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Challenging HEA Fellowship: Why should technicians in creative arts HE be drawn into teaching?

ABSTRACT

The UK Higher Education sector is subject to continual scrutiny and measurement, not least via the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). For Government, teaching qualifications are synonymous with teaching excellence. Within the Creative Arts, however, this has always been problematic. The percentage of academics with teaching qualifications remains among the lowest in the sector, and technicians frequently deliver practice-based teaching. As technical teaching expands in both volume and sophistication, arts technicians are increasingly seeking recognition through the Higher Education Academy's Fellowship programme. This article reports on a small-scale study undertaken at a leading UK Creative Arts University that aimed to illuminate the experiences of four technicians gaining Fellowship. Insights suggest that these individuals were motivated to work across academic and technical camps. In doing so, they expanded their practice and networks, although they also experienced hierarchical paradoxes with management and colleagues.

KEYWORDS

Creative Arts
technicians
technical support
professional support staff
changing identities
arts and humanities
HEA
fellowship

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past decade, I have managed a team of technicians working within a leading UK Creative Arts University. During my tenure, I observed a significant increase in the number of technicians applying for Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships. I became a Fellow in 2013. In 2014, 25 per cent of my staff were Fellows and by 2017 this had increased to 79 per cent. I considered how my endorsement might have been a contributory factor in the rising participation of my team, as Trowler et al. identify early adopters of Fellowship as 'sources of contagion' (2005: 433). However, I was also conscious that I had been operating within an institution with a stated objective to increase the number of accredited teaching qualifications of its staff. My research in 2018 explored HEA Fellowship from the perspective of technicians who had attained it. I conducted this research to inform and challenge my own advocacy of Fellowship.

The collective profile of technician roles within Higher Education (HE) has been elevated through the launch of 'The Technician Commitment' (a sector-wide collaboration led by the Science Council and supported by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation's #TechniciansMakeItHappen campaign) in 2016 and the establishment of The National Technician Development Centre for Higher Education in 2018. Within Creative Arts HE, technician roles have evolved to include greater teaching responsibilities, as institutions place increased emphasis upon practical instruction underpinning an employability-led curriculum. In response, 'many universities have established roles that embrace and formally blur the academic/technician distinction. Vacancies titled "Technical Instructor, Technical Demonstrator, Technical Tutor, Teaching Technician," etc., are now routinely advertised' (Savage 2018: 240). The literature broadly regards all those teaching in HE as a homogeneous academic entity. However, the distinction between academic teaching staff and non-academics with teaching responsibilities is becoming blurred. There is ample research exploring Fellowship and academic teaching, but few studies have considered the experiences of technicians who teach.

TECHNICIANS AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Arguably, the most critical metric of contemporary HE is teaching quality. In particular, institutions should demonstrate 'teaching excellence' in their performance in the National Student Survey (NSS), league table position and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). One key measure by which universities substantiate excellence is through staff teaching qualifications. For Killick, this represents 'the professionalization of teaching and learning' (2015: 14). Spowart et al. describe professionalization within HE in a positive light: 'We use the term deliberately to signal the increasing drive for academics to engage in teaching scholarship (Galvin, 1996; Shulman 2000) and to become qualified (or accredited) as a teacher, as well as being an expert within their own discipline' (2016: 206). For Locke, 'Professionalization' has 'connotations of imposition from outside or above, for example, by means of the introduction of prescriptive and inflexible standards, enforced accreditation, sanctions and disincentives, performance measures and certain performance management techniques' (2014: 26).

Spowart et al. and Locke identify a requirement to assert professionalism against recognized standards to demonstrate excellence, as demanded by Government and the markets. However, the measurement of 'excellence' is problematic. Moreover, the UK Government accepts that there is no single accepted definition of teaching excellence, acknowledging that 'in practice it has many interpretations and there are likely to be different ways of measuring it' (BIS 2015: 21). The requirement to interpret rather than measure teaching excellence is explicit 'because there is no single direct measure of teaching excellence, we will need to rely on proxy information, using the best data sets available to inform judgments' (BIS 2015: 31). Increasingly, the level of pedagogic training that teachers have undergone is used as a gauge for individual and institutional teaching excellence. HEFCE (superseded by the Office for Students [OfS] as the main regulator of HE in the United Kingdom in 2018) validated this strategy, considering teaching credentials 'to act as one of a number of indicators of quality; develop and value learning and teaching; and allow recognition of the expertise of those who teach' (2016b: 2). Also, while the practice of linking qualifications with excellence attracts challenge within the sector, 'there is some evidence now that qualified teachers are having a marked positive effect on student learning' (Gibbs 2012: 70). Gibbs concluded, 'trained teachers are rated more highly by students, are more sophisticated in their thinking about teaching, and have students who take a more sophisticated approach to their studying' (2012: 16). Students appear to agree. Liam Burns, the president of the National Union of Students (NUS), stated that 'university lecturers should be forced to acquire teaching qualifications to ensure that students paying tuition fees are getting the most out of their degrees' (Guardian Higher Education Network 2016). Despite a heightened value placed upon teaching qualifications by Government, regulators, scholars and students, 'In almost all cases, the proportions of academic staff in UK higher education institutions with professional recognition in teaching and learning remain relatively low' (Thornton 2014: 229). Bucklye et al. identified 'subjects where less priority was placed on the training of teachers were those where one would expect a particular emphasis on professional expertise such as Creative Arts' (2015: 32). This position is consistent with the findings of a 2016 report into academic teaching qualifications that identified 'Creative Arts & Design and Physical Sciences have the highest percentage of staff with no teaching qualifications (49% and 47% respectively)' (HEFCE 2016a: 19).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HEA FELLOWSHIPS

The accreditation of teachers within HE is not a new concept, and it is helpful to trace the ancestry of the current scheme briefly. Although there were earlier initiatives led by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), an accepted harbinger of national teaching standards was the 1997 *Dearing Report* that sought to enhance public confidence in the quality of learning and teaching in HE. 'We see advantage in establishing an organization that can accredit training and practice, and recognize excellence in teaching at higher levels of recognized status' (Education in England 1997: 125). Subsequently, in 2000 The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) was formed to promote high-quality learning and teaching in HE, and in 2002 the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was established. The introduction of professional standards for teaching in HE was formally proposed in the 2003 DfES white paper, 'The future of higher education'. The

paper proposed the development of 'new national professional standards for teaching and a new national body to develop and promote good teaching' (Department for Education and Skills [DfES] 2003: 46), and the establishment of a 'Teaching Quality Academy'. In response, the LTSN and ILTHE were merged to form the HEA, who would go on to develop the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) in 2006. The UKPSF was developed by the HEA and is owned by the sector, providing 'a description of the range of activities, knowledge, and values expected to be demonstrated by someone teaching and supporting learning, and gives an external indication that a standard has been met' (Turner et al. 2013: 6).

The UKPSF was revised in 2011 'to acknowledge the increasing range of teaching and learning support responsibilities undertaken by staff in HE' (Turner et al. 2013: 9). The revision also established the four current categories of Fellowship: Associate Fellow (AFHEA), Fellow (FHEA), Senior Fellow (SFHEA) and Principal Fellow (PFHEA).

An individual with Fellowship is deemed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to hold a 'teaching qualification'. 'Teaching qualification data records whether or not individuals hold an HE teaching qualification, another relevant teaching qualification, or have been recognized in other ways [Fellowship] for their teaching expertise' (HEFCE 2016a: 6). HEFCE identified ambiguity around whether AFHEA 'should be counted as a teaching qualification', noting

> Associate Fellows of the HEA are not treated by some providers as having a teaching qualification because they are not in many cases undertaking the full range of teaching responsibilities (e.g. direct delivery; assessment etc) and the award is not mapped fully against the UK Professional Standards Framework (unlike the other HEA fellowships).
>
> (2016a: 30)

Although frequently spoken of in these terms, Fellowships are not qualifications. 'They do not of themselves confer any academic credit at any particular level of curriculum' (Fung 2014: 9). Rather 'through the process of gaining HEA Fellowship colleagues are able to demonstrate their understanding of, reflection on and evaluation of their own practice within their discipline or profession' (Bradley and Bostock 2014: 6). Once awarded, Fellowship enables the holder to use the post-nominal letters after their name (AFHEA, FHEA, SFHEA or PFHEA), as recognition. The HEA encourages Fellows to remain in 'good standing' through 'working towards their next award and be performing, or out-performing, their current fellow descriptor standard' (HEA 2018).

The 2011 revision of the UKPSF provided an opportunity for institutions to develop their own in-house continuing professional development programmes with devolved authority to assess whether their staff fulfil Fellowship criteria. To assist applicants in collating their evidence and preparing an application, many institutions provide facilitated sessions through which applicants are encouraged to reflect upon and align their experiences to the areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values of the UKPSF. Fung notes 'institutional schemes are typically wide and diverse: an inclusive scheme should be for everyone who teaches, supports learning and/or demonstrates leadership in education, regardless of job title or status' (2014: 8).

In 2018, the HEA merged with the Equality Challenge Unit and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to form Advance HE, following the Bell

Review (2017). At the time of writing (May 2019), the HEA Fellowship scheme remains unchanged and has over 115,000 Fellows worldwide.

INDICATORS OF VALUE

Until recently, there was no empirical evidence linking Fellowship to teaching excellence at an institutional level. However, research published (by the HEA) in 2017 'looked at the common themes expressed by those institutions that were rated "Gold" or "Silver", which showed a whole-institutional commitment to teaching excellence and strong student engagement' (HEA 2017), thus demonstrating a statistically significant relationship between Fellowship levels and TEF success (Figure 1).

As the institutional benefits become more compelling, institutions have sought to incentivize Fellowship to staff with teaching responsibilities. Cashmore et al. reported, 'there has been a significant and positive shift to construct policies which incorporate teaching excellence as criteria for promotion and career enhancement' (2013: 4). Yet voluntary participation for academics remains problematic: 'The HEA understands 35–40 institutions have set some form of target, and as a result some form of encouragement or enforcement of compliance. The emphasis on recognition is often strongest with new entrants' (Thornton 2014: 228). Spoward et al. found that 'for many, accreditation was regarded as important for job security and career advancement. The security of permanent employment has become a thing of the past and academia is no exception to this' (2014: 214). Within Thornton's study of Fellows, '75% responded that they valued the status of being a Fellow of the HEA' (2014: 233). Thornton reported that this was particularly the case for Fellows who teach and support learning outside of traditional lecturing roles, e.g., technicians. Perhaps, as Lea observes, this is because 'put simply, the framework seeks to enact theory into practice' (2015: 7), a principle that underpins the daily duties of technicians working in the Creative Arts.

As non-academic staff increasingly gain Fellowships, hierarchical challenges and paradoxes can arise. Fung reported, 'Professional awards can have implications for promotions and career progression; both the awards themselves and the authority to make them can affect power relations within

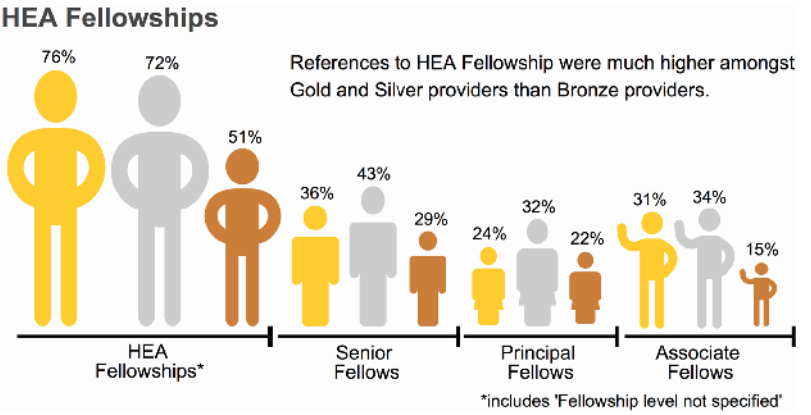

Figure 1: Relationship between the level of Fellowships and TEF ratings (HEA 2017).

and between groups and departments' (2014: 8). As technicians working in Creative Arts HE find themselves drawn more deeply into teaching, it seems likely that institutions will seek to define and measure the quality of technicians' teaching. HEFCE noted 'we believe that the development of new and hybrid roles will change the traditional definition of key staff groups' (2010: 35). Fellowship provides an opportunity for technicians to align their teaching and support of learning with the UKPSF to gain a recognized teaching qualification. But without the incentives, rewards or perceived recognition made available to their academic colleagues, technicians may ask themselves: why should I?

METHODOLOGY

I set out to learn from the individual experiences of four Creative Arts technicians working within fashion, digital media, cinematography and video-editing, who had achieved FHEA within my institution. I used semi-structured

Stage	Area of focus
Motivation	1. **Institutional pressure:** University strategic objectives 2. **Shifting responsibilities of technician roles into academia:** Increase in practice-based teaching responsibilities and participation in academic activities 3. **Peer pressure:** Pressure/incentive/ influence from line management, expectations of technical colleagues or academic staff 4. **Self-motivation (intrinsic):** Enjoyment of learning, interest in pedagogy, desire to improve practice and self-esteem 5. **Self-motivation (extrinsic):** Reputational, benchmarking and validating own practices against UKPSF, parity of esteem with colleagues and signalling excellence to others 6. **Career prospects:** Promotion opportunities, job security, desire to transition into academia
Application	7. **Process of application:** Writing the Reflective Account of Practice and attending in-house development events
Effect	8. **Effect on practice**: Impact on own teaching and support of learning 9. **Effect on professional relationships:** Peers, line-management and academic staff 10. **Reward and recognition:** Actual or perceived benefits of Fellowship 11. **Advocacy:** Likelihood to act as an advocate of FHEA to others 12. **Remaining in 'good standing'**: Continuous professional development.

Figure 2: Areas of focus used to inform questioning.

interviews to explore the participants' motivation to apply for Fellowship, covering their experiences of application: assembling a submission and the impact of Fellowship upon their practice. To unpack each of these areas further, I reflected upon my own experiences of Fellowship, of managing and mentoring technicians undertaking Fellowship, and my review of the literature to identify twelve areas of focus. These areas were used to inform interview questions intended to enable interviewees to speak more widely on each of the ideas (shown in Figure 2).

INSIGHTS

I describe below insights addressing each of the previously mentioned areas of focus:

1. Institutional pressure

All participants expressed an awareness and interest in the current issues faced by the University and the contemporary HE sector. Specifically, each emphasized the importance of institutional performance in terms of metrics and league tables and the recent emphasis on TEF. All believed that the University as a whole would gain benefit from technicians obtaining Fellowships, but had mixed views on whether they would benefit as individuals. One participant recalled: 'we joked in the class that it was good for the University, insofar as it was a tick box exercise for the University and made the place look good', sensing and acknowledging 'a general sense of bitterness that this was for the University rather than ourselves'. Another described 'jumping before being pushed', noting: 'I wanted to get it [Fellowship] done early because I thought we'd all be pushed into doing it eventually and they [management] would insist on it – just like they did with the academics'. In general, all participants were aware of the institutional appetite for Fellowships and while none felt forced, they did perceive a gentle institutional 'nudging'.

2. Shifting responsibilities of technician roles into academia

All participants described examples of how their technician roles had evolved to incorporate more sophisticated teaching. In one instance this was gradual: 'I saw that over the years the technicians were taking on academic responsibilities, as academics left or retired'. Another stated 'there are no academics that deliver my specialism here anymore'. Academic absence was considered to be a contributory factor in terms of the rising teaching responsibilities of technicians: 'academics seem increasingly occupied with research, and many of the staff are part-time, so are only in one or two days a week, so rarely see students'. Another observed 'I am often teaching the teachers. They are delivering stuff, but they don't know why they are delivering it. They may have a purely creative approach with no concept of the technology or process that makes it possible'.

Participants believed that their teaching had evolved to resemble academic practice-based teaching rather than demonstration or process instruction, combining both concept and context with technique. None were negative about this trend (salary discussions aside). All participants cited a desire to improve their teaching practice as a motivating factor in their decision to seek Fellowship.

3. Peer pressure

The participants identified as members of various communities of practice – notably technical peers and academic course teams. They described how each community had influenced their decision to seek Fellowship. Technical peers offered mixed support and advice; three participants described experiencing cynicism from their peers. 'At the time, a lot of technicians thought, why should I do this if I didn't have to?' although participants also described positive responses and encouragement from their peers, particularly those who had already gained Fellowship. One participant explained, 'There were a couple of technicians with Fellowships who were really helpful to me and were able to show me what a completed Fellowship application might look like'. The influence of line management followed a similar trend. Line managers who had obtained Fellowships themselves were more likely to be advocates while those who had not were less likely to promote Fellowship to their staff or include it within appraisal objectives. Academic colleagues were, on the whole, described as being more supportive in terms of supporting the participants' Fellowship aspiration.

4. Self-motivation (intrinsic)

The participants perceived that Fellowship had not been promoted to them as a way of improving their practice, but they were clear that this was the primary reason for their engagement. 'Some of the technicians had already done it, and some members of the academic team I work with were talking about doing the SFHEA, so I thought there must be a benefit to this'. Ongoing pedagogic professional development was another important factor. Three participants had gained Fellowship to secure entry to institutional Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, which has emerged as an established pathway for technicians to gain a place on the course.

5. Self-motivation (extrinsic)

All participants believed that Fellowship would provide an external 'benchmark' of the quality of their teaching practice 'FHEA is recognition of academic credibility'. The appetite for teaching excellence as a concept was a shared aspiration, but participants lacked clarity on what this could mean within the context of their teaching practice. 'I wanted to know what they [HEA] are measuring you against. I mean, what does it mean to be a good teacher, and what do they think it means to be a good teacher?'.

6. Career prospects

Sustaining and improving career prospects was described as a motivating factor by all participants. The prominence of job security issues in responses was perhaps related to a recent restructure of the technical services within the institution. One participant described how she had to 'compete with a colleague for a role at a lower grade. The colleague withdrew and took a severance package because she knew that if we both went for it I would have got it because I was more qualified than her'. Another participant recalled:

> I joined just after the restructure and was very aware of the aftermath. I thought for job security reasons it made sense to get qualifications such as FHEA (and PGC), but also to improve my prospects in the future and to climb the career ladder.

All participants held a desire to transition their careers into academia. Three participants believed that they were more likely to be appointed to an academic role in a different institution rather than where they were working as a technician and saw Fellowship as potentially enabling: 'I could also see that the qualification became mine to own and take with me wherever I might go externally in the future. I was aware that job vacancies were increasingly listing FHEA within the criteria for [teaching] roles'. Indeed, one participant recalled a colleague confiding 'if I get the FHEA, it'll help me get a better job somewhere else'.

7. Process of application

Three participants had attended in-house development sessions intended to support applicants through the process of preparing an application (the remaining participant achieved Fellowship before the internal scheme was established). 'I attended all of them. They were really well done and helped address some of the areas and questions that we were struggling with. Prior to the course, I knew nothing of the word "pedagogy" and inclusive practices'.

Although participants were aware that the UKPSF encompasses those who support learning, all elected to focus their applications on their teaching experiences. The HEA identifies AFHEA to be suited to 'a member of staff who undertakes the role of demonstrator/technician with some teaching-related responsibilities' (HEA 2019). It was through attending the facilitated sessions that three participants became aware that their practice aligned with the criteria of FHEA (rather than AFHEA).

Participants agreed that a valuable element of their submission had been the requirement to engage with the University teaching observation scheme: Peer Supported Review (PSR). For technicians, PSR is commonly perceived as an 'academic' scheme. It is not compulsory for non-academic staff and none of the participants had been involved before their Fellowship application. All participants described experiencing real value in the PSR: 'I will continue with the PSR process because I found it so valuable. And if you are doing them […] why not get the formal recognition of FHEA?'; 'It is almost like a free qualification. I am doing the work anyway and I just had to write it up'. Participants reported that their engagement with PSR had enabled them to network and collaborate across the University boundaries and hierarchies:

> I'd only been at the campus for about a year and Fellowship enabled me to build bridges. I met Learning Support Assistants, technicians and have dialogues that I never would have had otherwise. The real value was in the breadth, getting to know technical colleagues from other teams, and the benefit of co-learning with the academics we support.

8. Effect on practice

The longest-serving Fellow surmised, 'It is just a paper qualification that I have got, I went through, and I learned some things, but it has never done me any good, it may have done the University some good. But not me'. They concluded that Fellowship had not resulted in any discernible impact upon their practice at all. In terms of self-esteem, the same participant acknowledged: 'It did make me feel good, and it gave me the confidence to go on and expand my role. So, from a self-satisfaction perspective, it was worth doing this stuff'. Confidence in the quality and value of their practice was a theme that carried through all

interviews. One participant noted: 'Fellowship definitely gives you more confidence in your role and opens up discussion with academics too, because you feel able to talk with them at their level, using academic language and understand their issues with what they do'. Another described an improved ability to contextualize their teaching with academic colleagues, noting, 'I'd talk with academics and say, so you want me to teach this […] how does it fit in with the rest of the unit?' Another noted: 'It really helped myself and the other technicians acknowledge the value in what we do'.

Three participants believed that the process of reflecting upon their practice while preparing their Fellowship applications had benefitted their teaching:

> I have revisited the structure of some of my lessons and sought to improve my practice, not just through the lesson planning, but through the examples that I use in my work, being more inclusive and making the materials more accessible.

Another observed:

> I approached Fellowship in a holistic way. I didn't just pick bits out. I concentrated on theories of learning, depth of subject knowledge, and by putting the whole package together I think it made me more rounded.

And a third:

> What is really interesting is that you realize there isn't really a right way of teaching; instead, you develop your own way and learn to appreciate that all of the different ways that people teach complement each other. Students need the differences to make sense of their subject.

Arguably the most significant ongoing impact upon practice described by participants had been experienced through the continuation of critical reflection upon practice, engagement in the PSR scheme and the benefits of a more extensive network and higher quality professional relationships. One participant noted:

> FHEA certainly progresses you faster than you'd be able to manage otherwise. It accelerates your development to a certain point within education. You'd probably pick these things up over time anyway, but the Fellowship experience gets you there much faster.

9. Effect on professional relationships

Participants reported that the quality of their relationships with academic colleagues had improved since gaining Fellowship. This was attributed to being professionally recognized for teaching, having empathy for educational issues and engaging with collaborative practices that span traditional boundaries (technical and academic). One participant noted 'one of the things that FHEA has helped me realize is that academia is not impenetrable, and you don't always need a Ph.D., and you can get in with your technical and practical skills'.

Participants described how their relationships with technical peers were more dichotomous. Generally, technicians with Fellowship had been

supportive and engaged new or potential Fellows in dialogue and initiatives relating to technical teaching and learning. Participants described experiencing cynicism from technicians, specifically colleagues who 'thought I was crazy putting in the time and effort to get the qualification because they couldn't see the value of it'. One participant suggested that the technical and academic camps represented a professional working/middle-class divide, noting,

> there is a kind of grumbling from the working class in a sense they were being forced to do something that they didn't choose, so a lot of them were quite reticent thinking that there was nothing in it [Fellowship] for them.

Support for Fellowship within technical teams varied considerably among the participants' line managers. Accounts support that those technical managers who advocated Fellowship were more likely to support continued pedagogic development. Two participants described being well supported by their managers, but another reported being actively discouraged: 'I feel like there are deliberate things put in place by the technical managers to stop the technicians communicating with academics. They don't like seeing us eat lunch with them, or collaborating on projects together'. Continuing, 'I have had quite a few issues with the boundaries of my role, being told that I am overstepping what a technician should do'. Participants agreed that for line managers to support and value Fellowship for their staff, they needed to understand it themselves:

> It doesn't matter if I teach inclusively or not. My line manager doesn't know the difference because he hasn't gone through the appropriate learning processes. There are things in my inventory that I use in my teaching now because I've been through FHEA that I know he isn't aware of.

Participants also described feeling distant from senior management.

> When I hear news of university success (a rise in league tables position, etc.) it does feel like it is happening way above our heads. If someone said it is because of people like you that the University is doing well, I'd feel more connected to institutional success and recognized for my efforts.

10. Reward and recognition

Reward and recognition were among the most contentious of the themes, arguably because unlike the similar academic pay scheme where staff are supported to progress from lecturer to senior lecturer upon gaining Fellowship, there is no equivalent career progression or financial reward for technicians. One participant observed,

> If a technician does a first-aid course, they get paid a little bit of extra money to be a first-aider. But, if someone is going to promote good teaching and inclusive practices, they are just making themselves more work without reward.

The longest-serving participant described a lack of progression as their most demotivating factor: 'I wish there was a clear career progression for technical

staff because you reach the top of the grade and there really is nowhere for you to go', describing a lengthy career of upskilling, gaining academic credentials and carrying out duties in anticipation of one day applying for an academic role, an opportunity that never arose. She reflected that because she had performed teaching and quasi-academic tasks within her discipline, there was reduced demand for a formal academic post in the department. She ruefully noted that through her academic aspiration and overperformance as a technician, she had potentially denied herself the position that she had been aspiring to. Concluding, in career terms, 'I have probably shot myself in the foot'. Another participant highlighted traditional technician role stereotypes (consistent in all the interviews), noting: 'particularly in my discipline, once a technician, always a technician'.

All participants felt that the University should better incentivize Fellowship for technicians through celebrating success and sharing best practices. Without an incentive, participants agreed that the technicians who 'opt-in' to the in-house Fellowship scheme do so because they are already intrinsically motivated to improve their practice.

11. Advocacy of the scheme

One participant was clear that a recent staffing restructure had overshadowed her perception of Fellowship: 'I felt that the people who had been saying "why bother with getting the teaching qualifications" had been proved right. When newer technicians have asked me about Fellowship I say "no, it hasn't done me any good"'. Newer Fellows were more positive and described enjoying the process of critically reflecting upon their practice while assembling their Fellowship applications. The relative ease and expediency of Fellowship as a route to obtain a recognized teaching qualification formed a critical element of the participants' advocacy: 'if a colleague is searching for a way to progress, the FHEA is an excellent pathway. It is much easier than a PGC and much faster than an MA'.

12. Remaining in 'good standing'

Participants each described ways in which they had maintained their professional development since attaining Fellowship. One participant had focused upon 'improving their practical skills rather than teaching qualifications'. Others had committed to continuing their engagement with the PSR Scheme. At the time of writing, three participants expressed interest in SFHEA in the longer term, but did not foresee making an application in the next twelve months. Two of the participants had enrolled on the in-house Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching course within a few months of completing the FHEA. Another considered career mobility to represent 'good standing', noting

> I have made a couple of job applications recently that have required the FHEA as part of the expected criteria. I haven't got anywhere yet, but having the confidence to make the applications was aided by the fact that I had got the FHEA.

ANALYSIS

'The ultimate goal of the analysis is to derive concepts and theories that capture the meaning contained within the data' (Denscombe 2010: 283). To

identify patterns and differences within interviews and contextualize them within the pre-empirical themes, transcript data were catalogued and indexed. This enabled comparison and consideration of individual participant responses from which to draw the research insights.

All participants described how they had initially engaged with Fellowship as a means of improving their practice rather than achieving a 'badge' of external validation. That said, all held a desire to transition their careers to academia at a future point and were aware that 'for new and aspiring academic staff the qualification pathway is becoming a more established feature of institutional strategies' (Parsons et al. 2012: 7). Moreover, FHEA appears to be effective for technicians seeking employment externally as 'Institutions risk investing in the development of their most capable and motivated technicians only to lose them to competitors or industry' (Savage 2018: 250). Indeed, while writing up this study six months after the interviews, I learned that two participants had been recruited to academic posts (one internally, another externally). A third had been offered an academic role at another institution but declined it, and the fourth was in the process of making applications. Career progression was repeatedly cited as a motivating factor, although in one instance it was observed that as technicians gain credibility as teachers, they may unwittingly reduce the incentive for the management to establish an academic role within their discipline.

At the point of their application, participants experienced differing reactions to their Fellowship aspirations from colleagues. All described (in general terms) experiencing both support and cynicism from technical peers. Technicians who expressed dissent were doing so through what they perceived to be a fundamental lack of incentive – a sense of 'Why should I?' and 'What's in it for me?' Interviews suggested that those who vocalized their objections loudest were more likely to be mid-late career technicians with minimal teaching responsibilities and without the ambition to progress their careers beyond current roles. Marshall's study (concerning the key challenges facing HE) acknowledged a requirement for 'rebooting and refreshing [academic] staff, particularly those whose period on the mid-career plateau has extended, with respect to teaching and learning skills' (2017: 3). In respect of the most institutionalized technicians, participant accounts identify that Fellowship in its current form appears unlikely to act as a career defibrillator for the demotivated or disengaged.

Fung's observation that Fellowship can 'affect power relations within and between groups and departments' (2014: 8) does appear to be consistent with participant experiences. Thornton's study of Fellowship identified 'a small minority who are actively hostile and skeptical towards such exercises' (2014: 237). Thornton was writing about academic staff who objected to professional recognition schemes on the basis that they felt able to develop their own teaching and learning practice independently. In contrast, the participants of this study described experiencing disapproval of their development and practice into areas that peers and managers might consider 'academic' such as teaching.

Dearing acknowledged in 1997 that for technicians 'the distinction with academic staff are becoming increasingly blurred' (Education in England 1997: 31). In 2012, Whitchurch described a theoretical 'third space' territory located between academic and professional support camps in which a new type of 'boundary-crossing hybrid HE worker' is located. Reporting on the future of the HE workforce, HEFCE identified 'The key focus should be on doing what will make the strategic positioning most effective, not on limiting

people's roles and activities to their particular grade or job title' (2010: 83). In a previous article, I developed Whitchurch's third space with a focus on the responsibilities of creative arts technicians, identifying a 'synchronous space' (Savage 2018) in which academic staff and technicians coexist, collaborate and overlap in their teaching and learning practices and responsibilities. Moreover, as technicians increasingly deliver sophisticated practice-based teaching within the Creative Arts, the distinction with 'practitioner-academics' becomes indistinct. For Shreeve,

> being an academic is a question of identity […] new academics in practice-based subjects are likely to be experienced and highly effective in their professional practice roles, but are entering into a new world of practices in the academy in which they are novices.
>
> (2011: 79)

By contrast, Creative Arts technicians attaining Fellowship can claim duel competencies in both practice and pedagogy, lending credence to Whitchurch's claim 'professional staff have better qualifications than ever' (2012: 1) and 'with academic credentials paralleling those of their academic colleagues' (Whitchurch 2012: 52). This is of particular significance in the Creative Arts, where

> there is a reliance on using large numbers of practitioners to teach on courses in higher education, where teaching is normally undertaken within the institution in environments such as the studio or workshop that mirror those found in the world of practice.
>
> (Shreeve 2010: 691)

There are indications that the teaching credentials of non-academic staff are becoming valued in policy terms. TEF guidance, for example, directed providers 'to demonstrate how its excellence in teaching is spread throughout the institution' (BIS 2015: 35). My institution (TEF Gold) elected to include the percentage of technicians with recognized teaching qualifications as evidence of institutional teaching excellence. Currently, HESA does not record teaching qualifications data for non-academic staff but 'noted with concern that the current approach to data collection might drive providers to focus their training on permanent members of academic staff, to the exclusion of additional learning support personnel and technicians. This is particularly relevant to higher education providers whose remit is to attract industry or creative specialists to enhance student learning' (HEFCE 2016b: 3). HESA and HEFCE convened a teaching qualifications workshop consulting with providers that asked 'if we were to review the HESA categories, what should they be and why?' Respondents identified 'the inclusion of non-academic contract staff' as a priority and outcomes were intended 'to inform key developments such as the future development of TEF, and the approach to student information and regulation to be adopted by the new Office for Students' (HEFCE 2016b). It is conceivable, therefore, that the HESA staff qualification record may be broadened in the future to include non-academic staff. In this scenario, Creative Arts institutions would theoretically be advantaged (based on low levels of academic staff with teaching qualifications) (HEFCE 2016a) and the increased recognition that Creative Arts technicians are gaining for their teaching (Savage 2018). Also, as technicians begin to match (and in some teams

exceed) the teaching qualifications of their academic colleagues (Whitchurch 2012), this historically understated group of non-academic educators might yet emerge as the future custodians of excellence within Creative Arts HE.

CONCLUSION

I set out to learn insights from Creative Arts technicians who had engaged with Fellowship so that I might better understand and contextualize the value of the scheme to my team and my institution, while also pausing to challenge my advocacy. From the perspective of the participants, 'value' is understandably subjective. In the short term, the value was perceived by participants through increased self-confidence, improved self-esteem, expanded professional networks and richer engagement with academic activities. In career terms, insights suggest that the value of Fellowship is through access to 'potential' in terms of future opportunities that may emerge. However, the value only exists if opportunities materialize. The longest-serving participant perceived Fellowship to be of negligible benefit, ultimately because the potential that had been anticipated had never arisen, whereas, for the newer early-career stage Fellows, the potential for growth and advancement exists within a career path yet to be travelled.

To conclude, I return to consider whether my advocacy of Fellowship has changed or if it will remain. Have I changed my view? Will I change my actions? The answer is no; I remain an advocate. I believe that in its current form, Fellowship provides a compelling introduction to learning and teaching for technical staff, promotes reflective practice and a commitment to professional development, increases networks and collaboration opportunities, while also enhancing mutual respect and working relationships between academic and technical camps. However, I would caveat my advice to technicians with Fellowship aspirations by advising them: Fellowship does not make an individual an excellent teacher in itself, although many excellent teachers do choose to pursue a Fellowship. Therefore, I would counsel motivated technicians with teaching experience to engage with FHEA (rather than AFHEA) to improve their confidence and practice, to enjoy the learning experiences and to do so for intrinsic reasons rather than in anticipation of reward or recognition. For technicians interested in transitioning their careers to academic roles, evidence suggests that FHEA is a potent enabler, particularly for those applying for roles outside their current institution.

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