (Botham, 2017; Kneale et al., 2016). Positive comments tended to be focused on the benefits of 'taking stock' of personal achievements on their teaching practice, rather than the enhancement of specific teaching, skills or attributes. There was also an acknowledgement that it was a useful process for the wider university and for the purposes of promotion:

It did cause me to be reflective, so I suppose that is useful [...]. It certainly made me look more closely at what I had achieved. (HEI1b)

I don't really know whether I did find it useful for me. I did it as a means to an end [promotion] (HEI2e)

I don't want to denigrate this qualification because it's very relevant to the current educational climate in HE. I think, because I'm so long in the tooth now [...]if I'm staying in HE as an academic yes it's useful but it's more of oh ok, I'll just have to go and get it and it'll be another thing on my CV (HEI3f)

The dissonance between institutional drivers, potential teaching enhancement and professional development, perhaps was exacerbated by the experience of going through the application process, which as is now considered, was a cause of personal and professional pressure for many.

'Even more bloody stressed!': juggling conflicting priorities and needing support

The dominant theme across all three institutions was the challenge of juggling competing academic priorities. Neoliberal policies have led to significant reductions in government funding, resulting in increasing workloads and levels of stress associated with the pressures to perform across both teaching and research (Kenny, 2017). The prioritisation of research over teaching was also very evident across all three institutions:

Everyone has it [the pressure to gain recognition] and they say "Do I have to do this, you know, because I have got a lot else that I am supposed to be doing?" Like your research, it's on top. (HEI1d)

Am I putting my efforts in to making sure I can be returned for the REF? Am I putting my efforts in to ensuring I am giving a good student experience? Hopefully 'Yes' to both of those and then: "Do I also have time to apply to be a Fellow of the HEA?" [...]other things take priority. (HEI2b)

Most of us are already working evenings and weekends anyway, it's not like there's any flexibility to give us some extra time to do it, we have to just fit it in where we can. (HEI3e)

Adopting a Foucauldian lens, individuals are regarded as constantly scrutinising themselves in relation to sets of 'truths', and investing in self-forming and self-reflecting practices. The dominant discourse of academics is to be efficient, autonomous and productive in relation to both teaching and research. It is evident from the second quotation above that applying to be a Fellow of the HEA is not regarded as an important aspect of 'giving a good student experience'. Recognition is constructed as something entirely separate and additional, adding to an increasingly escalating workload. This observation echoes the way new lecturers talk about the competing pressures to gain their initial teaching qualification (e.g., Smith, 2010). With both inexperienced and experienced academic



staff it seems that there is an implicit expectation to keep up to date and engage with new teaching ideas, but there is no protected time to engage (Botham, 2017).

The cynicism creeps in because there's a voice in your head saying oh it's another hoop jumping exercise ... and it's another thing that I have to do which is going to stop me doing my day job ... which is going to make me even more bloody stressed. (HEI3d)

Taken collectively, these experienced staff conveyed the sense that the time investment of engaging in the recognition process did not lead to any significant personal gain. This lack of value may be a consequence of the traditional perception of teaching-related CPD activities, as being of secondary importance to research (Fung & Gordon, 2016; Turner & Gosling, 2012). Though efforts have been made to challenge this position and raise the status of teaching and learning, including work to professionalise university teaching, it remains an entrenched position.

Despite increasing pressure to align with and perform in response to this particular 'top-down' institutional agenda, staff were largely appreciative of the support they received once they had made the decision to commit.

There is more broadly a sense of being invested in by the university and supported through a process that, you know, motivationally ... was helpful. (HEI1d)

We already discussed [recognition] in detail and in our [appraisal] we've had a lot of discussion about this. When do you want to do it? How would you do it? So, I thought our School is a really supportive environment to go through the process. (HEI3f)

Perhaps related to the time pressures, strong mentorship within the Faculties was deemed as important across all the three institutions. Whilst academics were frequently critical of the political drivers behind the recognition schemes, they were almost unanimous in their praise for the staff supporting the process.

Conclusions

In this article we have drawn on existing data from three institutionally focused evaluation studies that sought to explore both the impact of engagement with institutional recognition schemes and how institutional cultures can influence that engagement to enhance or inhibit personal development. We used this to examine whether issues emerging from these individual studies are replicated and to consider the implications for the future role of professional recognition schemes as a source of professional development. Adopting a Foucauldian lens allows us to consider the complex nature of power in the recognition process. Rather than viewing gaining Fellowship as something that is individual, apolitical and neutral, this study reveals insights into how individuals negotiate the shifting academic terrain, often responding to the 'push' from institutional agendas relating to teaching quality metrics.

Whilst professional development was not always a clear motivator some colleagues valued the opportunity for their development provided through these schemes. We used the data to examine the impact of institutional culture on development, and whilst institutional culture drove engagement, it did little to promote development. Indeed, this position may be reinforced following recent policy developments, where the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework, placed the emphasis on metrics to

demonstrate student learning (HEFCE, 2017). This could again stimulate a move away from enhancement and development to engagement for the benefit of league tables.

Across the three institutions, neo-liberalism agendas were apparent. Some staff feel pushed to achieve professional recognition because of standing in league tables and the increasing use of metrics in defining the quality of the student experience. The pressure to conform is seen as separate and additional to an increasingly escalating workload with no protected time to encourage profound engagement. Since all the staff in this study were experienced academics with significant management responsibilities in relation to teaching and learning, the strong sense of obligation to gain accreditation is likely to influence those under their leadership. In this context, these experienced academics are ‘people through whom power passes or who are important in the fields of power relations’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 247). Consequently, it is likely that less experienced staff will also be impacted by dominant concerns about teaching metrics, over other discourses such as professional development. Whilst professional accreditation is often viewed as freely chosen and self-determined activity, adopting a Foucauldian lens illustrates that the situation may not be that straightforward.

Our analysis of the data highlights a paradox, illustrated through the tensions often experienced by those in academic development roles (Kensington-Miller, Renc-Roe, & Moron-Garcia, 2015). The HEA extols the value of their professional recognition scheme through promotional material on their website yet since the advent of the UKPSF revision, the sector has been impacted by a series of converging influences (increase in fees, student voice, TEF, etc.) which have potentially perverted the original intentions of the Framework and the conditions within which individuals respond to it. There is an expectation in institutions (linked to credentialism and league table positions) that staff will engage but the extent to which this is actually valued and developmental is largely assumed. Indeed, the experience of engaging with this process could potentially inhibit professional development as staff may feel it is too much additional work to aspire to the next level and the juggling of conflicting academic priorities could further exacerbate this sense of disconnect.

The picture is certainly not all bleak; there are significant opportunities to enhance professional development provision through the implementation of professional recognition schemes, to build a ‘culturally rich community of people who care about learning and learners’ (Fung, 2014, p. 10). However, the developmental potential of engaging in this largely self-reflective exercise is severely limited if motivation or engagement from critical ‘others’ are absent. Botham (2017) found that a continued engagement in reflective practice and scholarship was one of the main benefits to practice for colleagues engaging with the UKPSF. Including peer observation as part of the process (as is the case for 2 of the 3 institutions here) may also provide opportunities for dialogue and has previously been shown to enhance both the value and quality of teaching across HEIs (Cairns, Bissell, & Bovill, 2013). Similarly, a recent study by Asghar and Pilkington (2018) also illustrated the developmental potential of professional dialogue. Indeed, there have been renewed calls for career development and recognition for those who have followed a teaching-focused career within research-intensive universities in the UK (Fung & Gordon, 2016). This could potentially indicate a shift in attitudes in dialogue in a group of institutions where research activity has been the dominant measure of professional success. As Foucault suggested, acts of power do not render us merely passive and compliant. That is,



we can adhere to certain practices, thus contributing to and reinforcing their institutionalisation, or we can resist by creating or affirming our own way of being. Whilst in the current era, neoliberal discourses of accreditation appear to dominate over developmental discourses, the data illustrated that where accreditation was regarded as voluntary participants were much more likely to value the process. Creating conditions in which individuals are intrinsically motivated to participate then becomes an important organisational objective – if professional development is part of an authentic vision.

Clearly there is a need for further studies on this subject that encompass a broader range of institutions (e.g., research-intensive and alternative providers) or include international collaborations to examine how the discourse of recognition, teaching development and marketisation are exerting an impact on CPD. Rather than assuming there is a connection between professional recognition and the enhancement of quality, research that explores the impact of professional recognition schemes across multiple institutions, building on the work done by Turner et al. (2013) is needed. It appears that individual institutional cultures may impact on engagement with these schemes and this could be further investigated in a larger and broader study. Another key area for investigation is to explore the role of the student voice in this process as student evaluation, particularly through the NSS, is now determining what good teaching should look like and institutions react to this in many different ways.

Note

1. On 21 March 2018, the Higher Education Academy, merged with the Leadership Foundation and the Equality Challenge Unit to form Advance HE.

Disclosure statement

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