

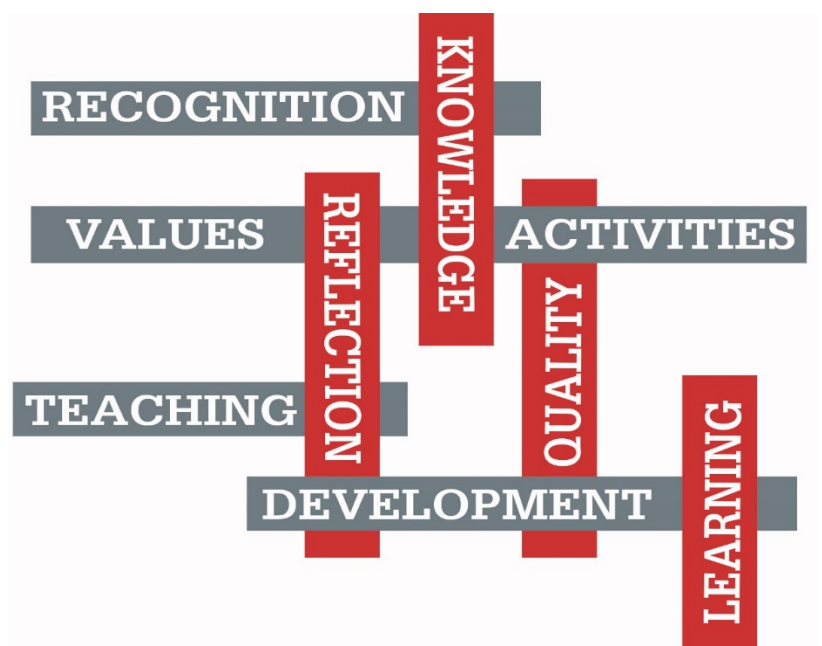


## Guidance notes to support writing your application for Associate Fellowship or Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA)

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## Introduction

The following guidance notes have been written in order to help you to shape your application for professional recognition by the HEA via direct application to the University of Aberdeen [Continuing Professional Development \(CPD\) Framework for Learning & Teaching](#) (Route 3). They are applicable to candidates applying for **Associate Fellowship** and **Fellowship** of the HEA. Additional guidance is available for candidates applying for **Senior Fellowship** of the HEA.

### **What is the Higher Education Academy?**

The HEA is a national, independent organisation which exists to champion excellent learning and teaching in higher education. Its mission is:

*"...to improve learning outcomes by raising the quality and status of teaching in higher education as an essential driver for student success."*

The professional recognition scheme is aligned with the national [UK Professional Standards Framework \(UKPSF\)](#), which is outlined in more detail on P3 of this document. There are a number of benefits to gaining professional recognition with the HEA:

- It provides national recognition of your commitment to professionalism in teaching and learning in higher education.
- It demonstrates that your practice is aligned with the UKPSF.
- It provides an indicator of professional identity for higher education practitioners.
- It is a portable asset that has UK-wide relevance and which is increasingly recognised by higher education institutions overseas.

Further details about the HEA can be found at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

### **What exactly do I need to do to apply for HEA recognition?**

The University of Aberdeen has created a CPD Framework for Learning and Teaching, through which all staff employed by the University can apply for professional recognition by the HEA. The recognition process for Associate Fellowship and Fellowship is based on the submission of documentation via this CPD Framework.

There are three documents required for a complete submission:

1. An 'Account of Professional Practice': submitted using a template provided by the HEA. For an Associate Fellow application this should be c. 1400 words in length, for a Fellowship it should be c. 3000 words.
2. Two completed references: not just the names of referees. These relate to your teaching and learner support duties and as such should focus on these rather than looking like a supporting reference for a job. Guidance is provided later in this document.

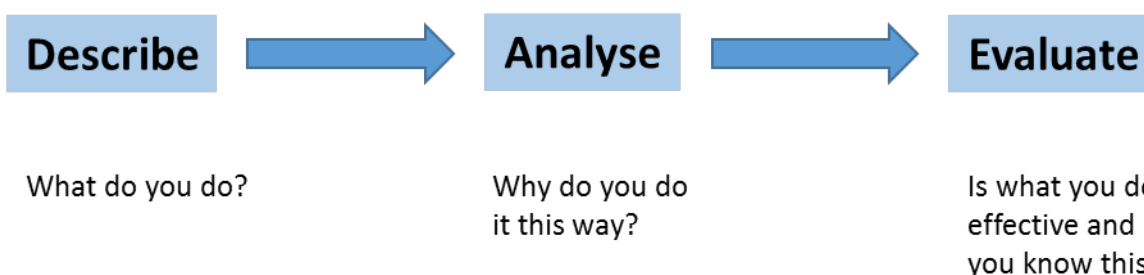
### **Six pointers before you get started**

**The rest of this document** contains information that is designed to help you to complete your Account of Professional Practice. There are also some pointers towards obtaining references contextualised around teaching at the end of the document.

1. This application is for professional *recognition* by the HEA. It does not in any way qualify you to teach in higher education.
2. This application process is specific to the University of Aberdeen and its employees. Other universities have their own CPD schemes and these might differ in their requirements based on the practices, norms and aspirations of that institution.
3. The application is practitioner-based. It assumes that you are involved actively in teaching and/or supporting learning. Write about your current teaching / learner support activities as far as possible. Avoid using examples that are older than c. three years; hindsight bias can creep into your account very easily.
4. Following point 3 above, the application is based on your thinking about the rationale for your teaching and/or learner support duties. It is not meant to be a simple description of what you do, it is meant to be reflective, i.e. asking why you teach in the way that you do and whether this is effective.
5. Conversely, do make it clear if you have extensive teaching experience and / or experience of teaching in different contexts / sectors / countries that has influenced your approach to teaching, but ensure that any substantive examples that you use in your application are drawn from teaching in UK higher education.
6. The application is your own. As you write it, focus on your own work. If you work as part of a delivery team, be clear about what your role is in that team and the contribution you make to it.

### Guiding approach to your application

As noted in 4 above, your application should be based on more than just a description of what you do. Moving beyond description to provide a rationale for the approaches that you take to teaching and supporting learning, followed by some evaluative comment as to its effectiveness, is a key element in taking a critical approach to your teaching duties. The following simple, three step model has proven useful in previous, successful applications as a broad, guiding approach when providing an account of your practice:



Try to use this approach wherever you include an example of your practice; don't just say what you do but ask yourself why you do this and whether you know it is effective. Evaluation does not have to be strictly formal at all times; SCEF is by no means the whole story!

### Key literature

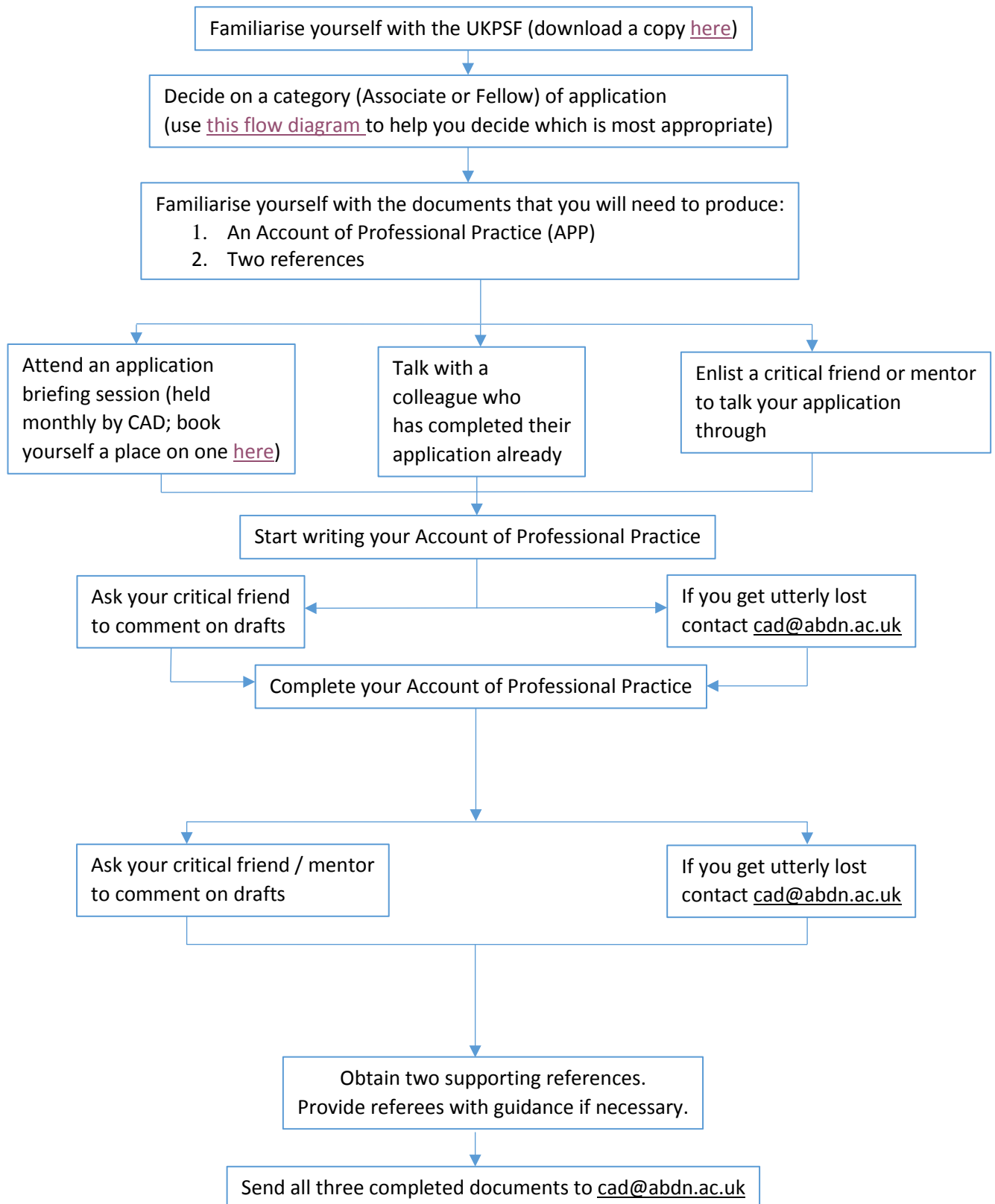
There is no expectation that you are fully conversant with the wide range of educational literature that exists. A scholarly approach to the application is, however, an expectation and this will help you to provide a firm rationale for your practice. If you are unfamiliar with the educational literature, the following two texts are recommended starting points.

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. & Marshall, S. 2014. *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*. London: Routledge.

Race, P. 2004. *The Lecturer's Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Teaching, Learning & Assessment*. Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer

## Approaching your application

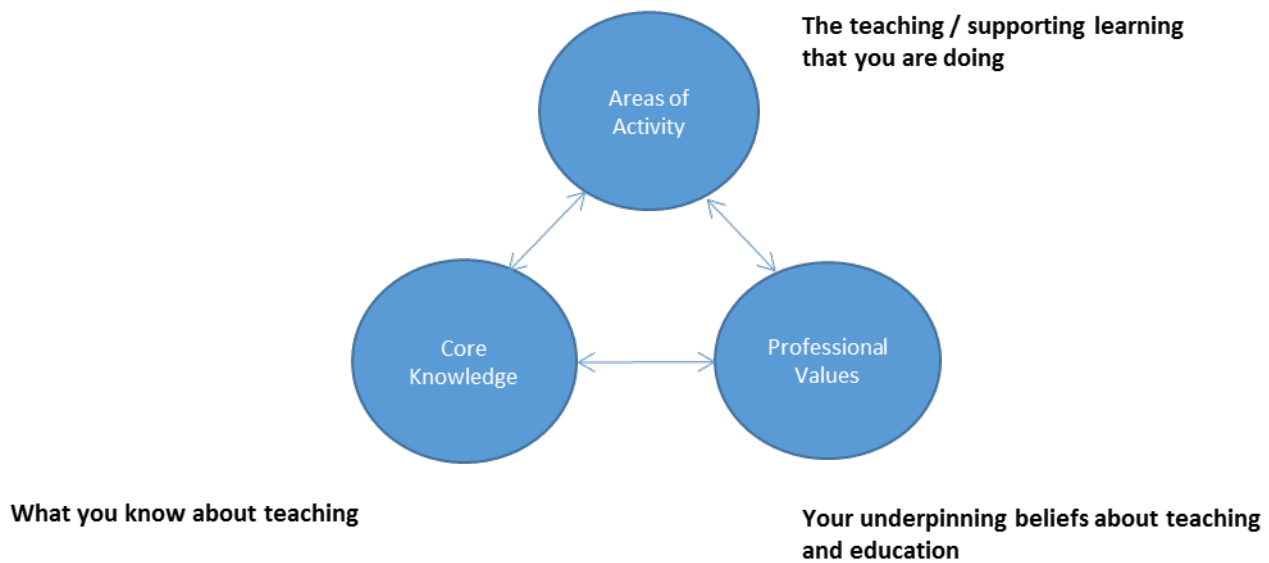
Getting started with your application might appear daunting at first; there are numerous documents to read and become familiar with. Based on experience of working with many people who have completed their applications successfully, the following schedule synthesises the various stages involved in producing a complete application.



# The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF)

Any application for professional recognition by the HEA should be underpinned by reference to the [UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in H.E. \(UKPSF\)](#). As the key document in the application process, it is worth spending some time before you start writing to get to grips with the range and function of the UKPSF.

The UKPSF comprises three 'Dimensions of Practice', setting out the areas that any application should incorporate. These are:



These three Dimensions are subdivided further into individual statements: five Areas of Activity, six aspects of Core Knowledge and four Professional Values; see P3 of the [UKPSF](#). Together they cover the complexity of professional roles in higher education.

## How do the Dimensions help to structure my application?

Depending on whether you wish to apply for Associate Fellowship and Fellowship, some or all of the Areas of Activity form the section headings for your Account of Professional Practice.

- For Associate Fellowship: Select the most applicable *two* out of the five Areas of Activity. Your completed APP should be c. 1400 words in length.
- For Fellowship: Write against *all five* Areas of Activity. Your completed APP should be c. 3000 words in length.

You write your account based on the activities in which you are involved. Into this account you then weave both Core knowledge and Professional Values:


- For Associate Fellowship: include reference only to Core Knowledge CK1 & 2 plus all four Professional Values.
- For Fellowship: include reference to all six elements of Core Knowledge plus all four Professional Values.

## What are 'Core Knowledge' and 'Professional Values' all about?

Being able to provide an account of not just what you do, but broadening this to include aspects of what you know about learning and teaching plus what underpins your practice, are key aspects of your HEA application. **The Core Knowledge dimension** focusses on your knowledge base. For most staff involved with teaching in higher education, this evolves through practice and trial and error; most of us were never taught how to teach.

Experience is valuable and should be brought into your account but it is not the only source of knowledge. You might belong to professional groups or networks (even within-School ones) which are also sources of information about teaching and what works / what doesn't. Furthermore, there is literature available, some of which is from the wider education field but there are many journals devoted to discipline-specific teaching. Wherever you source your evidence to support your claims against the Core Knowledge dimension, remember that it is just that; 'knowledge'. You need to be able to convey to others that your practice has a foundation.

The **Professional Values dimension** focusses on your underpinning beliefs about higher education and how you bring these to bear on the teaching that you do. As such, whilst you do need to make clear in your application how your practice aligns with the values set out by the HEA, this is really about encouraging you to begin to think about your underpinning philosophy of education. As these are values, your application should highlight how you are putting these things into practice; your evidence is provided through examples of your practice in this case.



**Top Tip#1. Reference the CK and PV dimensions through the use of examples that actually show how you know or use these dimensions in your practice; in other words make a 'claim' against them via your practice. Don't just reiterate what the UKPSF says as an assertion; back it up with an example. Reference the Dimension against which you are making a claim by putting it in parentheses after the example. This makes it clear to the reader what you are claiming.**

### Example:

*I run tutorials in parallel with my lectures, which provide opportunities for students to work in groups or individually (K3).*

**Analysis:** This is a common issue; focussing on simply describing what is done and then claiming this against one of the elements (in this case K3: "How students learn, both generally and within their subject / disciplinary area(s).") Reading it critically, there is no evidence in here that the writer knows anything about how students learn – despite the fact that they might know plenty – it needs further elaboration in order to be an effective evidence claim against K3.

### A better example:

*I run tutorials in parallel with my lectures, which provide opportunities for students to work in groups or individually. For example, as part of VM3002 Animal Infection Control I ask my students to work on short problem cases, getting them to describe to their fellow students their preferred approach to a problem. Through this, I encourage students to ask each other questions based on their own understanding (and misunderstanding) of the issues and in their own words, supporting a 'scaffolded' approach to learning (K3).*

**Analysis:** including an example to substantiate the claim is recommended, as in this example. The author also demonstrates their understanding of learning through reference to scaffolding, which is a recognised approach to conceptualising learning based on Bruner<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruner, J.S. (1966). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## Area of Activity 1: Design and plan learning activities and / or programmes of study

### *What do I do?*

***A systematic approach which uses your learning outcomes***

In what ways are you involved in designing and planning your teaching? You don't have to be a Programme or Course Co-ordinator to be involved with design and planning. Even a single lecture, tutorial, practical class or other teaching situation has to be designed and planned. A frequent question asked under this heading is around the degree of involvement required in the design and planning process. It is true that many staff (particularly postgraduate tutors and demonstrators) are given a topic and a brief for their teaching, and are expected to deliver it. This might appear to leave little room for one's own interpretation and teaching approach to be used. Similarly, professional bodies frequently have learning outcomes that have to be met for professional accreditation to be awarded. However whilst such instruction might provide a structure and the topic materials to be taught, exactly 'how' the session is delivered is still controlled by you. There is rarely another member of staff in the room looking over your shoulder.



**Top tip#2: Associate Fellowship applicants often avoid completing this section, noting that they have little control over the design and planning of teaching that they do. This is perfectly acceptable. Remember that applications for Associate Fellowship only require you to write against two out of the five Areas of Activity, not all five as in the case of Fellowship. Associate Fellows are recommended to select those Areas against which the strongest case can be made.**

### *Why do I do it this way?*

***Using experience, feedback, developments in your field.***

In this application, doing something 'because you are told to' isn't going to be sufficient. Your rationale is important. In terms of planning and design, typically the course or programme learning outcomes are the starting point for what we teach, following a model known as 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 1996<sup>2</sup>). In addition, perhaps your design is shaped by feedback from a previous student cohort, or by the need to demonstrate progression between one part of a course or programme and another. Being able to show a systematic approach to your design and planning is recommended here.


### *How do I know that it is effective?*

***Using both formal and informal feedback.***

Your design and planning processes will rarely show up through being commented upon by students via Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF), although it may be hinted at. Be prepared to look for evidence that is not collected formally: ask your colleagues, ask the students directly, find out if, as a result of changes you have made, other parts of the course / programme are working more effectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Biggs, J. (1996). *Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment*. *Higher Education* 32, 347-364.



***Top tip#3: Don't get mixed up between providing an account of the design / planning and the actual delivery of your teaching. The latter belongs in Area of Activity 2. This is a common mistake; although there is overlap, try and keep the two separate, else you will find yourself repeating yourself in Area of Activity 2.***



## Area of Activity 2: Teach and / or support learning

### **What do I do?**

**Describe your activities but don't get bogged down in this part**

Describe the teaching activities with which you are involved. You need to describe briefly what you teach, in order to provide some context for your account, but don't get bogged down in the complexities of the topic, number of hours taught etc. This application is about the *process* of teaching, and your own critical self-examination of the techniques that you use to help your students to learn. It is not about simply describing what you teach, or how many hours it takes.

### **Why do I do it this way?**

**Spend more time and effort here**

What is your rationale for teaching in the way that you do? At first, many of us teach **either** in a manner that emulates those lecturers and other staff who taught us in a manner that we thought of as particularly effective, or in a manner that tries to avoid aspects of teaching that we particularly disliked. It is often the case that we have no well-developed ideas about teaching in its broadest sense when we start teaching. Our practice evolves.

**Top tip#4. Bear in mind that the Panel who review your application will probably never see you actually teach. As such, this application needs to be the next best thing. Your writing should provide a picture of what your teaching actually looks like; what the students experience in your classes. Include an example or two under each Area of Activity which illustrates the teaching that you are doing.**

### **So how do you get started?**

**Example:** You have a series of lectures and an allied tutorial series to support them. Ask yourself why you lecture; is this the most effective way to support student learning? Are your lectures just 50 minutes of talking, or do you do other things in that time? Perhaps you stop and ask questions during your lecture. Perhaps you ask your students to stop and think about what you are saying. Why do you do this? How do you think it helps student learning? Similarly with the tutorials; what is their purpose? How do they work?

**Top tip#5: You can ask yourself critical questions regarding the methods you use in all of your teaching. This can raise uncomfortable questions, and many a 'sacred cow' has been slaughtered as a result. For example, fieldwork is held up frequently as a crucial aspect which supports student learning in the earth sciences. Whilst you might agree with this (and as a Geographer, I certainly do), ask yourself why it is effective, and on what evidence you base this. There is plenty of teaching practice that is based on nothing more than folklore; whilst this may indicate that it works, it also leads to a lack of critical engagement as to whether things could be better.**

**A weak example:** I am the Course Co-ordinator for VM3002 Animal Infection Control, where I deliver two out of the eleven lectures in my specialist field. I have written the course materials in line with the requirements of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (K1), and as such have little choice in what is taught. As Course Co-ordinator, I ensure that the students get the best quality teaching by inviting staff who are outstanding researchers to deliver lectures on their own research specialisms (V3), as staff who are enthusiastic about their research will transmit that enthusiasm to the students.

**Analysis:** This is a largely descriptive account, providing little insight into why particular approaches have been selected. For instance, is it really true that outstanding researchers always deliver the best quality teaching? Where is the evidence for this? It also fails to dig deeper into the individual's own approaches to teaching and the rationale for those; even if the curriculum is controlled by a regulatory body, we all still make choices about the detail of how we actually teach. Rarely is a third party in the room with us, telling us what we can or cannot do.

**A better example:** I am the Course Co-ordinator for VM3002 Animal Infection Control, where I deliver two out of the eleven lectures in my specialist field (K1). At this level, students have enough core knowledge of animal infection to be able to cope with more challenging and realistic learning situations (V1). Rather than lecture 'at' the students for two hours at a time, my teaching takes the form of short (c. 20 minute) introductions to various real problem situations based on my own practice, followed by opportunities for the students to pair up and decide how they would have approached the problem (K2). I then ask pairs at random to describe and justify their approach to the problem before telling them how I went about it and why.


**Analysis:** This is a less passive account which begins to demonstrate what this individual's teaching actually looks like (rather than writing 'about' it, as in the previous example) and provides some rationale for why the individual thinks that this approach is effective. It also takes the learner's situation into account, telling the reader how their previous learning is built upon.

### **How do I know that it is effective?**

#### **Use informal and formal evidence**

that you are presenting?

Whilst formal feedback via SCEF is more likely to highlight lectures than, for example, tutorials, looking for informal feedback whilst teaching in all situations, from colleagues informally or via peer observation more formally can all be useful ways to validate your approaches. Similarly, how do your students react to your teaching? Are they engaged? How do you know this? Are they awake? Are they (for example) asking questions? In turn, are these questions 'good', in the sense that they are non-trivial, perhaps probing points which indicate to you that they are thinking and engaging actively with the ideas



**Top tip#6: Don't use your application to vent your frustration about things which are outwith your control, particularly with regard to the time you have to commit to tasks. Similarly, focus on the teaching that you do, not on 'what would be better if the University did X'.**

## Area of Activity 3: Assess and give feedback to learners

### What do I do?

Assessment comes in many forms. First of all, ask yourself:

- Do I provide formal or informal assessment, or both?
- Do I use formative and summative assessment, or both?
- In what ways do I provide feedback to students?

**Formative assessment** is used as 'low stakes' assessment, usually taking place during a course. It frequently includes no grade or a token grade and can be seen as a vehicle for providing feedback to students at a point in their course where they can act on that feedback to improve their performance.

**Summative assessment**, by contrast, is 'high stakes', with a grade attached. Summative assessments are used to evaluate overall student learning, offer at the end of a course. Whilst feedback will be included on a summative piece of work as a matter of course, unless the assessment is delivered as a mid-term piece there may be little that a student can do to learn from it and apply that learning in the course.

**Feedback**, similarly, comes in various forms. Do you provide written or verbal feedback, or use standardised rubrics? Do you use only formal, written feedback on scripts, or are there opportunities for informal feedback, for instance whilst talking with students in tutorials or lab. classes? Have you experimented with audio or video feedback? How is feedback used and understood by your students? Is feedback simply a one-way transmission of your comments on a piece of work, or do you view it as the start of a two-way interaction, perhaps between either you and an individual or you and the whole class?

**Top tip #7. Despite the dreadful terminology, "feedforward" is a useful idea: in what ways do you provide explicit pointers to help your students to improve their work for next time? This can be a subtle change to your feedback practice, balancing the emphasis between what was good or bad about a piece of work this time in order to emphasise what the student can do next time on the basis of this in order to improve. For example, "For further credit next time, consider doing 'X'..."**

### Why do I do it this way?

Why do you use the assessment methods that you do? Are they the most effective way to test the intended learning outcomes from the course? Do you provide opportunities for students to receive feedback before it is too late to do anything with it to improve their performance? Example: a mid-session test or essay is an ideal way to provide your students with useful feedback, not only on their current performance but also to highlight areas where they can improve, and perhaps more importantly have time to improve, prior to the final, summative assessment.

### How do I know that it is effective?

Are the assessments that you use really testing the things that you want your students to show that they have learned? Or are they testing how well the students can write about these things? Or indeed how much they can write? Whilst it is easy to write off such questions, simply by asking them can uncover assumptions and 'hopes' about what we think we are assessing. Put another way, to what degree do the assessments that we use encourage student learning to last beyond the end of the course? Similarly, it is an easy assumption to make that effective feedback provided by staff is identified and commented upon favourably by students via formal feedback processes (SCEF, SSLC for example). However, do you really know what your students do with their feedback? How might you find out?

## Area of Activity 4: Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance

### What do I do?

#### Defining the learning environment

First of all, what is meant by a learning environment? This could mean the **physical environment** in which you teach. In this case what do you do with the space that you have in order to support and enhance student learning. Example: having a classroom with all seats in rows facing the front might work for a lecture but is unlikely to help or encourage discussion between students. In what ways do you use the space that you have? Perhaps you use field courses, trips and site visits as part of your teaching. How are these used to support student learning? Alternatively, you might think about the **virtual environment** that you use in your teaching. Do you use blended learning, for example using MyAberdeen to encourage active learning? Or perhaps you might want to consider the **intellectual environment** that you create with your learners. Are they simply passive recipients of knowledge that you transmit to them, or do you interact with them, and / or support them to interact with ideas, materials, artefacts or other facets of discipline? Do you encourage them to generate questions, perhaps along the lines of how we, as researchers, might? Note that 'active' learning doesn't have to involve students running around / changing seats / being on a field course; they can be engaged in an active manner by providing them with the space and time to think about things that you are teaching. Make sure that you really do this though! Regarding student support and guidance, first of all establish whether you are involved in support and guidance from an academic perspective, in a pastoral role or in both. Next, ask yourself in what ways are you involved in this? It could be formally (as a personal tutor, for example), or informally through discussions with students around their coursework or course selections.


***Top tip#8: If you intend to include your use of MyAberdeen as part of your application, ensure that you include examples that engage your students actively. Simply using MyAberdeen as a repository for PowerPoint slides, whilst perhaps adding some flexibility to your delivery, would need further explanation as to how you then utilise time in class.***

### Why do I do it this way?

The learning environment is one further element in the notion of how you approach your teaching and support for learning. Engaging your learners in an active manner in their learning is generally considered to be an effective approach to teaching, with opportunities to discuss ideas, try out methods and generally become more engaged with the materials and the ideas that that you want them to learn.

### How do I know that it is effective?

It is certainly the case that if the learning environment is not suitable / amenable to learning then you will hear about it (usually via SCEF), but realistically, how often does anyone comment favourably about this aspect? Therefore, expecting to get much formal feedback on this aspect of your work is unlikely. As a result, you need to be proactive in this aspect of your work, asking student / peers / others who know your work directly about this is essential.

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***Top tip#9: it is straightforward to claim that you learned about a new aspect or new findings in your research field by, for example, attending a conference, and then including this material in your teaching. Whilst content is important, be specific about what you managed to bring back and include; what is described here would be considered a normal part of teaching practice, which, whilst perfectly acceptable, would need further examples to back it up as a viable claim against Area of Activity 5.***

## Area of Activity 5: Engage in continuing professional development in subjects / disciplines and their pedagogy, including research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices

### What do I do?

**Defining CPD in your professional context – it's not just "going on a course" at this level**

This Area of Activity highlights your professionalism as an educator in H.E. You are seeking to demonstrate and provide evidence that you have a professional approach to your own development as an educator. Throughout this section, always make an explicit link between any CPD that you highlight and the way in which you have used this to enhance your teaching.

CPD at this level is about far more than 'going on a course'. We learn through working with others, attending or presenting at specialist events, discussions with colleagues, reading about new ideas, being part of a professional network, amongst many others. These situations are as likely to be focused on your research as on your teaching. The point here is to make sure that there you can make a clear and obvious link between some or all of your CPD activities and your teaching. You are not expected to be an educational researcher in order to complete this section, but you are expected to be aware of and be able to demonstrate your use of scholarship in the field of learning & teaching.

For example, perhaps you attended a specialist conference around your research topic, and as a result were able to use new material that you picked up for the conference in your teaching as a result. Alternatively, a discussion with a colleague from another discipline resulted in you trying out a new teaching approach. Similarly, undertaking the role of an external examiner is an important and valued activity in terms of learning and teaching, but what impact does it have on your own teaching? What have you learned from the process and how has it made *your* teaching better or benefitted *your* students as a result?

In a different vein, you might be engaged directly in research into your teaching, and have published in one of the many pedagogic journals that accompany disciplines (e.g. Journal of Geography in H.E., Medical Teacher etc.). Alternatively there is a middle ground, whereby you might be interested in finding out more about teaching in your

**Top tip#10: Whatever you include in the above, make sure that you can provide specific examples. It is not enough, for example, to say that you 'read some papers'. Which ones? What did you do as a result?**

discipline, but are perhaps not engaged actively in researching that aspect. Documenting and reflecting on such scholarly activity (reading papers or books, discussing teaching etc.) is also encouraged in this section of your application.

### Why do I do it this way?

CPD differs from person-to-person and can rarely be standardised at this level. However, when thinking about CPD in the context of this application, ensure that whatever you choose to include can be linked directly to your work in improving your students' learning.

**Top tip#11: Highlight briefly not only what you have done in terms of CPD, but what you intend to do as a result engaging in CPD activity.**

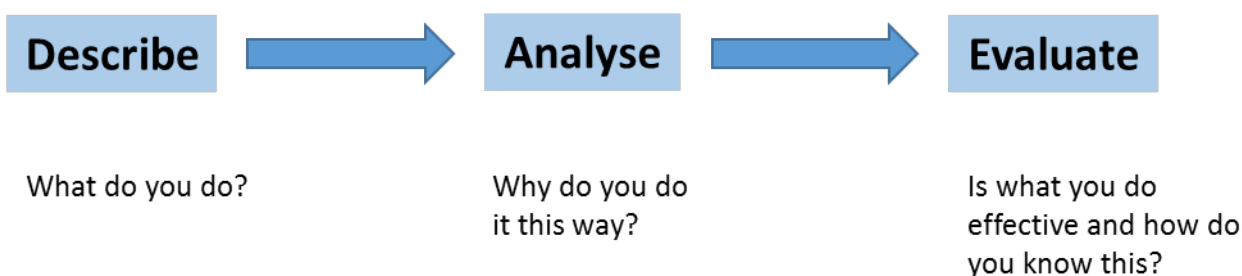
***How do I know that it is effective?***

Link your CPD with your teaching and learner support work. Indicate what you have learned as a result of undertaking CPD. In what ways has undertaking this CPD influenced your teaching? Provide specific examples of this.

A reminder: provide examples of your practice throughout your application and make sure that you have provided both a rationale and some evaluative comment on them....

***You have seen this before: a guiding approach to completing your application***

Remember to move beyond description to provide a rationale for the approaches that you take to teaching and supporting learning, followed by some evaluative comment as to how effective that is. This is a key element in taking a critical approach to your teaching duties.



Use this opportunity to check back over your application and ensure that you have addressed these three steps in all of the examples that you have included.

## Two references in support of your application

### *References back up a narrative account*

As the application for professional recognition is made via a narrative account of your practice rather than as a portfolio with accompanying evidence, you are asked to provide two references in support of your application. These supporting references need to be specifically about your teaching, and as such need to be a little different in approach to a more wide-ranging reference, for example if you were asking for a reference in the case of finding a new job. As such, make sure you approach referees who can comment on your teaching practice from a position of knowledge.

You need to provide the actual references to the CPD panel; please do not simply provide names and addresses or your application will **not** be considered.

In order for your referees to provide meaningful references with regard to your teaching, please read and then refer your referees to the **guidance appropriate to your application** provided by the HEA at either:

- <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/download/referee-guidance-notes-associate-fellow> (for Associate Fellowship), or
- <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/download/referee-guidance-notes-fellow> (for Fellowship).