Engaging with the HEA Professional Standards Framework.

What is the HEA PSF?

The HEA (Higher Education Academy) PSF (Professional Standards Framework) is a set of expectations related to teaching and learning and the support of these activities within the provision of Higher Education. Full details of the PSF can be found at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf

The PSF can be seen as a framework for the recognition of standards within HE practice but does not engage in a tick box or prescriptive description of competencies.

Staff can apply for professional recognition against the 4 categories (or descriptors) within the PSF which loosely describe different types of teaching and support activities within HE. This application is a reflective account based on their experience and HE practice. Details of the descriptors can be found at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition

How does Plymouth University engage with the PSF?

Plymouth University is committed to the values of the PSF and in supporting staff to meet the expectations of practice enshrined within the PSF.

The University supports its staff to engage with the PSF via accredited programmes such as the PGCAP (Post Graduate Certificate of Academic Practice) https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/qualifications-and-accreditation and the TDF (Teaching Development Framework) https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk//TDF/TDF/intranet.htm.

Both of these routes enable staff to achieve professional recognition against the PSF.

How does it affect partners of Plymouth University

Academic Partnerships asks partner institutions to engage with the PSF as it constitutes part of the national expectations for UK Higher Education. The PSF is referred to as an external reference point within the existing QAA methodology for the review of Higher Education.
In 2012/13 the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) started collecting data about the teaching qualifications of each member of staff. Partners are not subject to this data collection exercise at present but should be mindful of this possibility.

**How can partners engage with the PSF?**

Partner staff can apply to do the PGCAP programme – achievement of the full 60 credit award (offered at level 7- Masters level) confers HEA Fellowship. Full fees for this programme are £3000.

Partner staff are not eligible to apply for professional recognition via the TDF but can make direct applications to the HEA. A fuller discussion of the options open to partner institutions can be found below.

One of the ways that partners might consider of integrating the PSF into HE practice is through Peer Review or HE teaching observations. Different colleges have developed schemes which are bespoke to their HE practice.

**Routes and processes for HEA recognition within Partner Institutions**

At the moment the only options for HEA recognition for college staff lies in direct application to the HEA, or in the engagement with an accredited programme such as the PGCAP.

1. **Direct Application.** The process is based around a web form and written statement of Academic Practice. The requirements differ for the 4 levels of recognition (Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principle Fellow) in the depth and level of the statement to support the 3 PSF framework dimensions and the level of descriptor.

   Costs and requirements (applications from HEA subscribing institutions/ non HEA subscribing): Associate (PSF Descriptor 1): £100/£200, Fellow (PSF Descriptor 2): £200/400, Senior Fellow (PSF Descriptor 3): £300/£600, Principle Fellow (PSF Descriptor 4): £500/£1000. The word limit guidance for Fellows is 3000 and 5-6000 (7000 upper limit) for Senior Fellows.

   Academy guidance is available on the experience of staff in HE practice and their appropriate level of recognition. Most teaching staff with enough HE experience to meet the 3 dimensions of the framework would be advised to apply for Fellowship. Senior Fellowship would be more appropriate for staff that have written and led programmes and demonstrated some leadership roles in a cross college capacity and beyond. Applicants need to demonstrate a sustained record of effectiveness to meet the SF descriptor. Guidance from the HEA is that staff should apply at the appropriate level for their experience. However, if an application for D2 is unsuccessful but has appropriate evidence for D1, this alternative level may be offered to the applicant. In such cases the original fee paid for D2 would not be refunded.
The revised guidance now states that referees (2 per application) should include at least one existing Fellow or above, or an experienced member of staff working for a UK HE provider which does not preclude college referees. Referees need to be familiar with the PSF.  
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/hea-fellowships

2. PGCAP at Plymouth University. – this accredited programme replaced LTHE and candidates take 2x 30 credit modules. For non PU employed lecturers the costs are £1500 per module. HEA Fellowship is conferred on successful completion of the core module (Academic Practice). The demand for this programme is high as it is a requirement that new lecturers pass the programme in order to pass probation.

Other longer term options.

1. The HEA require FTE 500 as a minimum requirement for college subscription and this would be a pre-requisite for colleges applying to the HEA for accreditation of their own programme/CPD such as PGCAP or TDF at Plymouth. Although subscribers are open to making applications for accreditation there are a number of hurdles and from the experience of the Plymouth ED team this is a route that requires considerable time and investment in order to satisfy the HEA requirements. This may be an option for the long term, but in order to achieve a situation where this was feasible any college would need to take a number of steps to place it in a position to successfully achieve accreditation. This would include demonstrating that the college had embraced the PSF and was introducing any programme as a part of its institutional HE mission in supporting and developing staff. This could mean demonstrating that the PSF was part of any probation and induction programme and integration with the college PDR for teaching and supporting HE. This may include looking at the ways that staff are supported through peer reviews and may require some thought about how HE staff are supported in relation to the PSF as opposed to Ofsted criteria. The FE Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers (see below) may also factor in this work. The HEA also consider the institutional infrastructure for support of accredited programmes which touches on all of these elements of demonstrating that the institution is engaged with the PSF.

2. The university has a Teaching Development Framework (TDF) which offers a local accreditation route for Plymouth University staff. The University is running workshops for staff to guide them through the application process which has a number of elements including a peer review of educational practice (commonly teaching observation), 2 referee statements, and the statement from the applicant which must include examples demonstrating the breadth of activities plus 4 contrasting examples in more depth that relate to the descriptor level. The word limits for these examples is 500 words each, and the referees’ statements are capped at 300 words. The peer review follows a standard pre and post review format and written review following guidance headings. The applications are reviewed by panels with HEA oversight. Currently this process is only open to PU staff but may be opened to college staff teaching on PU programmes in the future.
Conclusion: In the short term it is advisable that colleges give consideration to how they can start the process of engagement with the PSF through:

- supporting direct application for experienced staff
- reviewing the mechanisms for peer reviews/observations to introduce PSF
- consider PSF in light of institutional staff development and the college HE strategy
- consider subscription to HEA whether on their own or in partnership with other colleges
- consider the costs associated with both direct application and costs of accreditation

Academic Partnerships (AP) will be working with PU Educational Development to continually review whether there is potential to develop the Plymouth TDF for partnership staff. There will be costs associated with this option and it may take a little time to achieve given the infancy of the Plymouth TDF and the high numbers of staff applying through it.

AP can provide workshops to support direct applications and can help staff to review applications. We are also able to provide some guidance in the application of the PSF within peer review processes. Some colleges nationally are actively taking the route of integration of PSF in PDR for staff supporting HE and this would seem a logical step to demonstrating engagement with the PSF.

International partners are also able to make applications to become HEA subscribers and the advice from the HEA international team is that the descriptors are written to be universally applicable for individual applications for professional recognition.

FE Sector standards

The Education and Training Foundation (the successor to the IfL published their own set of Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in May 2014:


These standards are promoted as a supportive framework which enables staff to shape their own CPD and do not include a professional recognition process. Staff working across the sectors may find it instructive to consider this framework in any proposals that they make for college support of HEA professional recognition.