



Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy

Additional Guidance notes

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1. Who is the Principal Fellowship for?

A Higher Education Academy Principal Fellowship provides recognition of an individual's distinguishable contribution and achievement of significant influence and enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education through the promotion of professional standards. Your title and role and the context of your work is relevant only in regard to the opportunities it might provide and the degree to which it reflects your capability. Typically a Principal Fellow would be highly experienced with wide ranging strategic leadership responsibilities, in connection with key aspects of teaching and supporting learning. This might be institutional strategic leadership or within a discipline-based organisation, or a combination of both. The Principal Fellow descriptor – Descriptor 4 (D4) of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) - recognises the wide range of contexts in which teaching and supporting learning activities occur and, as a consequence, the nature of evidence acceptable against the descriptor will vary in response to those contexts.

A noticeable feature of the descriptor is the indirect relation to teaching ('in connection with key aspects....'; 'in the area of'; 'in relation to...') which reflects that strategic leaders, not infrequently, may not be teachers or learner facilitators themselves, and although they may have held such roles in the past, this is not essential. The descriptor therefore recognises that strategic leadership has to be upheld by a wide body of knowledge and expertise that may be brought to bear on the strategic development of learning and teaching in the broadest sense.

This does mean that Principal Fellowship can therefore be appropriate for individuals who do not see themselves as directly influencing the quality of teaching through a teaching-related role. For example those with a significant research role/responsibility can apply as long as they are able to evidence the descriptor through practices that have enhanced the quality of teaching and learning. The key consideration is the evidence that you have made a strategic level contribution to high quality student learning within the context in which you work.

The application requires a 'sustained and effective record of impact at a strategic level in relation to teaching and learning' to be evidenced throughout. This means that you need to be able to draw on a range of activities that illustrate **scale** (the extent and longevity), **scope** (breadth and coverage) and **success** (positive nature of the result) for each of the descriptor elements. The expectation is that a Principal Fellow is able to evidence enhancement of teaching and impact at the level of the home institution/organisation and beyond. It is accepted that this is not always possible within very large institutions where autonomous faculties equate to the size of smaller HEIs, or where the work of an individual spans a range of institutions and/or organisations nationally and internationally, for example: discipline-based developments. It is, therefore, important that you clearly explain the context, scale and scope of your work.

Whilst an applicant seeking Senior Fellowship (UKPSF Descriptor 3) might feel they are able to demonstrate enhancement that is sustainable and effective, a Principal Fellow must be able to demonstrate a broader sphere of impact at a **strategic level** within an **institution, organisation, nation or global context**. The Principal Fellowship is therefore not appropriate for many individuals and it is worth noting that progression from Senior Fellow is not a coherent 'rite of passage'. This reflects the different portfolio of activities and strategic influence within an institution or organisation that a Principal Fellow would typically have.

2. The Principal Fellowship application

Making an application requires you to reflect deeply on what you have done, why you have done it, how you did it and evidence of the impact achieved. This requires time and it is useful if you have the support of colleagues or people who are experienced in the process of working with UKPSF. If you do not have access to local support you can attend recognition events offered by the HEA, details of which can be found on the HEA website under the [Events](#) heading.

There are two main elements to your application: the Account of Professional Practice (APP) and the Advocate Statements to validate your application. Three advocate statements are required and information about these can be found in the [Recognition-Principal Fellowship](#) section of the HEA website.

The APP comprises two sections: The REI and a Reflective Account of Practice.

3. The REI

The REI is a summary of the key areas of influence you have had in relation to high quality student learning within the organisation and beyond, that are relevant to your application for Principal Fellowship and which you might expand upon in the reflective account. For each activity you must indicate the alignment to each element of the descriptor in the right hand side of the table. Focus on the last five years, although earlier activities that continue to have an impact may be included. When viewed holistically the REI should provide an overview of the breadth of the activities you have engaged in and how these relate to the elements of Descriptor 4.

The Principal Fellowship is recognising your contribution and impact on high quality teaching and learning so only include your subject research where it has impacted on the pedagogy of your subject and the student learning experience. Similarly, general managerial roles will be relevant only where they are related strategically to the enhancement of teaching and supporting learning.

It is advisable to provide a very short annotation against each entry in the REI to indicate what you 'have done' rather than the title of the role you have undertaken. This provides information about what you actually do and therefore the link to the elements of the descriptor (4.I, 4.II etc.) is clear.

No	Title (or description of engagement)	Period		Used as evidence for descriptor				
		From	To	4.I	4.II	4.III	4.IV	4.V
1	Royal College committee member <i>leading the development of curricula for new degree programme based on revised....</i>	2013	Present	✓		✓	✓	

Example: the annotation provides a clearer link to the descriptor.

4. The Reflective Account of Practice

The Reflective Account is divided into four sections based on elements D4.II – D4.V of the Principal Fellow Descriptor and provides the means for you to evidence it. You are making a personal claim so the account should be written in the first person and should include the entries from your REI that are the most relevant for each section.

Critical to your claim for Principal Fellowship is the demonstration of *a sustained record of effective strategic leadership* and *a sustained and effective record of impact at a strategic level in relation to teaching and learning*. In order to evidence the 'sustained' and 'effective' nature of your work you are encouraged to provide a reflective narrative rather than a descriptive account in your application. This requires you to ask yourself a series of questions about your experience of the activities, in order to provide a critical perspective.

Prompts to support a reflective approach might include simple questions such as:

What did I do and why did I choose to do it that way?

What was my understanding and rationale for this approach? (Think about process and outcome.)

What has happened as a result? Has it achieved the desired outcome? (This may be on a number of different levels – self, others and organisation)

What has been the impact of this? What evidence is there of this impact?

What happens now?

What have I learned from this experience and how has this impacted on my own approach/practice/understanding?

For each element of the Descriptor you should draw on a range of activities to illustrate the depth and breadth of your activity in this area. This is where your REI entries can help you to identify the strongest examples to use in each section. Try to provide examples that complement each other by focusing on different aspects of your work and different examples of your leadership. It is also important to make a direct link to the UKPSF and the Dimensions of the Framework throughout your application.

5. The Descriptor elements

4.I. Active commitment to and championing of all Dimensions of the Framework, through work with students and staff, and in institutional developments

This first element of Descriptor 4 functions as an overarching descriptor which should be demonstrated through the examples and reflections incorporated into the other four sections of your application (4.II to 4.V). You therefore need to think about how you have championed the UKPSF in responding to each of elements of the descriptor in your application. In the context of the descriptor '*championing*' is concerned with how you have supported, advocated and promoted the UKPSF in teaching and learning support activities at a strategic level and through other work and opportunities that arise. You can think about this in two ways:

1. The ways in which you have demonstrated an *active commitment to and championing* of the UKPSF as a framework: Championing the Framework includes being a role model and setting up conditions in which staff and students can engage with learning, promoting a holistic view of learning, teaching and assessment which is underpinned by the UKPSF within the organisation. This might be where you have promoted the incorporation of the UKPSF in, for example, a promotions or recognition strategy.
2. The ways in which you have demonstrated an *active commitment to and championing* of the specific Dimensions which make up the Framework: This is how you model the dimensions through your behaviours and approaches and may, for example, be where you have led a specific initiative in developing an assessment or learning support strategy which has drawn specifically upon your skills and understanding of the Areas of Activity to inform the activity. It may be where you have adopted an approach to implementing a diversity initiative that has been based on professional values which align to the UKPSF professional values. This does not require you to deconstruct the Dimensions into the detail of evidencing each Activity, Value or Core Knowledge as this is not

appropriate in the context of the strategic level activities used in your application. However, you do need to demonstrate the Dimensions both in the **ways** that you work and in the **content** of your work through the demonstration of professionalism as evidenced in your practice and approach rather than merely the language of UKPSF.

Many areas of the UKPSF and the Dimensions are implicit in your practice. You therefore need to ensure that your narrative contains a clear articulation of your work, the organisational context and where 4.I is being evidenced. Evidence can be drawn from the impact you have had in institutional/organisational, national and international environments but it must be authentic in nature rather than articulating abstract concepts. The Accreditors will expect to see this evidence endorsed by your advocates in their statements.

4.II. Successful, strategic leadership to enhance student learning, with a particular, but not necessarily exclusive, focus on enhancing teaching quality in institutional, and/or (inter)national settings

This section requires you to evidence how you have provided successful leadership of initiatives that have enhanced teaching quality at a strategic level within the institution/organisation and/or in (inter)national settings.

At the highest level, institutional strategy is associated with the Executive Board, Governors or Council (or equivalent) - the Executive being responsible for making strategy and gaining that approval. However, this does not mean that as a strategic leader you are automatically a member of the Executive or a very senior manager. Strategy may also be constituted by influential colleagues with expertise, influence and understanding who may be operating formally at another level (for example, those working in IT, TEL, EO, CPD, LTA, etc.). 'Strategic leadership' is therefore not aligned to the level of appointment or grade. In the context of Descriptor 4, strategic leadership is related to how you work effectively at a level where there is evidence of volume, longevity, impact and scope. Given the way that HE is structured strategically you will typically be working on projects or activities endorsed, supported or sustained by Executive bodies.

At its best, your work as a strategic leader will involve consultation, discussion, moderation of proposals, and delegation of responsibility. These processes, along with the detail of procedure (working groups, committees, project management, line management), will most commonly place you at a number of stages removed from the point of delivery. This mediation, and its management, is an essential part of strategic leadership.

As a leader, you will undertake a lot of your work with teams and may find it problematic to claim direct responsibility for actions and consequences. Similarly, it may be unlikely that you can make an

exclusive and sole claim to the originating ideas in a strategy. It is therefore appropriate to highlight how you have (for example) championed the ideas of others, resolved conflicts in strategy, sought extensive advice from elsewhere in the sector, and followed examples of good practice in identifying your personal contribution to strategic leadership.

In your narrative for this section it is important that you make a link between knowing **how** to operate and knowing **what** to operate by reflecting on your strengths, successes, and any possible shortcomings in understanding, developing and delivering strategy. Such reflection may necessarily include operational matters and details, but should also link coherently with the evidence of your continuing professional development (Section 4.V). Updating your professional expertise at this level is not just about personal skills and abilities, but should essentially be concerned with the contexts of policy, institutional developments and priorities, international developments in learning and teaching and the pursuit of new knowledge.

Relevant activities might include the development of aspects of learning, teaching and assessment, helping to meet the institutional objectives and mission statements which impact on student learning and the quality of teaching. If you are not based in an institution this might be how you have led projects and initiatives that have enhanced HE teaching and learning across an organisation, a group of institutions/organisations or within a professional body or discipline association. In all cases the activity must have resulted in a sustained change at a strategic level, the positive impact of which you are able to evidence.

4.III. Establishing effective organisational policies and/or strategies for supporting and promoting others (e.g. through mentoring, coaching) in delivering high quality teaching and support for learning

The key to this section is evidencing how you have **established** effective organisational policies and/or strategies for supporting and promoting others in delivering high quality teaching and support for learning. In the context of the descriptor 'establishing' means more than just implementing a policy but extends to how you have influenced the quality of teaching and support for learning through the development and implementation of organisational level policies and/or strategies.

The context in which you work will determine how you are able to evidence this. The diagram below illustrates the potential source of policy and/or strategy. One or more of these might be relevant to you. It is important to think about what happens in the space between the circles. For example you may be responsible for the implementation of external/national policy into the institution (or organisation) where you may not have had any involvement in developing the actual policy. In your narrative you should identify how you have worked to develop the policy for the new context and how

you then implemented this i.e. how you have provided a framework internally that is the best fit for your organisation/institution.

Alternatively you may have worked with an established institutional policy and implemented it at a local level of Faculty or College and once again you must show how you have successfully achieved this by contextualising the policy and then engaging the people/community with the process of embedding it.



The interlocking areas are where the activities of creating, developing and implementing policy happen – they will vary in nature and impact

A different scenario might be where you have created a policy which you have then had to launch. This might be in any of the contexts indicated in the diagram. If this is at a local level then you also need to evidence an impact at a strategic institutional/organisational level i.e. a local policy that has been adopted and is having a positive sustained impact at an institutional level.

The policy must be related specifically to *supporting and promoting others* which might, for example, include activities to instigate policies on staff performance (performance review, reward and recognition) or policies that provide development and support specifically related to enhancing teaching and learning i.e. institution-wide CPD programmes, observation of teaching or peer review of practice, induction of staff, mentoring and coaching schemes, development of staff in partnership organisations etc. As such your impact on learning, teaching and the student experience may be indirect, although evidence of impact is still required.

Evidencing sustained impact might include examples of how the implementation of policies has resulted in positive changes in staff in relation to the quality of teaching, student learning and student support. The impact may be measured by success rates or by qualitative evaluation and should provide evidence that a real difference has been made in a particular context.

Draw on the most relevant examples from your REI to explain and reflect upon how you have contributed strategically to establishing the policies and strategies. Ensure that where you were working with others you make clear what your specific role was in that context. Your advocate statements should support your evidence of impact.

4.IV. Championing, within institutional and/or wider settings, an integrated approach to academic practice (incorporating, for example, teaching, learning, research, scholarship, administration etc.)

Teaching or supporting learning in higher education takes place in a complex environment, where you may have a multiplicity of activities and roles in which you need to integrate teaching and/or supporting learning, management, leadership, research, scholarship, professional practice, administration and various forms of service to the HE community. The key to this section is recognising the synergy gained from these activities. An *integrated approach to academic practice* may be within institutional or wider settings, which can be helped by thinking about your work from the three different perspectives:

Your situation: How your 'location' within your organisation and the role/s you have, determine the nature of the relationships between different environmental elements (such as those mentioned above).

Your personal involvement in developing different HE practices and leading the integration of these across the institution and beyond: This is about how you actively forge and promote links between the elements to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. This might be through activities such as: actively disseminating the interdependencies across teaching and learning, scholarship and research; leading cross-institutional/discipline funded projects; activities with professional bodies, which then influence practice within your organisation; editing journals relating to academic practice; conducting pedagogic research which impacts on policy and practice.

Your active engagement in leading change initiatives in student learning: How you have drawn on different aspects of practice and brought them together or moved practice to a new context. For example: the use of research in teaching (in internal policy development); a workload management system that recognises different practices and seeks to support and enhance learning experiences by utilising them effectively; development of professional practice across the curricula; encouraging dual professionalism within institutional promotions procedures in research intensive institutions.

In this section you should show and reflect upon how you have *championed* (see section 4.I for definition) such an integrated approach to academic practice and how this has been sustained over a period of time. It may be the case that over time your integrated approach has experienced a number of iterations. In this case it is valuable to show how this is continually contributing to the enhancement of the quality of student learning. Examples can be drawn from within your own institutional/organisation or from wider HE settings (across discipline communities, regional or mission groups of institutions, nationally or internationally).

4.V. A sustained and successful commitment to, and engagement in, continuing professional development related to academic, institutional and/or other professional practices

In the context of this descriptor statement *Continuing Professional Development* (CPD) recognises that you are still learning, irrespective of role, and this happens through a range of activities that you engage in that result in improvements to your practice. These activities typically develop your practice relating to the UKPSF Dimensions and the ways that knowledge and understanding (through research and scholarship) contribute to this. As a Principal Fellow this should also include activities that enhance your understanding and effectiveness as a strategic leader.

CPD activities can be specifically related to your role, as many of the activities you naturally engage in as part of your work will influence your professional development and your conceptual understanding. Activities might include: involvement in 'think tanks', symposia, research groups, chairing committees or working groups, advisory work, leading large initiatives, project management, consultancy, editorial work or writing, examining etc. It is also valuable to draw from activities that inform your practice, but which are not central to, or part of your role. This could include involvement in other organisations or institutions (external to a home institution/organisation), such as partner institutions, professional associations and discipline communities. Activities could consist of work as a consultant or advisor, assessing professional standards or regulatory frameworks, refereeing, developing a national curriculum or professional standards framework, evaluation and commissioned review.

The range of activities you draw from should ideally refer to both formal (structured) activities and informal (casual, ad hoc) activities and you should evidence how each makes a valuable contribution to developing your practice. The 'informal' activities would be those activities that challenge and question your thinking about the effectiveness of what you do. Examples might include: learning about something new or updating your knowledge/expertise from a discussion with an expert, colleague or visitors in a meeting, reading a specific book or journal article, in your external examining or at a visit to another organisation etc.

Reflecting on your engagement in continuing professional development will enable you to demonstrate the impact on your own practice and that of others. The examples of CPD that you use from your REI should demonstrate the breadth of your engagement (within your discipline, your role/s etc.) and be specifically related to learning and teaching as relevant and appropriate to your context. The emphasis on '*a sustained and effective record of impact*' means that it will not be acceptable for Principal Fellowship to be evidenced solely on the basis of completing a programme or course. However, completion of a relevant programme or course (in leadership for example) can constitute part of your evidence.

It is important to recognise how your personal CPD or professional 'growth' has improved others' learning and teaching practice e.g. the impact of your own leadership development on the way that you work with your team and the subsequent impact of that on the way others lead at a local level in implementing organisational strategy. Your evidence should, therefore exemplify the benefits to yourself, others, the organisation or institutions and wider (if appropriate).

Contact us:

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR
+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk

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