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Chapter

Institutional Accreditation and the Professionalisation of Teaching in the HE Sector

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Abstract

Institutional accreditation is an integral part of moves to professionalise teaching and learning in higher education (HE). Despite this growing trend, there is a paucity of literature which examines the benefits and challenges of institutional accreditation. In this chapter we draw on survey data collected in 2020 from 55 HE institutions globally which are accredited by Advance HE to award Fellowships. These teaching Fellowships are aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF). Findings show that institutional accreditation supports the career development of teaching-focused academics and impacts on teaching and learning in a number of ways. These impacts include providing an external benchmark, raising the profile and quality of teaching and encouraging teaching-related professional development, including engagement with scholarship in teaching and learning. Accreditation was also found to align with neoliberal agendas of quality, league tables and marketization. The perennial issue of how to evaluate the impact on student learning is something respondents continue to grapple with. Finally, these data demonstrate there is a clear need to develop a more systematic and embedded approach to evaluation that captures the outcomes of teaching-related professional development.

Keywords: Accreditation, Benchmarking, Professionalisation of teaching, Professional standards framework (PSF), Impact evaluation, HEA Fellowships, Career development

1. Introduction

Accreditation, broadly speaking, involves a process of evaluation and judgement by an external body which, if successful, enables an institution, or a programme, or short course within an institution, to be recognised as meeting a pre-determined standard [1]. This recognition is often used in marketing materials and serves to inform potential 'customers' that what is on offer meets, or perhaps even exceeds (where accreditation is not the norm), industry quality standards. Despite accreditation having a long history in many professions [2], the accreditation of teaching in Higher Education (HE) is a relatively recent phenomenon emerging as part of wider moves to professionalise teaching and learning in the sector [3, 4]. This 'professionalisation' plays out in various ways including becoming qualified (and/or accredited) as a teacher and engaging in pedagogic research and scholarship [5].

Internationally, there is a substantial evidence base relating to the impact of teacher development programmes at the level of individuals [2, 6–12]. Within this global interest in HE teaching and learning, the UK has made a significant contribution in leading good practice, research and agenda-setting, alongside strong and often collaborative contributions from countries such as Australia and New Zealand. This leading role has included the UK, through the former Higher Education Academy[1] and the UK Professional Standards Framework, driving what is now a global agenda to professionalise HE practice in teaching and learning [13].

In this chapter we draw on survey data collected from a sample of HE institutions globally that are accredited by Advance HE (a UK-based, member-led, sector-owned charity) to award teaching fellowships. These fellowships, frequently known as HEA fellowships (after the former Higher Education Academy), are aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF). The stated goals of the UKPSF, as articulated on the Advance HE website [14] include supporting 'the design and delivery of initial and continuing education development programmes', and 'demonstrating professionalism to stakeholders'. The UKPSF can also be used to support senior staff in developing policies and promoting a strong culture of excellence in teaching and learning support via the development of processes to reward and recognise teaching. The recognition afforded through the UKPSF is intended to promote and support career paths in teaching and learning [14, 15]. However, the extent to which this ambition has been realised is debated [5, 15]. Equally though the growth in accredited provision that has formalised professional development for new, and experienced staff, has been documented, both in the UK and beyond [13, 16], and evidenced through the widespread use of Advance HE accreditation services. The impact of these developments has been contested by some [5, 17] raising concerns over local resistance, and conflict between the long-term goals of professional development and institutional priorities to raise the profile of teaching. This project therefore aimed to establish the impact of operating accredited programmes and courses on:

- Teaching and learning across the institution;
- Institutional policies and strategies relating to teaching and learning;
- Student outcomes and experience.

Here we are specifically interested in exploring the rationale behind HE providers becoming accredited by Advance HE and the impact this has on the quality of teaching and learning. We also sought to establish whether there is any clear evidence of the impact of accreditation on the student experience.

Understanding the impact of any form of teacher development on the end-user, the student, is notoriously fraught with difficulty [18, 19]. Attempts to capture potential impacts have tended to be indirect, or one dimensional, i.e. focusing on satisfaction as a measure of the complexity of the student experience [20]. Despite this, the agenda for ensuring HE teachers are appropriately qualified remains, with nations proposing ambitious recommendations to address this [2, 21, 22] and the priority for the professionalisation of HE practice reaming a priority for many countries [13]. This reflects the documented benefits students gain from studying within an environment where lecturers have engaged in initial, or on-going teaching-related professional development [18]. Since gaining institutional accreditation

[1] The Higher Education Academy became part of Advance HE, a new, sector-owned charity in 2018, with the aim of addressing system inequalities and advancing education.

is not required in HE, and comes at a time and financial cost, alignment of teacher training and ongoing professional development to an accreditation framework, such as the UKPSF, appears to be important to institutions in demonstrating a commitment to the professionalisation of HE teachers.

1.1 Historical context

Institutional accreditation via Advance HE is part of a broader agenda to raise the status of teaching and learning, and to support teaching-focused academics to be as well qualified and rewarded as their research-focused colleagues [16]. Concerns over teaching quality, preparedness for the workplace, the lower status of teaching compared to research and a lack of recognition drove this agenda from the late 1990s [23]. More recently, increasing competition in the sector, including global competition for students, has led to universities striving to improve in all areas of their business [24], including teaching. Consequently, we do not regard accreditation as a neutral phenomenon, but part of the wider quality improvement discourse surrounding modern-day HE. For some, accreditation is treated with suspicion and regarded as highly political, imposed and prescriptive [25, 26]. It is also perceived to be embedded in neoliberalism with its focus on benchmarks, audits and performativity [27]. Furthermore, the increasing expectation placed on university teachers to gain professional recognition and/or a teaching qualification has likewise been cited as an example of the credentialisation of university teaching [28].

In the UK, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) introduced an accreditation framework in the early 1990's [29]. This framework underpinned many of the early teaching courses in the UK designed to introduce new lecturers to teaching and learning principles and practices. The Dearing Report followed in 1997 and was highly influential in driving the agenda to professionalise HE teaching. By 2006 the UKPSF for accrediting the experience, knowledge and values of university teaching staff, and others who support learners in university settings, was introduced. Subsequently revised in 2011, the framework provides a general description of the role carried out by those that teach and/or support learning in a HE setting. Whilst the framework was developed in the UK, there is evidence that it has been highly influential both in the UK and beyond [13, 30, 31]. One of the benefits of the framework is that it is transferable internationally, providing a clear structure through which educators can conceptualise their practice. Thus it provides a globally recognised benchmark for accrediting the professional development of university staff engaged in teaching and/or supporting learning [31].

Advance HE oversees the UKPSF and is the accrediting body which provides permission (or not) to operate teaching and learning related continual professional development (CPD) or taught, credit bearing courses aligned to the UKPSF. At the time of the research 172 HE institutions were accredited against the UKPSF, with 23 situated outside the UK. Whilst the majority of member institutions are within English speaking countries (UK, Australia, New Zealand), there are increasing moves to develop a more global approach to institutional accreditation with new member institutions situated in Africa, Thailand and Bahrain for example.

To achieve institutional accreditation a university, or other HE provider, must first be a Full Member of Advance HE. Advance HE then assesses an institutions commitment to the UKPSF by considering the role of the UKPSF in framing institutional policies and strategies and rewarding and recognising staff who teach and/or support learners. Advance HE is concerned that accredited provision is supported by adequate resource, and applicants must demonstrate how resources are deployed and sustained [32]. They also need to evidence that robust quality assurance processes are in place to ensure judgements made about teachers against

the criteria are valid and reliable. If successful, institutional accreditation permits the institution to deliver a taught course (such as a postgraduate teaching award) or a CPD Scheme enabling participants to gain 'recognised status' as HEA Fellows at one of four categories: Associate Fellowship; Fellowship; Senior Fellowship; and Principal Fellowship, aligned to the descriptors of the UKPSF. To ensure currency and maintain the standards as prescribed by Advance HE, reaccreditation takes place every 4 years [32].

Despite the increasing prevalence of Advance HE accreditation across the sector in recent years, research which examines its impact remains limited [33]. In the UK this has been reflected in a recent emphasis on institutionally-focused evaluation studies examining the impact on individuals of achieving HEA Fellowship, for example, [3, 16, 34–37]. With some notable exceptions [13, 38, 39], this latter work has so far been largely UK-centric [33], and the wider institutional impacts of Advance HE accreditation have not previously been considered in any large-scale, cross-institutional studies. A recent comparative study of two UK institutions [17] found no correlation between the rising number of HEA Fellowships and student's perceptions of teaching quality as revealed by National Student Survey scores. Thus, the developmental potential of some accredited routes to teacher development have been brought into question.

To address the gap in the research, and as part of their own quality assurance processes, Advance HE commissioned an independent research project. We report here on data collected from one of the work packages associated with part of this larger project to understand the impact of Advance HE accreditation at an institutional level. Full details of the wider study and the overarching outcomes are available online [31].

2. Method

This research explores the impact of Advance HE accreditation on institutions. To achieve this, we designed a comprehensive online survey as the primary method of data collection for this stage of the project. In related work (e.g. HEA Evaluation toolkit) we had previously used online surveys to successfully reach a dispersed sample population in the UK [40]. We echo the benefits associated with online surveys reported by other researchers [41, 42]. These researchers cite the potential of online surveys to provide a so-called 'wide-angle lens' on a topics of interest, noting the ability of online surveys to capture a range of perspectives and experiences. In particular, both authors cite the potential to capture 'un-heard' or underrepresented voices in qualitative research. Practically, online surveys can provide rapid, easy and affordable access to geographically dispersed populations [42]. As this study was international in scope with a short time-frame during which data collection could be undertaken, online surveys were deemed most useful in providing insights into the diverse range of institutions that engage with Advance HE accreditation, whilst also promoting inclusivity and accessibility of the research.

We developed a draft online survey which explored the following topics: institutional rationale for becoming accredited by Advance HE; perceived benefits; challenges; and impacts of accreditation. We also asked respondents to report on the strategic uses and engagement with accreditation. The survey was designed to be completed by those individuals in institutions who had responsibility for Advance HE accreditation; individuals in roles such as Academic / Educational Development. These individuals usually have responsibility for Advance HE accredited provision, as well as a lead role in obtaining and renewing accreditation. Therefore, we felt that they should be well positioned to provide an institutional-level perspective on

accreditation. The survey was piloted with 10 respondents familiar with Advance HE accreditation drawn from four countries. This allowed us to review the ordering, clarity and accessibility of the survey, with minor revisions made to the final version. The final survey included a mix of closed and open questions; the closed questions, which included multiple choice and likert-scale questions, were used to capture data relating to motivations, challenges, impacts and uses of accreditation. We used open questions to capture more detailed responses, which across a whole data-set could then build up to provide a rich and nuanced picture of the impacts of accreditation [42]. We used JISC Online Surveys to host the final survey.

Initially, the survey was distributed by Advance HE to the named institutional contacts for their accredited provision. Advance HE were the gatekeepers of this information, and due to issues relating to data protection, the names and details of these contacts could not be shared. However, at the time the survey was distributed the COVID 19 pandemic took hold. There were concerns about potential impacts this may have on response rates. We mitigated this by cascading the survey link to Advance HE's Programme Leader's online space 'Advance HE Connect'. The survey was open for 23 days and at the time the survey closed there were 55 responses (42 UK-based institutions and 13 from outside of the UK). This represented a response rate of 27% of all UK-based Advance HE accredited institutions and 50% of all non-UK based accredited institutions. Given the circumstances under which the survey took place, in that many institutions were focusing on responding to a global pandemic, we identified this as a good response rate, comparable to that obtained in related work [43], and reflects the level of interest and perceived relevance of this research to the community. We then used descriptive statistics to review and analyse the response to the closed questions. The data obtained from the open responses were collated and analysed thematically.

3. Findings

3.1 Why does advance HE accreditation matter?

It was immediately apparent that Advance HE accreditation matters greatly. Not least because time had been dedicated during the global pandemic, whilst institutions were hastily transitioning to Emergency Remote Teaching [44], to respond in substantial detail to the survey. Whilst a diverse range of answers were provided, three reasons behind institutional accreditation were most frequently cited by a quarter of respondents in each case. Before we consider each of these in turn, it is noteworthy that only two respondents explicitly mentioned students in their rationale for institutional accreditation, a point we return to later.

3.1.1 External benchmarking

Respondents frequently drew on discourses of marketization [45] and quality improvement in their responses with 'external benchmarking' most frequently cited as the rationale for Advance HE accreditation. HEA Fellowship was regarded as having a particular '*currency in the sector*' and was especially sought after by the non-UK institutions who regarded it as a means of acquiring *'Global recognition'*, both at an institutional and individual level. As one respondent put it: '*We know and accept that UK has the high quality of educational system*' and '*We value the UKPSF'*. Several respondents also valued the independent nature of the quality assurance.

Benchmarking is defined in [46] as "the process of self-evaluation and self-improvement through the systematic and collaborative comparison of practice and performance with similar organisations in order to identify strengths and

weaknesses...and to set new targets to improve performance." The process is evidence based, and by comparing to organisations similar to themselves, institutions seek to enhance their own practices, ultimately seeking a competitive advantage. As universities around the globe compete to attract staff and students, an external reference point involving benchmarking across borders has taken on increasing significance.

The UKPSF was cited as being a *'robust pedagogical tool'* and the associated Fellowships were regarded as having a *'real currency in the sector'.* One institution from an international institution in the Global South noted:

> *Already we see the UKPSF being embedded institutionally as a benchmark. This year for the first time engagement in [The university's accredited CPD scheme] and gaining HEA fellowships has been set as one of the conditions for the most prestigious university-wide award on Teaching that is given out at the annual convocation ceremony. The "Award of Excellence in Teaching and Teaching Leadership" specifies the criteria that applicants must have engaged in applied learning from CPD in their teaching practice, including within [the accredited CPD scheme] and have benchmarked their teaching practice internationally.*

Gaining accreditation also ensured that staff had access to a '*community of practice'* that extended well beyond their own institution. The '*sharing of experiences and resources'* was deemed particularly important for smaller institutions and those from outside the UK. By virtue of being Members of Advance HE institutions have access to services and resources that provide extended networking opportunities. For example, Advance HE facilitates 'Accredited Programme Leaders Forums' that encourage cross-institutional networking opportunities. Similarly, the online platform 'Advance HE Connect' provides accessible discussion opportunities and current information regardless of geography or time-zone.

In relation to the concept of benchmarking, several respondents discussed the setting of 'targets' or numbers of staff to achieve Fellowship via the institution's accredited provision. 43% of survey respondents reported institutional targets were set, 51% did not have targets and 6% were either unknown or missing. Several institutions had 'lofty' key performance indicators of over 80% of its teaching staff to achieve Fellowship within the next year or two. For some, this was explicitly embedded within the institution's probation policy which served as a mechanism to ensure compliance, aligning to discourses of managerialism and accountability now infiltrating teaching enhancement units in HE [4]. New appointments with teaching responsibilites were therefore required to achieve Fellowship within a specified time period. As one respondent articulated:

> *The institution values the ability to award Fellowships and aims to increase its numbers. It is held important that the PGCert provides as much in terms of qualifications and status as possible, and aligns with sector practice to professionalise teaching.*

Although an increasing feature of contemporary HE [47], target setting is a contentious area. In relation to teaching credentials targets are most frequently monitored and managed via probationary policies designed to ensure requirements are written into appointment letters. This is certainly not the intention of the accrediting body, but a consequence of the managerialist demands and 'audit culture' of HE [4, 48]. In this survey the polarised views surrounding target setting were also evident.

> *We have always resisted setting targets, and annually defend this position on the grounds of prioritising educational enhancement, not metric chasing.*

Implicit within the above quotation is the recognition that gaining Fellowship, on its own, does not necessarily lead to enhancement. As Ball [49] argues a permanent measurement culture requires people to perform in certain material ways – in this case, gaining recognition for their teaching via Fellowship – these 'performances', are rooted in 'institutional self-interest' (p.216). As an illustration, when asked 'What motivated your institution to apply for accreditation?' one respondent simply wrote: *'to ensure we returned a good percentage of staff in the HESA Teaching Qualifications Return.'* Much measurement, like the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data referred to here, is subsequently used in league tables and plays a role in determining an institution's reputation for teaching. In an increasingly competitive market place this matters greatly to institutions. Indeed, this is a sentiment echoed by participants in related studies centred on the evaluation of accredited CPD schemes [50, 51]. Awareness of the external value and role in league tables was often cited when respondents considered the potential institutional benefits of gaining accreditation. This illustrates the extent to which the rhetoric of performance has infiltrated individual practice.

3.1.2 Enhancing teaching quality

Connected to the concept of benchmarking, the enhancement of teaching quality was mentioned in various ways as a key motivator behind institutional accreditation, including: *'quality enhancement', 'raising standards', 'developing a culture of teaching'* and *'assuring high quality education'.* Respondents frequently revealed a direct connection with the UKPSF and the strategic direction of the institution, as articulated in policy documents such as 'Teaching and learning strategies'. Inherent here is the assumption that engagement in accredited provision *does* manifest in teaching quality enhancement. As we, and others, have argued elsewhere [5, 50, 51] this is a somewhat problematic assumption to make, particularly since accredited CPD schemes (rather than taught courses) rely on applicants reflecting back on previous teaching experiences (usually in writing), instead of considering how improvements to future teaching activities might be implemented. Nonetheless, a quarter of survey respondents mentioned improving quality as a key driver for accreditation, and several of these were positioned in relation to research as illustrated here:

> *There is a desire to provide staff with a robust route to professional recognition, reinforcing the importance of assuring high quality student education alongside high quality research.*

Accredited in-house CPD schemes were also mentioned as being accessible and inclusive. A key growth area, similarly reported in the literature [5, 52], is the creation of opportunities for engagement for part-time and non-academic staff (e.g. librarians, learning technologists, technicians, graduate teaching assistants; and research students) as the following quotation demonstrates:

> *For the CPD scheme, this enables our experienced staff with a wide range of associate lecturers and industry linked professionals with different career paths, to also complete Fellowships (an internal accredited scheme can do this, and external application would be more expensive and have far less uptake).*

In an increasingly commercially-driven HE market place we also see here the concept of 'value for money' tacit in this excerpt. Without institutional accreditation, for staff to gain Fellowship at Descriptor 2 (FHEA) via a direct entry

application to Advance HE currently costs £220 per applicant for a subscribing institution or £440 per applicant for a non-subscribing institution [53]. At Senior Fellow (SFHEA) level the costs increase to £330 and £660 respectively. Conversely for institutions with accredited provision, there is no cost beyond the annual subscription fees. For large institutions then, with a strategic drive towards growing the number of staff with recognised teaching status, it is easy to see why accredited provision delivered in-house is an appealing option. In fact, one could argue, institutions have limited choice if they are to 'compete' in the teaching league tables alongside similar institutions. Perhaps this is one reason why, in the UK, accredited provision is so pervasive.

3.1.3 Supporting career development

Alongside the neoliberal discourses of quality improvement and target setting, a quarter of respondents highlighted the importance of Advance HE accreditation in supporting the career development of those primarily engaged in educational activities and demonstrating individual as well as institutional credibility. This was particularly significant for teaching-focused institutions: *'As a teaching-focused institution it is important that we provide opportunities for staff to develop their teaching expertise'.*

In academic circles, there have long been calls for teaching to be recognised on an equal footing to research. In the UK, The Government White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' [54] highlighted the need for institutions to redress such imbalances and properly reward and recognise teaching. Despite progress in terms of policy development, promotion and tenure are still proving to be elusive for academics focused on teaching [55, 56] signalling a clear gap between policy and practice.

Reflective of the professionalisation of HE teaching, survey respondents here referred to the achievement of Fellowship as providing an *'enhanced professional reputation'* and a *'professional as well as academic award'*. Institutions outside of the UK also noted the *'transferable qualities'* of the professional accreditation and regarded it as a 'portable asset' for teaching staff. As one respondent described: *'It give graduates an internationally recognised certification to support their career development'*. Respondents also noted the *'importance of having a process for recognition and reward'*. Similar to the findings of van der Sluis [51], our research illustrated the importance of having sector standards and a professional body to champion teaching and learning in a sector historically dominated by research. 39% of respondents confirmed that Fellowship or the UKPSF was explicitly mentioned in their institution's promotion criteria, with a further 39% reporting that it was mentioned under some circumstances.

> *The Fellowship scheme was seen to be a motivator to encourage engagement with professional learning. The scheme is part of a strategic initiative to transform teaching and learning. The transformation required increased engagement with professional learning to build capacity. Engagement with professional learning ultimately culminates in Fellowship which is a concrete measure recognized in annual appraisal and promotion processes, hence the motivator to engage with professional learning and capacity building.*

3.2 How does advance HE accreditation impact on teaching and learning?

When asked to determine the level of impact institutional accreditation has on teaching and learning, via a 5-point Likert scale, 95% responded positively. Specifically, respondents reported positive impacts on: the quality of learning

activities (94.6%); the championing of teaching and learning practice and innovation (94.6%); the establishment of internal teaching and learning networks (89.2%); the design of teaching (78.5%); and the quality of assessment (76.8%). Impacts were reported as significant at the individual level but harder to articulate at an institutional level. Despite the very positive responses derived from the Likert scale questions regarding teaching and learning practices, of the 20 respondents who elected to add a qualitative commentary, 8 noted, in various ways, the challenges of correlating accreditation directly with teaching and learning practices.

> *It's difficult to identify how accreditation can have had a specific impact on some of these areas - I get the feeling that in technology-enhanced learning for example, developments were happening among the keen people anyway.*

> *Advance HE accreditation is aligned with institutional (and School priorities and plans) so it is hard to disentangle impact. My 'gut feeling' is a positive impact, but the scale of impact depends on institutional actions and commitments (which are considerable)*

> *There is a difference between valuing educators and Advance HE accreditation - while at the moment accreditation is seen as one way of demonstrating the value, I don't think this is the only way, by any means, of achieving that valuing, so I am hesitant about some of my answers here. This is a much more nuanced situation and, while I'm supportive of Fellowship (very much), I'm also cognisant of the fact that there are other ways to measure excellence in education, and that measuring the impact of this approach is a much more subtle thing than simply saying 'it works because we think it works'. We would need to be able to trace a direct line between Fellowship and, say, NSS scores in order to be able to say categorically that the impact has been positive; all I can really say comfortably at this point is that encouraging people to professionalise as educators and to recognise that via Fellowship might create an atmosphere in which Fellowship has an impact.*

These responses illuminate the perennial issue of measuring the impact of educational initiatives [57, 58]. Almost 34% of respondents said that they were undertaking evaluation work explicitly to measure the impact of institutional accreditation. We do not know the details of this evaluation work, but several respondents noted the difficulties of disentangling impact when there were various initiatives operating simultaneously, all aimed at driving up the quality of teaching and learning. 57% of survey respondents were not undertaking any evaluation work. Educational developers play a key role here, as does the institutional culture and overarching support for teaching and learning initiatives. Ironically, whilst benchmarking with other institutions was regarded as an important motivation for institutional accreditation, respondents did not appear to have developed or implemented teaching benchmarks through which they could evaluate their own development against. That said, in our study, whilst respondents were aware of the compounding influences of multiple initiatives all aimed at driving up teaching quality, there was still a very strong perception that accreditation helped do this. One respondent described the impact like this:

> *In reality [accreditation] provides a gateway for the academic development team to build relationships, build confidence and self-efficacy in staff to make significant changes to teaching, learning and assessment practices. It has been truly transformational in getting staff to believe in themselves and to realise they do great work and they can influence and change things.*

Accredited provision was regarded as the *'golden thread'* that connected various institutional initiatives to enhance teaching. These initiatives included: building capacity by developing a pool of mentors and assessors (91%); raising the profile of teaching and learning (87.5%); providing leadership opportunities (73%); and increasing engagement with teaching-related scholarship activities (57%).

3.3 Advance HE accreditation and student engagement with teaching and learning

Respondents were asked 4 key questions relating to the perceived impact of Advance HE accreditation on student engagement with teaching and learning. These 4 questions related to: student satisfaction; student achievement; student interactions with staff and student interactions with each other. Over 46% of respondents felt that accreditation had a positive impact on student satisfaction. It was notable however that 37.5% of respondents were 'unsure' and the qualitative commentary again emphasised the challenges of making causal links between institutional accreditation and the impact on student engagement, satisfaction and achievement. Of 21 qualitative comments, 18 reported difficulties measuring any impact on the end-users. In contrast to the impact on teachers and teaching and learning practices, there was limited evidence upon which respondents could draw any concrete conclusions. In fact, there was a sense that the impact on students was: *'impossible'* to ascertain; *'the biggest unknown'*; '*difficult to pinpoint';* and *'based more on intuition'.*

> *This impact [on students] would be very indirect and whilst from other impacts I would hope it is positive I have no clear evidence at this time to make such claims.*

To be confident that institutional accreditation aligned to the UKPSF leads to positive impacts, there needs to be robust and rigorous measures in place to evidence this. Research has recently begun to emerge that attempts to address this point. In [51], for example, the author sets out to establish whether there was any relationship between National Student Survey scores in the UK and the rise in the number of HEA Fellowships. Using data over a six year period (2012–2018) he concluded that 'the growth in HEA Fellowships has no significant positive or negative association ($p>0.05$) with students' perceived quality of teaching and academic support, and their overall satisfaction with the course.' ([51], p. 4).

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have drawn on data collected from an international survey targeted at institutions which provide teaching-related CPD aligned to the UKPSF and accredited by Advance HE. In undertaking this survey, we addressed the noteworthy gap in the published literature around the institutional impacts of teaching-related CPD. As we considered in the framing of this chapter, extant work centers on the experiences of those seeking individual recognition through engagement with accredited CPD Schemes [5, 33, 59, 60]. Wider impacts, though often implied, have until now, not yet been examined systematically. The work presented here was part of a wider independent study to address this gap, and provide contemporary insights to inform institutions in maximising the benefits of providing accredited CPD.

The data collected via the online survey demonstrates that, for those responsible for teaching and learning within the 55 member institutions, institutional

accreditation and the resulting ability to confer Fellowships is significant. In particular, respondents noted how accreditation was raising the profile of teaching and learning and enhancing teaching quality. Accreditation was also found to align with the neoliberal agendas of quality, league tables and marketization, which has become a dominant discourse in the sector. In the UK in particular, institutions being able to demonstrate the number of staff with a teaching qualification has become a proxy for teaching quality and signals a commitment to teaching and learning that aligns with the rhetoric of policymakers [17]. Though the narrative of league tables and marketisation was perhaps not as prominent for international respondents, external benchmarking was highly important. It appears, therefore, that institutional accreditation has become synonymous with signalling a commitment to high quality teaching and learning, supported by the development of architecture such as promotion pathways and strategic guidance that can further serve to raise the status of teaching and learning. To gain accreditation institutions have to possess such architecture, and to maintain this accreditation, they need to evidence how processes of reward, recognition and teaching development continue to play a role in the institution and the enhancement of teaching and the student experience.

It is the impact of accreditation on the student experience which is the 'thorny issue' institutions, and also the accrediting body Advance HE, continue to grapple with. As we highlight above, the link between accreditation and student experience is, at best, tenuous. Implicitly students are at the heart of the UKPSF, and it is the contribution individuals make to student learning through the teaching, and support they provide, that is recognised through accredited provision. A notable outcome of the survey was a gap in practice to evaluate the impact of accredited provision on institutions and students. Given that accountability is so prevalent across the sector [61], with measures of student satisfaction, retention success and employability being used to assess the success and impact of institutions globally, it is surprising that practice to evaluate the impact of accredited provision has not become more widespread. Advance HE does not currently require institutions to adopt a systematic approach to this. However, given that Advance HE is a membership organisation, with associated costs, we can speculate that budget holders within institutions are likely to become increasingly concerned about value for money and evidencing impact.

There is a need to develop a more systematic and embedded approach to evaluation that captures hard and soft outcomes of teaching related-CPD across a number of different levels. In 2015 we proposed a longitudinal approach to evaluation which was embedded from the planning stages to benchmark provision, and revisited throughout, to foster a systematic and structured approach [58]. We proposed different methods of measuring impact, so that the diversity of outcomes, including those for students, could be captured at relevant moments. Since this work concluded 'students as partners' has become an increasingly prominent movement, with examples of students becoming involved, through partnership work, in activities such as curriculum and resource design, pedagogic innovation and research [62, 63]. Bringing together evaluation and students could be an avenue through which institutions could address these clear gaps.

Active student engagement in academic development and curriculum innovation work has challenged the neoliberal discourse of students as consumers, instead positioning them as equal partners in these co-creation activities [64]. Following a students as partners approach, students could become involved in the design, development and implementation of activities to evaluate teaching-related CPD activities, specifically those linked to institutional accreditation, to embed students more explicitly in the accreditation process. Actively involving students

in the evaluation of accreditation would open up spaces for them to contribute to discussions around teaching development as well as enhance student awareness of the UKPSF and accreditation. This could serve, in the long term, to demystify the practice of lecturers' development for the benefits of all concerned – students, institutions and Advance HE.

A final theme we want to explore here is the future of accreditation. Advance HE accreditation serves to confirm institutions meet a certain standard, have the resources to support meaningful lecturer development and have the strategies and processes to reward and recognise good teaching [32]. Membership to an international community of practice, opportunities to share experience and gain recognition via the award of Fellowships were among the most frequently cited benefits of accreditation. However, though the number of institutions accredited by Advance HE is growing, to maintain relevance with disciplinary-focused lecturers, those working in academic development need to ensure that engagement with accredited provision continues to be developmental. Whilst our survey highlights multiple benefits at both an individual and institutional level, for some individuals, the experience of engaging with accredited CPD Schemes to gain recognition of existing experience, means that the developmental potential is not fully realised [33, 51].

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought into sharp focus the potential for Advance HE to provide easy access to rapid and relevant CPD. Increasingly universities are being positioned to respond to what some refer to as 'wicked problems' i.e. complex societal challenges that lack clarity in their aims and solutions [65]. Climate change, sustainability, poverty, decolonisation are all contemporary problems that universities are being called upon to address, however, staff and institutions need to be supported to develop capacity and change. Advance HE is already leading conversations and developing practice around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, therefore future accreditation practice could be expanded to promote engagement with these contemporary agendas embedding them holistically in accreditation processes.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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