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Working and writing in the presence of a peer in an online space: facilitating submissions to achieve HEA accreditation?

Conference or Workshop Item

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Title: Working and writing in the presence of a peer in an online space: facilitating submissions to achieve HEA accreditation?

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Abstract

The need to evidence teaching improvements has created an appetite for gaining professional recognition both by individuals increasing their employability by accrediting their practice and from institutions to demonstrate quality teaching by recruiting individuals whose practice has been accredited. In the UK teaching excellence is recognised and accredited by Advance HE through four categories of Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and using the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF).

The Open University (OU), the major distance education provider in the UK, runs its own accredited scheme to support staff in teaching and learning support roles to gain HEA fellowship recognition. The scheme is called Applaud (Accrediting & Promoting Professional Learning & Academic Development) and is run fully online using a combination of learning technologies to engage with participants, mentors and reviewers of the scheme. Despite the support currently available to Applaud candidates, some candidates still struggle to complete and submit their applications. To improve the existing support and the rate of completion and successful submissions, the Applaud scheme is trialling several activities in collaboration with most Faculties across the university to create additional ways to support candidates. This presentation will explore a study trialling one novel form of support within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the OU, funded by the FASSTEST scholarship centre.

This new and additional form of support draws on literature addressing the success of academic writing groups (Sora et al, 2017; Kozar et al, 2015), phone calls with a colleague to aid writing motivation (Myatt et al, 2014), and having a sense of commitment to an accountability partner (Scott et al, 2019). This form of peer support involves pairing interested Applaud candidates seeking the same type of HEA fellowship recognition (AFHEA, FHEA or SFHEA). Participants must be in the same cohort and associated with the Faculty involved in the study. They are offered a brief introductory session on arranging regular brief working sessions (one to two hours) with each other via MS Teams or Skype. These online working sessions follow a structure that adapts writing retreat approaches to committing to short writing sprints (around 20 minutes) in the virtual company of others and discussing progress

and difficulties after each sprint. One expected benefit of this form of support has been to provide both the space and support for reflective practice to inform the writing of a fellowship claim.

Our study asks to what extent working and writing with a peer in a shared online space assist timely submission for HEA accreditation. To evaluate this trial, we are collecting feedback from participants on working with a partner and the effectiveness of writing retreat-style structured sessions and writing sprints. This presentation will present this study and discuss some preliminary findings, followed by recommendations for future iterations and applications.