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Understanding the impact of an online accredited HEA Fellowship scheme on students' experiences

Conference or Workshop Item

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Title: Understanding the impact of an online accredited HEA Fellowship scheme on students' experiences

Promotional abstract (100 words):

This paper reports on the findings of the evaluation of the Open University's Advance HE accredited fellowship scheme, called Applaud. The findings revealed that Applaud has had a positive impact on participants' practice, increased their interest and engagement with the scholarship of learning and teaching, and assisted teachers to improve students' experience. The findings of this evaluation also informed the successful reaccreditation of Applaud, which started on 1st September 2020 (2020-2024). This paper will also explore preliminary data from the newly accredited scheme and discuss possible implications of these findings to learning and teaching more broadly.

Session outline (500 words):

Recently, the number of universities and professional accredited bodies (e.g. nursing) seeking professional recognition such as the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) offered by the Advance HE has increased substantially. One of the reasons for this increase could be due to the policy landscape in the UK, as universities are now required to report on the number of HEA fellowships in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (van der Sluis, 2021). In addition, professional recognition is one of the strategies used by some UK universities to offer professional development and recognition to staff in teaching and learning support roles. This is certainly the case for the Open University (OU), which is the largest online learning provider in the UK.

Applaud is The Open University's institutional scheme for Accrediting & Promoting Professional Learning & Academic Development. In line with the OU's distance learning approaches, Applaud is a fully online scheme and offers individuals the opportunity to gain external recognition as an Associate Fellow, Fellow or Senior Fellow of the HEA. The fellowship category will depend on an applicant's role, experience and responsibilities in teaching and supporting learning. Every four years the scheme is re-accredited by the Advance HE. As we prepared for the accreditation of the next period, which started on 1st September 2020 (2020-2024), the research team conducted an evaluation of the previous scheme through an online survey that was sent to over 450 participants who successfully gained their HEA fellowship through Applaud, with 108 valid responses. Survey responses indicated that the scheme has had a positive impact on participants practices (81%), as 72% of them were more confident in their role as teachers/supporters of learning and understood how to support better their students, and 66% felt more confidence to undertake scholarship of learning and teaching.

Preliminary analysis of this data was used to inform both changes in the scheme and the second stage of data collection, which included online interviews. Fourteen interviews were conducted, audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. In this presentation, we will share more of these findings, including participants experiences in this fully online scheme, and the impact of receiving HEA fellowship on teaching practices and on students' experience. This will be an interactive presentation, where participants will be asked to contribute their views on how the Applaud scheme can be further improved and how students' experiences can be better evidenced in our continued evaluation. This presentation will be of interest to scheme leaders, educational developers, policy makers, promotion committee members, teachers, and students. By providing

teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practice and to be recognised by their efforts in enhancing students' experiences, we promote lifelong learning and quality education. Therefore, this presentation is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number one, Quality Education.