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Professional Development for Teaching in Higher Education: A Brief Account of the Evolution of Accredited Programmes in the UK

Abstract

There is a long tradition of enhancing the practice of teaching in UK universities. Full programmes on the broad area of academic practice or the narrower one of learning and teaching have been a significant feature for many years. Many programmes were developed because of grass root enthusiasts and initiatives, but since 1997 UK government has sought increasingly to shape direction and policy in this area.

Since 1999 such programmes can be accredited by a national body and staff taking them obtain a readily portable certificate. In 2003, 107 universities out of a possible 116 had an accredited programme. The curricula are varied, but map onto a set of core knowledge and values specified by the accrediting body, the Higher Education Academy. One programme is described in more detail. Moves are underway toward greater commonality of standard and content, in the shape of professional standards, and a government requirement for inexperienced lecturing staff to take such programmes. Mention is made of areas of critique and concern for accredited programmes, including: evidencing their impact on student learning; catering for disciplinary differences; how they are assessed; the balance of theory and practice; the role of reflection; the impact of compulsion; and whether teaching activity is sufficiently recognised.

Keywords

Evolution of accredited programmes, the Higher Education Academy, accreditation, accredited programmes, curricula of professional development programmes, commonality of standard, commonality of content, learning and teaching in higher education in the UK, professional standards

Professionalisierung akademischer Lehrtätigkeit: Ein kurzer Bericht zur Entstehung der akkreditierten Programme in Großbritannien

Zusammenfassung

Die Steigerung der Qualität der Lehre hat in den Universitäten Großbritanniens eine lange Tradition. Umfassende Programme auf dem weiten Feld akademischer Praxis oder dem enger gefassten von Lehren und Lernen sind schon seit vielen Jahren charakteristisch und weisen auf deren Bedeutung hin. Viele Programme wurden von Betroffenen selbst und von Initiativen entwickelt, aber seit 1997 hat

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sich die Regierung Großbritanniens verstärkt darum bemüht, die Richtung und die Vorgehensweise entscheidend zu beeinflussen.

Seit 1999 können solche Programme von einem nationalen Gremium akkreditiert werden. Den Lehrenden wird die Teilnahme mit einem Zertifikat bestätigt. In 2003 hatten 107 von 116 möglichen Universitäten solch ein akkreditiertes Programm. Die Lehrpläne variieren, legen aber ein Bündel von zentralen Kenntnissen und Prinzipien zugrunde, wie sie die akkreditierende Stelle, the Higher Education Academy, vorgibt.

Dieser Beitrag beschreibt ein Programm detailliert. Es gibt Bestrebungen, die auf eine größere Gemeinsamkeit von Standard und Inhalt in Bezug auf professionelle Standards zielen. Und es gibt die Forderung von Regierungsseite, dass unerfahrene Lehrende an solchen Programmen teilnehmen sollten. Der Beitrag thematisiert auch die Bereiche der akkreditierten Programme, die als kritisch und problematisch angesehen werden: Erforschung der Wirksamkeit studentischen Lernens, Abstimmung auf die Bedürfnisse der verschiedenen Disziplinen, Balance von Theorie und Praxis, Rollenreflexion, die Auswirkung von Zwang, und ob die Lehrtätigkeit genügend beachtet wird.

Schlüsselwörter

Entwicklung akkreditierter hochschuldidaktischer Programme in Großbritannien, Higher Education Academy, Akkreditierung, akkreditierte Programme, Lehrpläne hochschuldidaktischer Programme, Entwicklung professioneller Standards

Introduction

This brief overview of the evolution of accredited programmes in learning and teaching in higher education in the UK summarises a number of areas that have contributed to the current picture, which is also outlined. The overview provides the prelude to mention of a number of developmental and research preoccupations, after which some points about recognition and the profile of teaching are made.

Background

There is long tradition of enhancing teaching in UK universities. Historically this activity was perhaps regarded as mainly the preserve of the individual, who would strive to do a professional job that met student needs and academic standards. Departments might offer, or insist on, support for new staff, by means of a mentor or academic adviser, through peer observation and perhaps recommending one or two short courses in teaching. Such courses were varied in scope and focus. For example from dealing with only first cycle education to those that addressed third cycle supervision. Duration was also variable, from half days to much longer. The nature of such courses was also diverse, along a continuum from practical tips to underlying concepts and theory. Opportunities for considering discipline specific issues or institutional context also varied, often according to who the 'provider' was.

Over the last 30 years this traditional picture has evolved towards the position today, where, in most universities, a teaching and learning programme is compulsory for those with little prior teaching experience or training.

A number of factors have influenced the current position. Notable among these are the efforts of a few individuals in institutions who started certificate and diploma programmes in the nineteen seventies and earlier, similar efforts in more recent years, and the championship of such programmes by influential figures in the university administration. These efforts often resulted in the formation of small groups and units with a remit that included creation of professional development opportunities about learning and teaching, such that by the mid-1990s most higher education institutions had a central unit that focused on learning and teaching, either as part of a bigger staff development unit, or a separate group. Whether these learning and teaching units started out primarily to run a programme in learning and teaching, as a provider of a series of one off workshops, or as bodies with much wider functions, most are now involved in a wide range of innovation activities, including supporting small internal grant schemes and one-to-one work with academics and course teams. GOSLING (1996; 2002) has documented this evolution.

Individual and institutional efforts and a rising national profile for learning and teaching were reflected in the formation of regional and national organisations in this area. Actions at a national level both reflected and fuelled local developments. The Staff and Educational Development Association was created from previous bodies in 1993 and started to give external recognition to programmes meeting set criteria. It greatly helped to raise the profile of university teaching (SEDA, 2006). In 1989 the UK university vice-chancellors created what in later years became the Higher Education Staff Development Agency with a wider remit than teaching[2]. SMITH (2005) and LAND (2004) both provide interesting accounts of institutional and UK-wide developments in support of teaching enhancement.

More Recent Developments

National Policy at the turn of the Century

Rising student numbers in UK universities and increased pressure on resources were two factors that pushed government towards taking a greater interest in teaching quality in the last decade of the 20th century. One manifestation of this was the emergence of a national quality assurance regime, which differed slightly in the four countries that comprise the United Kingdom. By the mid 1990s in England institutions as a whole, and teaching in disciplinary areas, were subject to audit and review by bodies that became the national Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 1997 (MIDDLEHURST, 1999), with subject review including observation of teaching and the final outcome scores being used to create league tables. This assessment and assurance regime has become 'lighter touch' as the twenty first century has progressed.

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[2] Personal Communication February 2006 from Professor Gus PENNINGTON, last Chief Executive of HESDA

In 1997 the influential National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing report – NCIHE, 1997) called for a professional institute to be set up to accredit programmes 'of training for higher education teachers; to commission research and development in learning and teaching practices; and to stimulate innovation' (page 371). It also called on institutions 'to develop or seek access to programmes of teacher training' for their staff, if they do not have them and suggested that institutions seek national accreditation of such programmes from the Institute (page 371). As a result the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) came into being in 1999 and started to accredit existing and new programmes in learning and teaching for university staff.

Government asked institutions to publish Learning and Teaching Strategies in 1999, and provided funds in support of these (HEFCE, 1999). Most institutions used some of the funds to support their units and programmes in university learning and teaching. Similar funds and strategies continue, and still provide valuable resource; however, 'national' funding has not been uniform throughout all four parts of the United Kingdom.

Accredited Programmes in the UK

The research intensive universities have generally been the slowest to set up programmes in learning and teaching. In 2002 an association of UK research intensive universities (the Standing Conference on Academic Practice) reported that 14 of the 27 institutions it surveyed had a compulsory programme for probationary academic staff (these are typically lecturers who undergo a probationary period of between 1-5 years after which they have an 'open term' academic appointment; FRASER, 2005). In 2003 there were 133 ILTHE accredited programmes at 107 out of a possible 116 universities (RYAN, FRASER & DEARN, 2005). By 2006 this figure had gone up to 140 (Higher Education Academy, 2006). Accreditation involved demonstrating that programmes met a number of areas of core knowledge and values. 'Verification' was achieved through programme documentation and a self evaluation report being analysed by a panel who then visited the institution and interviewed staff, programmes participants and university leaders, and subsequently produced a report indicating if accreditation had been granted and for what time period.

For completeness it is worth noting that university staff could become members of the ILTHE by taking an accredited programme, or by demonstrating their experience through an individual application that required a written commentary about teaching and supporting student learning in a number of specified areas, as well as supporting statements from two referees. An associate member level was also created that could be obtained through an individual application or by taking a programme. Precise data is hard to obtain but it is generally taken that by 2003/4 the ILTHE had about 16,000 members and associate members.

The UK has not been alone in such developments. FRASER (2005) indicates that from 1995 onwards in the Netherlands a three year, funded initiative to improve university teaching was launched, with one of the most popular measures being the development of teacher training programmes, that in South Africa a postgraduate

certificate in higher education has been created as a form of training for teaching, and that in 2002, 21 of the 38 Australian universities provided award bearing programmes. Sweden like the UK is considered to be 'on the route' to a compulsory system (TROWLER & BAMBER, 2005).

National Policy in the Twenty First Century

In 2003 the UK government published a higher education white paper (a white paper sets out future policy; see: Department for Education and Skills, 2003). It indicated that a successor body to the ILTHE would be created, that new national professional standards for teaching programmes in higher education would be drawn up and that all new teaching staff would receive accredited training by 2006 (page 46). As a result, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) came into existence in April 2004 (HEA, 2006), took over the accrediting function of the ILTHE and replaced the idea of membership with that of being a registered practitioner or associate registered practitioner. (It also took on a broader research and development role than the ILTHE, focussed on the student experience, and took charge of other national teaching initiatives, including the subject centres.) The professional standards were published in February 2006. In parallel to the Learning and Teaching Strategy funds (and others put into learning and teaching), funds to support English institutions in implementing professional standards were made available (HEFCE, 2004).

The Shape of Accredited Programmes

Overview

Accredited programmes have various titles, often using the term 'academic practice'. The programmes vary in duration, nature, assessment and time allowable for completion. They usually include practical ideas about a range of teaching methods, assessment, supervision and personal tutoring; a critical introduction to key educational concepts and theories widely used in higher education, such as approaches to learning and outcomes based approaches to curriculum design; an introduction to key literature and research; briefing about 'institutional ways of doing things'; feedback on observations of teaching or micro teaching; the encouragement of participants to learn from experience and from each other; and some form of assessed work that may include observations of teaching, a portfolio, research projects in teaching, or essays. Programmes accredited at full membership level are usually pitched at Master's level and most are of a 'duration/amount' equivalent to about 30 ECTS. Additionally, as mentioned above, programmes map onto the set core knowledge and values.

A Specific Example

The author's own institution runs two programmes in learning and teaching, the one described here commenced in 2001, is accredited for full recognised practitioner status and is aimed primarily at staff who play a full role in a range of types

and levels of teaching and assessment and who may be personal tutors and also supervise postgraduate students. It can be, and is, taken by staff with considerable experience as well as those who have less experience, the majority of whom are 'probationary lecturers'. The programme is directed and taught by academic staff who work in a central academic support unit, the Centre for Educational Development that was founded in 2000. The programme is based around a suite of workshops that have been compulsory for academic staff for over 20 years. It is an ILTHE / HEA accredited programme taught at master's level, worth 30 ECTS, and resulting in the award of a postgraduate Certificate of Advanced Study in Learning and Teaching (CASLAT; see: CED, 2006).

Components of CASLAT can be built up gradually over a period of time, culminating in a year during which the final module and the summative assessment is taken (see Figure 1). Accreditation of prior experience and course attendance is also possible. There are opportunities to attend workshops that focus on particular types of teaching associated with some disciplines, or on specific topics or approaches, including e-learning. The aim is that workshop and literature based learning should be critically reviewed, absorbed into practice where appropriate, and that teaching practice should be examined and enhanced. The assessment includes observation of teaching and production of a portfolio that includes a summary of experience, a written reflective commentary on practice (with reference to relevant literature), linked to examples of teaching materials, and finally a map to show how the material included demonstrates achievement of the programme outcomes. CASLAT assessment judgements involve staff from the Centre and also senior academics in the 'home' discipline of participants.

Module 1: 'Core workshops'
- Key areas of practice and theory
- Taken over short or longer period

Module 2: 'Options'
- Chosen individually to reflect:
  - Discipline
  - Teaching contexts
- Taken over short or longer period

Module 3
CASLAT Specific
- 6 x3 hour sessions
- Taken over 10 months

Module 4
Assessment
- Observation
- Portfolio

Work-based Learning: Practice of Teaching and Supervision

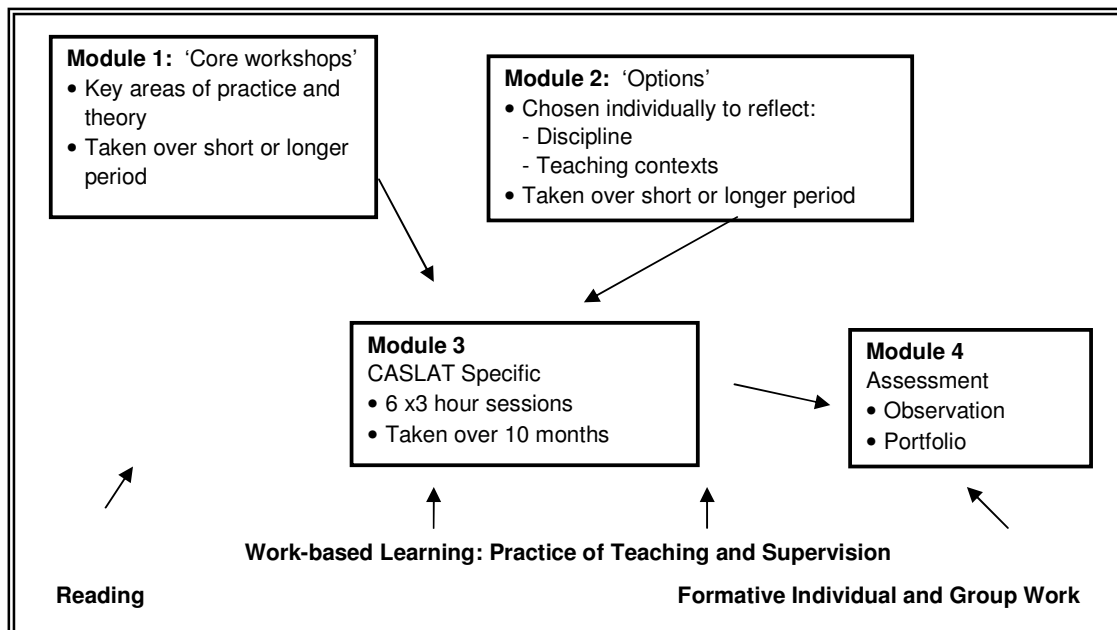**Reading**   **Formative Individual and Group Work**

Figure 1: The Structure of CASLAT

By the time they complete the programme CASLAT participants should be able to:

1. Demonstrate their understanding of the scholarship of how students learn through its impact on the teaching, assessment and course design modes that they employ.

2. Design a course in their discipline and implement a range of teaching methods.

3. Examine critically the likely advantages and disadvantages of the approaches to teaching employed.

4. Employ good practice in respect of student support, feedback and assessment, showing due respect for individual learners and their development.

5. Use and analyse critically the strengths and weaknesses of a range of methods for evaluating teaching.

6. Be aware of potential uses and the implications of communications and information technology for changing pedagogic practice.

7. Be constructively critical and reflective about their own pedagogic practice.

8. Have a working knowledge of the procedures, codes and norms pertaining to educational processes in their department/division, the College and, as appropriate – more widely – in England.

A wide variety of methods, approaches and perspectives are drawn on to seek to 'engage' participants and be useful, thought provoking and interesting to as wide a range of staff participants as possible (FRY et al., 2004). CASLAT has recently become compulsory for probationary academic staff who are inexperienced in teaching and/or do not already hold such a qualification. In the voluntary period registrations rose from 10 to 28 staff per annum. We anticipate that average annual enrolment in a few years will exceed 40 per annum.

Figure 2: Two CASLAT sessions

Feedback from staff taking CASLAT has been generally positive. The following quotes about the impact of the programme are by no means unusual:

- 'I now have a much more structured approach to teaching'

- 'Had a profound impact on my outlook on learning and teaching'

- 'Enormous impact on practice - I've been 'emancipated' by the experience – all the problems and frustrations I had with my teaching have been solved or are being solved'.

- `I thought the group discussions were always very enjoyable and it was a good chance to hear how other parts of College work'.

- `Production of a portfolio ……. has been very valuable'.

- `I have implemented many changes to my own teaching and now have at least some knowledge of the theory and literature behind the practice'.

The 2006 Professional Standards

The National Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education were published in February 2006 (HEA, 2006). The Framework states that it acknowledges the 'distinctive nature of teaching in higher education' and has' respect for autonomy of higher education institutions'. To gain accreditation, programmes will need to show how they apply the Framework to

their learning outcomes and assessment activities. It is understood that for the level equivalent to the current registered practitioner status, programmes will need to demonstrate application/use of the following:

Areas of Activity

1. Design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study

2. Teaching and/or supporting student learning

3. Assessment and giving feedback to learners

4. Developing effective environments and student support and guidance

5. Integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning

6. Evaluation of practice and continuing professional development

Core Knowledge

Knowledge and understanding of:

1. The subject material

2. Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme

3. How students learn, both generally and in the subject

4. The use of appropriate learning technologies

5. Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching

6. The implications of quality assurance and enhancement for professional practice

Professional values

1. Respect for individual learners

2. Commitment to incorporating the process and outcomes of relevant research, scholarship and/or professional practice

3. Commitment to developing learning communities

4. Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

5. Commitment to continuing professional development and evaluation of practice

The areas of activity are very similar to the headings under which experienced teachers applying for individual entry had to write about their teaching practice, and the core knowledge and values are very close to the ILTHE's original accreditation criteria. For most programmes it will be a case of 'tweaking' to use the Framework, rather than major change.

There are three levels of descriptor within the standards; none has yet been named. The first level appears to equate with the former associate status and the second with the full registered status, while the third introduces a higher level. Regional seminars run by the HEA have indicated that an individual entry route for experienced staff will continue to exist. By September 2006 new programmes and those needing re-accreditation will have to demonstrate how they are using the Framework.

Development and Research

The 'accredited programmes' world in the UK is very dynamic. By this I mean the national policy situation, the nature of higher education across the sector, and institutions themselves are undergoing many changes that impact on accredited programmes. Moreover, programmes have generally been rigorously evaluated by participants, by accreditors and by the usual university quality assurance processes and have therefore made continuous minor adjustments and periodically make more major changes. Programme 'providers' and others are conscious of a number of areas warranting further consideration and development.

A significant area that is being considered is the new professional standards framework itself. What changes, if any, do existing programmes need to make to be able to fit into the framework, and what compromises or re-examination might these involve? A further area of work is supporting, taking a critical stance to, and shaping programmes to cater for disciplinary differences, for example between teaching economics or chemistry or medicine (ALLAN, BLACKWELL & GIBBS, 2003). A few programmes exist that are specific to a discipline, e.g. medicine, but most cater for disciplinary difference within a single programme by having flexibility and choice within the programme (as does CASLAT), while also seeking to exploit the advantages of sharing and contrasting across disciplines. Another area to which considerable thought is being given is the format of assessment. What is appropriate and what best enables the core areas, knowledge and values to be met (FRY & HARRISON, 2005)?

A further topic of debate is how far/whether programmes might broaden their base and incorporate other areas of academic work (the thinking behind the term 'academic practice')? Another major focus of interest is what happens after academics have taken a programme? Generally, practice will develop and change and be enhanced. But from a regulatory or any other perspective, does this need to be demonstrated? The ILTHE and the HEA have undertaken a number of continuing professional development pilots and indicated various initiatives and possible requirements. But no firm policy decision has been taken. Many academic developers, including the author, consider the most important aspect to be that professional development *is* ongoing and that pedagogic practice and knowledge remains relevant and up to date – rather than having too much emphasis placed on a regulatory requirement. Most educational development units are finding acceptable and innovative ways of supporting and enhancing continuing professional development, often by creating and supporting a number of communities of practice.

Research into professional development in relation to accredited programmes (as distinct from research into university learning and teaching) is growing. A large area in which there is a call for much better data is that of the impact of registered status on student outcomes and whether there is any relationship between changing conceptions held by university teachers of teaching and taking a sustained programme of professional development. Gibbs and Coffey are among the few so far to have produced hard data about the relationship between these areas (GIBBS & COFFEY, 2004). There is considerable ongoing work about conceptions of teaching and their relationship to professional development programmes (LIGHT, 2003). This is one area where the voice of participants is heard. TROWLER & BAMBER (2005) have considered the impact compulsion has on this picture. With the changing situation in the UK there is still scope for further work.

Further areas that have been considered and critiqued are the mix between 'practice and theory' (ROWLAND, 2003), research informed teaching and evidence based practice (MANN, 2003). The underpinning philosophies behind the curricula and design of accredited programmes have also been considered (PILL, 2005), including from the perspective of the balance between the espoused theories and theories in use (ARGYRIS & SCHÖN, 1974). PILL (2005), SHARPE (2004) and KREBER et al. (2005) have all considered the concept of 'reflective practice' and the role and validity it has in developing professional practice; the assumptions participants bring to such programmes has been another area of inquiry (TROWLER & COOPER, 2002). A further important theme has been the role of scholarship; this area stems from BOYER's original work (1990). Also of enduring interest is concern over where such programmes are located, particularly the implications and impact of this, for example whether in a long standing or newly created academic department focused on education, in an academic service department, or in the central administration, such as Human Resources or Registry. The underlying point is not the location *per se*, but the way in which an institution regards and values academic development activity, the discourse around this and who is involved in it (ROWLAND, 2003).

Two issues of increasing concern to all involved in accredited programmes, whether as participants, tutors, leaders or assessors, is, firstly, awareness of the multiple pressures, stressors and time shortage faced by new academics building their career, into which they now have to fit another qualification. The qualification may help participants to use time more efficiently in the short to medium term, to be more effective, and get more out of teaching, but meanwhile young academics have new teaching to prepare and research programmes to build up. This is not an argument against programmes in professional development. It is no longer acceptable to regard teaching as an activity for which no training is needed, and as larger teaching loads may be assumed more rapidly in a career – without a lengthy period of 'apprenticeship' – the existence of professional development to help with the role is all the more necessary. The timing of when a programme is taken and the length of time for which registration on a programme can be maintained may require further consideration.

Secondly, teaching still generally has a lower perceived status and prestige than research, a point that has been made for many years (ELTON & PARTINGTON,

1993). Few institutions or departments make a time allowance for academics to take the programmes and few recognise possession of a certificate with anything other than passing out of probation – a decision in which progress with research will often play a dominant role. A high standard of teaching is increasingly a necessary prerequisite for promotion, even in research intensive institutions, but research, especially in the research intensive institutions, usually outweighs other factors in the promotion decision. Young aspiring academics now often take teaching development programmes while holding post doctoral positions, often seeing this as an aid to securing their first lectureship. This is not free from stress, and because 'post docs' generally have limited teaching experience and opportunity, the efficacy and scope of such professional development may be limited and participants have less opportunity to juxtapose and examine theory and practice against each other. It is important that practice is an integral part of programmes. Further examination of the timing of and recognition for undertaking a professional qualification in university teaching is overdue.

Conclusion

This paper summarises the development of accredited programmes and the professional standards framework in the UK. It illustrates this with reference to one particular programme and indicates some critical issues around such programmes. Generally, the area of professional development for teaching remains ripe for further research and theorisation. The UK has seen many initiatives and developments concerning professional development for teaching and efforts to raise its profile; teaching remains generally of lower status than research.

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