



## **Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching**

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### ***Curriculum Design***

#### **1. Background**

The University's PgCert in HET was originally validated by the University in 1998 and subsequently accredited by ILT in 1999. The programme is available to all academic staff with any teaching commitment to the University, although those employed on partial contracts or on a part-time basis are only required to complete the first stage. The programme is voluntary for experienced staff and compulsory for probationary staff.

This paper looks back at what our original intentions and constraints were and reflects on them versus where we are now.

#### **2. Design of the PgCert**

##### ***2.1 General Approach***

In developing the programme during Session 1997-98, we were initially concerned to address several external "drivers" impinging on the HE sector at that time. e.g.:

- an increasing public and political interest in the expertise and competence of staff to teach in HE
- national recognition of such expertise via systems of Accreditation (for example, much of the content of the Dearing and Garrick reports dealt with the issue of enhancement of teaching skills amongst staff and proposed the setting up of an Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) to provide an accrediting framework)
- the general raising of the importance of excellence in teaching practice due to initiatives such as HEQC Audit and SHEFC TQA, and the findings of the Dearing Report
- widespread recognition within the sector of the desirability of training for the extended range of skills and responsibilities required of academic staff in the current environment

- a growing realisation that despite being one of the most important and widely practised professions in the UK, teaching in Higher Education is carried out by staff who are in the majority of cases, formally unqualified to do so
- projects such as the COSHEP/UCoSDA/SHEFC initiative<sup>1</sup> on developing Accreditation Frameworks for such qualifications

Overall, the proposed programme was designed to meet the personal and professional requirements of staff and for those suitably qualified, to gain an appropriate formal qualification in teaching. Basically, the need for progress on this can be summarised as being due to concerns regarding the following.

*Professionalism* – in addition to other factors affecting the professional development of academic staff, teachers in higher education have to facilitate learning in their students in an ever increasingly demanding environment (e.g. larger classes, wider range of input standards and abilities in students, increasing need to utilise new delivery methods, etc.). A concerted programme of training in all aspects and applications of pedagogy (including C & IT) is now necessary to allow staff to enhance their effectiveness and to derive fulfilment from their employment.

*Career Progression* – an anticipation that teaching qualifications such as a Pg. Certificate in Higher Education and/or Membership of ILT would become established currency for academic staff seeking internal promotion or when moving to another institution.

*Accountability* – the previously held tenet that academic staff could rely on their subject based professional training as a formal basis for recognition of teaching effectiveness, was becoming increasingly challenged in the late 90's (SHEFC TQA, QAA, Dearing etc.). Much of the evidence generated by such exercises, together with other statements from the student population in particular, indicated that the competence of teaching staff to create a framework for effective learning was a legitimate concern. Additionally, it was becoming generally accepted that academic staff, to be more fully accountable to their stakeholders, needed to develop their professionalism as teachers and facilitators of learning and to have this development professionally recognised via qualifications, CPD etc.

The basic ethos of the programme was therefore to enable staff to become *more efficient, effective and reflective practitioners* and to provide them with a structure, within which they could build upon existing skills, knowledge and experience in designing, delivering and assessing their teaching and gain credit for this where appropriate, by APL. In so doing, staff will be able to enhance the learning experience of their students.

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<sup>1</sup> Towards an Accreditation System for Professional Development for Academic Practice in HE, Antony Luby, August 1997

The design team felt that the knowledge, understanding and skills required for competence in teaching could be best developed by being manifested in the *practice* of others and from the experience of the individual. This is developed through critical reflection, discussion and self-evaluation, in an experiential model such as that described by Kolb<sup>2</sup>. The proposed programme embraced this concept and much of the activities of its students were to be based on critical reflection of both their own and peer performance.

Progression through the programme would enable participants to become *more effective and efficient practitioners through theoretically informed reflection and application in their own areas*<sup>3</sup>. Participants would be able to display enhanced levels of skill, insight and knowledge in their own practice. The programme was designed to be contextualised in the main teaching, research and administration functions of academic and academic related staff in the University and therefore to be applicable to several groups of staff who have a common function of being involved in teaching, learning and/or assessment to some extent.

In summary, we had a clear picture of how the overall framework of the course should be constructed – this is demonstrated in the diagram in Appendix 1.

Additionally, it was anticipated that undertaking such a programme would be recognised as a fundamental part of any appropriate individual's integrated overall staff development profile and CPD programme. Participants would be encouraged throughout the programme to build up a Teaching Portfolio of assessment assignments and other evidence of good teaching, learning and assessment practice.

The programme design assumed that various categories of staff who wished to seek a qualification for their teaching experience and expertise would embark on either a Programme or Pathway Route towards such a qualification. Both Routes were fundamentally based on the concept of *evidence* driven achievement of learning outcomes.

The Programme Route was designed to apply to a “conventional” study route, consisting of a series of lectures, seminars and assignments. The parallel Pathway Route would be mainly *experiential*. Much of this experience would have been gained by staff engaging in various teaching and learning activities as part of their normal duties. However, it was also anticipated that some of the experience would be gained by participants engaging in *planned* “action research” as part of normal teaching duties or special projects. Both Routes had the possibility of partial exemption through APL and, in practice, the possibility existed for staff with appropriate experience to seek the qualification by an agreed hybrid route consisting of a mixture of both the other routes.

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<sup>2</sup> Kolb, D and Fry, R (1975) Toward an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning, in C L Cooper (ed.), (1975), Theories of group Processes, John Wiley and Sons, London

<sup>3</sup> this is known as *contextualisation* and is a fundamental principle of the programme

Lastly, we had noticed from our staff development seminars and by talking to colleagues in other Universities, that one of the biggest benefits of such seminars (especially to new staff, but experienced staff as well) was the discussion group format where staff could share practice and help each other. We therefore were adamant that the programme would have at its heart, a number of “class – contact” sessions for each module, to allow this discourse to take place.

## 2.2 *Programme Framework and Constraints*

Following on from the above analysis of the situation facing us, the basic framework for the programme was therefore decided to consist of:

- a variety of learning, teaching and assessment theories which will form the body of underpinning knowledge required for understanding and applying teaching methodology in practice
- examples of existing practice, from which participants will be expected to form opinions on whether these constitute good or bad practice and as to their suitability in their own areas of responsibility
- examples of participants own practice which will be used as above and as evidence towards a Teaching Portfolio

In general, what we wanted staff to be able to do was;

- develop a sound awareness of the learning needs of students
- become more effective teachers
- respond positively to change and innovation within their teaching roles
- contribute confidently to issues such as curriculum/module design and validation

The basic rationale for the design of the programme was that it should meet all of the following general constraints:

- aims and objectives to satisfy criteria for membership of ILT<sup>4</sup>
- attract 60 SCOTCAT Level M Points
- consist of 5x120 hour (notional participant effort) modules – to comply with basic framework of UAD Modular Scheme
- equivalent to 600 hours of study on part-time basis or to 15 weeks of full-time study
- mixture of class contact, open learning, self-study and portfolio generation
- related to individual staff member’s own cognate area where appropriate and also include cross-discipline issues
- needs to articulate to planned further study (Diploma, Masters etc.)
- needs to be supported by mentors and facilitators in each School

We were also faced with the inevitable constraints of introducing a new programme for staff which would necessitate them taking time out of an

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<sup>4</sup> see Appendix 3 and Footnote 7

already very busy schedule to participate and prepare assessments. Needless to say we anticipated<sup>5</sup> that this would be a major challenge.

### 2.3 *Aims*

The general aims of the proposed Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching were:

- to provide a framework for self-directed professional development for academic (and related) staff in which they can achieve the level of competence and confidence required to teach effectively in Higher Education
- to promote the concept of critical reflection on theory and practice which is embedded within the context of the practitioner's own discipline and encompasses different learning styles and processes
- to embrace the University's "Digital" and "Learner at the Centre" concepts by incorporating key aspects of these within the programme structure
- to develop the links between
  - teaching, learning and assessment
  - technology
  - research and scholarly activity
  - administration and
  - support activities

## 3. **Evaluation of Where We are Now (June 2002)**

### 3.1 *What's Working Well?*

Four years on from validation, the initial euphoria of launch and ILT accreditation is long gone and we are in the real world of delivery – so – what's working well? Lots of things, actually!

- over 80 UAD staff registered (approx. 30%), another 40 in our Partner Institution in Greece
- very good feedback on the seminar discussion groups
- some excellent assessment submissions showing lots of theoretically underpinned, contextualised and evaluated practice
- some genuine examples of shared and enhanced practice

In short – a sound platform on which to build.....or is it?

### 3.2 *What's Not Working Well?*

Lot's of things actually!! The main ones have been,

- the completion rate in assessments is not good (a common problem in PgCert's ?)
- attendance at seminars was initially sporadic (see later)

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<sup>5</sup> and subsequently not proved wrong!!

- lots of pressure from the University Research Committee to exempt Probationers from the course or at least to make it easier for them
- patchy mentor support.

Probably pretty typical? We have addressed some of these by:

- shifting seminars into two-day “blocks” outwith normal undergraduate teaching times
- allowing a much more flexible approach to assessment (including more emphasis on action research)
- relaxing the seminar attendance rule from 100% to 70%
- developing a more focused approach to Learning Contracts
- better training for mentors
- lot’s more one-to-one contact between Programme Director and participants

We are now working on Heads of School and the Research Committee – watch this space!

### 3.3 *Were We Creative in Design?*

Yes and No! Our original intentions were not in themselves anything particularly creative, but the subsequent solutions to our problems have been. It is not easy in the fast moving world of HE in which we live to be creative with staff programmes – it is more a case of “do what you can to survive”. Given all the changes which have been taking place in National policies with respect to HE (ILT, wider-access, QAA, etc.) programme design has become more of a “moveable feast” and “creativity” has probably taken on a different meaning than in designing for undergraduate programmes.

It is probably the case that devoting a whole module of our programme to the implementation of C&IT in the teaching, learning and assessment process was a creative risk that we took – it has certainly begun to pay off with more staff using the technology to genuinely support student learning through this.

## 4 Summary

Designing and implementing our PgCert programme has been a “roller-coaster” process with most of the important things happening quite well and some of the challenges being solved.

In short – a fascinating project with far more facets than we thought there would be when we started.

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 June 2002

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*Appendix 1*

*The PgCert “Environment”*

