

Heads of Educational Development Group
Response to
UUK/ SCOP/HEFCE/HE Academy
'Towards a Framework of Professional Teaching Standards'
National Consultation

The Heads of Education Development Group (HEDG) welcomes the Consultation document and the opportunity it provides to contribute to, and inform, this important debate on the development of Professional Teaching Standards. As a member organisation, representative of heads of educational development in the majority of UK higher education institutions, HEDG embodies a wealth and breadth of experience and expertise in, and commitment to, the professional development of new and experienced staff in teaching and the support of learning. As such, HEDG would wish to affirm its positive and proactive approach towards engaging with this initiative and to offer its contribution to the development of professional standards from its stance as a key stakeholder.

The HEDG response is set in the following context:

- HEDG represents the Heads of Educational Development in UK HEIs and, as such, reflects the diversity of the sector, including the diversity of missions of HEIs
- HEDG's UK- wide membership reflects the differing UK funding regimes (HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW, DELNI)

This response reflects HEDG agreement on the philosophy and overall approach that needs to be brought to this initiative, rather than a response in detail on many of the elements implicit in the document, some of which would not find unanimity amongst us. Member institutions will respond in detail on the matters raised in the Consultation.

HEDG therefore comments, as follows, on the core concepts in the Consultation and on the approach or processes that should underpin this important initiative:

- I. HEDG would want to emphasise that the very concepts of 'Framework', 'Professional', 'Teaching' and 'Standards' contained in the title of the document are potentially problematic and contested in our field. How the notions of 'professional' and 'profession' are defined and translated into practice in the Framework would, in our view, be a crucial feature not only in terms of acceptability but also in terms of practicality and operability. The significant differences across HEIs in terms of cultures, identities and disciplines needs to be carefully considered, as does the relationship to institutional personnel policies and procedures. Research will need to be carried out into the appropriateness and potential transferability of existing professional body approaches before considering these as possible models for the HE sector.
- II. 'Teaching' and the support of learning encompass a broad range of activity, roles and responsibilities. Additionally, this range of roles and activity is often characterised by a team approach to supporting student learning. The

Framework must be inclusive of all staff that teach and support learning and we recognise the inherent challenges in incorporating this breadth of roles and activity within a single framework.

- III. 'Standards', whether 'threshold' or otherwise, also pose problems. One illustrative manifestation of this is the relationship of 'standard' to the QAA's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). The diversity referred to above is evident in the range of 'levels' of the 115 ILTHE accredited programmes and in those related, or not, to the FHEQ (ref. para. 14, p.3). A summary of the breakdown of these programmes by FHEQ Level and by those FHEQ and not FHEQ related would have proved a useful addition to the Consultation document and would have informed the consultation.
- IV. 'Threshold' standards should not just be about 'informing new staff development' (fig. 2, p. 6), but should apply to all staff.
- V. HEDG could not support a Framework based on a regulatory approach, nor could it support a competency-based framework, such as that of FENTO or the TTA. A reductionist, competency based approach would not be an appropriate model on which to base professional standards in HE, where the nature of the job is wide-ranging and complex. Important aspects in the development of professional standards, for example, would be the development of a pedagogic research culture and the integration of generic and disciplinary approaches to the pedagogy of learning and teaching in HE, for which a competency based approach would not be fitting. Our view is that a 'Framework' should be defined in broad terms as a set of principles within which institutions can develop their own approaches, whilst ensuring portability. There is clearly a balance to be struck between flexibility that recognises local contexts and a framework that ensures consistency and rigour across the sector in how standards are applied, irrespective of the nature of the institution. A further point on the question of pragmatism is that the Framework requirements should involve a minimum of bureaucracy.
- VI. A recognition of the 'distinctive' nature of the HE sector means, to us, that there are good reasons why a developmental, rather than an imposed, 'one size fits all' approach is imperative. UUK et al. will need to effectively transmit this message and ensure that all 'stakeholders' can gain much more with such an approach than with one that runs counter to existing practice as it has developed.
- VII. It is appropriate, in our view, that the HE Academy is charged with developing this initiative, given its antecedents, and we recommend that the approach adopted by the HE Academy reflects the connotations of 'Towards' in the title of the Consultation document, in emphasizing the *developmental* nature of a Framework for professional standards. To be pragmatic, as the consultation document indicates, there is now extensive practice extant in the sector (para. 14, page 3) and it is from this base that development is needed. The next phase of consultation should use current practice as represented by e.g. ILTHE and SEDA as particular starting points for further investigation and development. The HEA will, however, also need to work closely with professional bodies and associations and the range of stakeholders, including students, in reviewing

existing practice that might inform future development. Proposals arising from the next stage of development need to be research informed to maximise their credibility within the sector.

- VIII. The HEDG view on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of Experienced Staff, and its place within the Professional Standards Framework, is that CPD must focus on the personal and professional development of the individual in ways that are appropriate to their needs and working context. CPD ought not to be narrowly defined in terms of 'courses' and 'events' but should reflect a much more open understanding of ways in which staff as individuals, or in communities of practice, may seek to develop and improve their professional practice. Any framework needs to be designed to encourage, enable and support developments and, in pragmatic terms, needs to be flexible enough to articulate with institutional systems and processes for personal and professional development and the differing requirements of other professional bodies that staff might belong to. There should also be reference to CPD as a scholarly activity, as it befits and defines academic practice.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that the development of a Professional Teaching Standards Framework will be complex and potentially problematic. 'Stakeholder' involvement will be critical for the next stage of development. We conclude by re-affirming our support for this initiative and by emphasising that the HE Academy will benefit from drawing on HEDG as a key stakeholder group in this development work. HEDG members have wide-ranging practitioner expertise and experience in developing and implementing support for the professional development of HE teachers, as well as UK-wide networking and brokerage roles and links that can aid the HE Academy in taking this initiative forward.