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Electing to speak: Professional dialogue in the context of Higher Education Academy Fellowship

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1 **Abstract**

2 Written submissions are traditionally used in the assessment of applications for Fellowship of
3 the Higher Education Academy, with dialogue offering an alternative approach. Quite why
4 individuals elect for dialogue has received little attention. Using a mixed methods approach,
5 data were gathered from two Universities offering dialogic and written routes in their
6 Fellowship schemes. Most individuals elected for dialogue, although this decision varied
7 between Fellowship categories. Reasons for the choice were highly individual. This study
8 demonstrates that dialogic approaches are popular with staff. However, we argue the
9 importance of choice in Fellowship assessment options and recommend this to other
10 academic developers.

11

12 **Key words**

13 Dialogue, Assessment, Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, Professional
14 Development, Academic Development

15

16 **Introduction**

17 Universities serve many masters: a lofty aspiration only to civic virtues may never have been
18 enough, even in Cardinal Newman's time. But the range, scope and complexity of targets
19 against which to report and roles to inhabit is surely unprecedented. British universities are
20 increasingly globalised, competing in international league tables and judged on fungible
21 notions of excellence designed to be universally applicable and comparable. At the same time,
22 universities are beholden, amongst others, to the state, students, businesses, disciplines and
23 local and national communities. This context makes the formation and identification of
24 professional identities by academics increasingly complex (Locke, 2014). Pressures to
25 demonstrate excellence (or 'professionalism') and to ensure transparency of function and
26 output in research are long established (~~and bloom with spectacular force every five years in~~
27 ~~the Research Excellence Framework (REF)).~~ Similar requirements are emerging for teaching
28 (Bradley, 2014). Most recently, in the UK, the Teaching Excellence Framework (Department
29 of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016), rates institutions in terms of the quality of its teaching
30 through a formal assessment process. This has implications for the work of academic
31 developers operating in roles which intend to impact positively on the student experience
32 through their work with Faculty.

33

34 Whilst this paper emerges from within the UK context, the pressures on higher education are
35 not unique to our geographical setting. Gourlay and Stevenson (2017: p391) argue that world-
36 wide 'contemporary higher education policy discourses are being driven increasingly by

1 international league tables, market competition, and the dominance of prestige culture, with
2 notions of 'excellence' framing both sector-wide responses and institutional practices'. In this
3 climate the traditional value of teaching, at least as recognised in the past, is increasingly
4 contested. Many commentators have noted the continued inferiority of pedagogy compared
5 with disciplinary research in most universities; for example Creanor (2014) describes the
6 engrained cultural perspectives which result in lip service being paid to the centrality of the
7 role of learning and teaching in higher education in the UK. Viewed from an Australian context,
8 Chalmers (2011) concurs, adding that recognising and rewarding teaching remains
9 problematic. The low status of teaching in the UK may be seen as curious, given the long
10 discourse on the importance of professionalisation of teaching in higher education stemming
11 from the Dearing Report over twenty years ago (Dearing 1997). Clearly this narrative has
12 failed to establish teaching as the pre-eminent and defining role of the academic.

13

14 One reason for a renewed focus on teaching in higher education (HE) is the commodification
15 of education and the increasing emphasis on the student as consumer (Devonshire &
16 Brailsford, 2012). The argument is that by raising the quality and profile of teaching and
17 learning in the sector there will be a positive impact on what students have to say about their
18 programmes of study. This matters especially in England where there is increased pressure
19 to demonstrate excellence, so as to attract and recruit students, despite the inadequacies of
20 the measures in place to capture the construct of 'teaching excellence' (Wood & Su, 2017).

21

22 Trends towards the commodification and auditing of teaching create new opportunities to
23 refocus attention on the significance of teaching and the support of learning in HE. The
24 emergence and use of the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF) (HEA, 2011) as a
25 tool by which academic practice can be recognised is one such opportunity (Peat, 2015.; Van
26 der Sluis, Burden, & Huet, 2017). The UK PSF sets out criteria or standards aligned to four
27 Fellowship categories and provides a benchmark against which individuals can seek
28 recognition of their pedagogic expertise. The UK PSF is increasingly being adopted
29 internationally, as is evidenced by the detail in Table 1. Commonly, in the UK, it is an integral
30 part of Post-Graduate Certificates in HE studied by academics new to teaching (PGCHE).
31 However, Fellowship can be achieved through schemes designed for more experienced staff
32 who teach or support learning, in effect valuing their everyday practice against the standard
33 required by the UK PSF's four Fellowship categories¹.

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¹ In 2011, Senior and Principal Fellowship Categories were added to the PSF – see
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/uk_professional_standards_framework.pdf

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	Total	Total Outside the UK	USA	Canada	Australia	New Zealand
Totals	101,754	3,540	119	47	1,473	147
Associate Fellow	21,151	956	34	9	524	31
Fellow	71,179	1,869	70	38	465	59
Senior Fellow	8,516	630	13	0	423	54
Principal Fellow	908	85	2	0	61	3

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Table 1: Fellowship Data Correct As At May 9th 2018²

6 Although an intention of the UK PSF was to provide a benchmark and to develop, recognise
7 and reward individual practice, its primary purpose was to improve quality and to enhance the
8 student experience (Hibbert & Semler, 2016). This distinction seems important because it
9 indicates that although the UK PSF might have value for the individual who seeks to map their
10 practice to its requirements, it may be more important for the institution which sees this as an
11 opportunity to pursue a metric which might help signal the quality of its teaching practices.
12 Hence there is a danger of tokenistic engagement with the pursuit of Fellowship because it
13 meets the purposes of the institution, competing in a global league table race, rather than
14 being an enabler for the individual or necessarily enhancing student learning (Peat, 2015).
15 This risk can create a tension for academic developers. On the one hand they are commonly
16 responsible for accredited Fellowship schemes and, in some cases, associated key
17 performance metrics which specify how many individuals in the institution will hold Fellowship
18 by a certain date. Yet, they are also committed to creating positive and effective professional
19 development opportunities for university staff. The two objectives do not necessarily align.
20 Nonetheless because responsibility for designing Fellowship schemes can be devolved to
21 institutions by Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy), there are rich
22 opportunities for academic developers to mitigate the risk of superficial box-ticking through
23 their engagement with the UK PSF. Perhaps the most important of these involve how

² There are currently Fellows in 93 countries across the globe (correct at May 9th 2018)

1 institutions choose to assess and benchmark applications for Fellowship against the skills,
2 knowledge and values promulgated by the UK PSF framework.

3
4 To maximise the opportunities afforded by the UK PSF, our two institutions, xxxx and xxxx
5 have championed the use of dialogical methods to evaluate Fellowship claims, arguing they
6 encourage a collegiate and respectful approach to supporting peers and subsequent decision
7 making which are as least as robust as more traditional, written approaches. Importantly,
8 because we believe in enabling choice, both institutions also offer participants in our
9 respective schemes the opportunity to submit their claim for Fellowship in written form.

11 **Dialogue**

12 In using oral methods to evaluate Fellowship claims, we are drawing on a long educational
13 and philosophical tradition which celebrates dialogue and the spoken word as amongst the
14 most powerful means towards the creation of identity and the transformation of thinking. One
15 writer in this Socratic tradition is Barnett (2007). He emphasises the importance of students
16 finding their own pedagogical identities through speech and speech acts, declaring that
17 speech 'has an authenticity that writing cannot possess' (p.89). We suggest that the forging of
18 pedagogical identity is at least as important for staff as it is for students, and is something
19 which is becoming increasingly challenging given the range of competing pressures discussed
20 earlier. Also important in our thinking is the reality that teaching in HE is said to be primarily a
21 solitary occupation with academics only maintaining small, but significant networks when it
22 comes to talking about teaching (Roxa & Martensson, 2009). We believe that incorporating
23 dialogical approaches into our Fellowship schemes helps staff at our institutions develop their
24 own identities as HE teachers and can expand their networks in positive and productive ways.

25
26 Our respective experiences at xxxx and xxxx suggests that engaging in professional dialogue
27 creates a space for individuals to explore their learning and teaching practices in the context
28 of their discipline. However, we think it goes further than this because the essence of a
29 dialogue is divergent, open-ended, not necessarily seeking a required end-point or goal,
30 therefore encouraging collective thinking and the opportunity to see problems from alternative
31 perspectives (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). We also see that dialogues support a socio-
32 constructivist or socio-cultural approach to teachers' professional development (Crafton &
33 Kaiser, 2011; Roxa & Martensson, 2009) and 'shifts interpersonal dynamics from transactional
34 to collaborative' (Neville, 2015, p 24). However, we appreciate that dialogues should be about
35 what matters to the teacher and mutuality is key, with individuals as equal participants (Crafton
36 & Kaiser, 2011). This perspective connects with thinking which purports the potential for

1 dialogues to go beyond everyday professional conversations when they incorporate a
2 reflective process, supporting individuals to explore their tacit understanding and to help them
3 reconstruct their practice (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014). This frames dialogue as a process that
4 includes, and informs, an internal self-reflexive dialogue as well as the external inter-
5 relationship with others (Neville, 2015, Penlington, 2008).

6
7 These views focus attention on reflection argued by Larrivee (2008) to be a necessary aspect
8 of teacher competency providing a means to address gaps in teachers' rationales (Sjorgen et
9 al 2012). When conceptualised as an element of the dialogic process it supports self and
10 collaborative learning while facilitating the connection between theory and practice (Appleby
11 & Pilkington, 2014). Although Larrivee's (2008) work refers to school teachers, it is equally
12 applicable to HE. She suggests that reflection is an incremental process with four stages: pre-
13 reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. In the pre-reflective
14 stage teachers respond to problems without consciously considering a rationale. Surface
15 reflection concentrates on technical aspects, pedagogical reflection considers the links
16 between theory and practice, while critical focuses on ethical and socio-political aspects
17 underpinning a teacher's beliefs. Although there is no explicit mention of reflection in the UK
18 PSF, we suggest that to meet the stated standards for each category there is a requirement
19 for individuals to engage in pedagogical and critical reflection. Novice, and some experienced,
20 teachers find critical reflection challenging, but Larrivee (2008) suggests authentic dialogue
21 and appropriate facilitation can enhance reflective practice skills and it is not uncommon for
22 the academic developer role description to include within it the active support of reflective
23 practice.

24
25 Anecdotally, in the UK HE sector, there are varying views as to whether a written or dialogic
26 route to Fellowship is more effective. Pilkington (2014, p.260) suggests that professional
27 dialogue can help an individual gain 'insight into multiple perspectives on practice and
28 behaviour'. Asghar & Pilkington (2017), in a qualitative study involving eight institutions,
29 suggest that those who engaged in the dialogue route felt it to be a preferable option over a
30 written application process for a range of reasons including the opportunity to build new
31 relationships with others, share practice and to have an oral recognition of their teaching
32 expertise. Conversely, in the same study, written applications were considered to be
33 unidirectional and almost soulless. It is important to note this view was not universal with two
34 participants stating they would have preferred a written option.

1 In a note of caution, Crowley (2014) states that quality professional dialogues require practice
2 and an environment that is encouraging of such an approach. Academic developers leading
3 the implementation of such approaches should be aware of this and the possibilities that
4 dialogic approaches can make participants feel professionally vulnerable through exposure to
5 what is, for some, considered a very public-facing evaluation process (Asghar & Pilkington,
6 2017). Similarly, Roxa & Martensson (2009) suggest that trust and privacy are crucial for
7 networks to flourish where teachers can develop and, in some instances, change views and
8 approaches to teaching and learning.

9

10 An increasing number of accredited continuing professional development (CPD) schemes
11 have adopted dialogic routes to Fellowship, with 39 out of 88 institutions using professional
12 dialogue in 2016 (Pilkington, 2016). Professional dialogue routes typically involve the
13 participant engaging over a period of time (in our own schemes this constitutes approximately
14 two to three hours) with a mentor or with others in a learning community. This is followed by a
15 final dialogue (approximately 45 minutes to an hour), to conclude whether or not the individual
16 meets Fellowship requirements, against the category sought. Some schemes, including our
17 own, require the collection of evidence in an ePortfolio to accompany the dialogue.
18 Alternatively, written routes often involve writing workshops, alongside the opportunity for the
19 participant's draft application to be reviewed and receive feedback before final submission for
20 assessment. Written routes may therefore be less reliant on individuals engaging in a face to
21 face manner than dialogue routes.

22

23 Both institutions in the current study offer university staff a choice of either a dialogic or written
24 route to Fellowship at all four categories. This research therefore aimed to compare participant
25 motivations for, and experiences of their chosen route to Fellowship.

26

27 **Methodology**

28 The two focal institutions are UK Universities, one in Scotland and one in England. They both
29 have an expectation that all members of staff employed on academic contracts gain
30 Fellowship by a given date. This process is facilitated by academic developers who have
31 designed and developed CPD schemes which support claims for Fellowship in either written
32 or dialogue format.

33

34 A mixed methods approach was employed. Data were gathered from Fellowship scheme
35 statistics and using an exploratory sequential design (questionnaires, followed by semi-
36 structured interviews). Data were collected over a six-month period from February 2017 –

1 August 2017. The questionnaire served three purposes 1) to inform the interview guides 2) to
2 obtain a sample pool of potential interviewees and 3) to canvas opinion on similarities and
3 variations between participants in relation to gender, employment role and route chosen to
4 gain insight into their experiences of obtaining fellowship.

5

6 Fellowship Scheme Data

7 The numbers and proportions of applicants choosing the dialogue and written routes were
8 compared and the effects of the category of Fellowship (Associate, Fellow or Senior Fellow)
9 on review choice examined. A small proportion of applicants were declared 'not yet ready' by
10 the assessors, meaning that, at this stage, their claim for Fellowship was unsuccessful. A
11 relationship between the chances of success and review choice was examined. Chi-squared
12 tests were used to examine significance.

13

14 *Questionnaires*

15 The first stage of the research entailed a questionnaire adapted from a previous survey used
16 to evaluate one of the institution's Fellowship scheme. The questionnaire was designed and
17 distributed online using the NOVI tool. Purposive sampling was used to administer
18 questionnaires to all staff who had applied for Fellowship since 2013 at the two institutions
19 resulting in the completion of 156 surveys. The questionnaires were distributed by email
20 containing information about the project with further instructions for those who wished to take
21 part. Consent was requested at the start of the survey and end of the survey to adhere with
22 institutional ethical codes of practice.

23

24 In terms of analysis, closed questions were analysed using descriptive statistics with a
25 thematic approach adopted for the open questions (see Bryman, 2008 p.554). For the latter,
26 codes were drawn out of the open responses which then informed the interview guide.

27

28 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

29 The second stage of the research entailed semi-structured interviews with participants who
30 had agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview by selecting 'yes' in the questionnaire.
31 The purpose of the interviews was to explore in-depth, participants' perspectives on the
32 Fellowship process and routes on offer within their institutions. An interview schedule was
33 developed based on the findings of the questionnaire. Informed consent to be interviewed was
34 sought and secured for the eleven staff members who agreed to engage in the process. Two
35 of these staff completed the written and nine the dialogic route. All interviews at both
36 institutions were conducted by one interviewer to ensure consistency was maintained. The

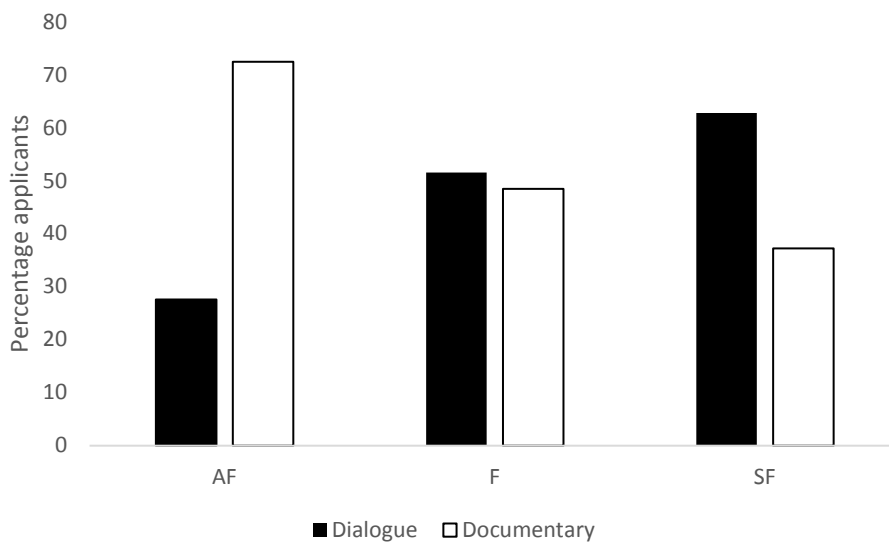
1 interviewer had no direct involvement with the Fellowship process therefore could not be
2 perceived as being biased towards either of the two review options available. All interviews
3 were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

4
5 Interview data were analysed independently by two of the researchers using a thematic
6 analysis framework (see Bryman, 2008 p.554) and then discussed. It was agreed that four
7 themes were emergent from the data. These were: (1) Motivations, (2) Options and Choices,
8 (3) Obstacles and Solutions and (4) Benefits – Process and Outcomes including impact. This
9 paper draws primarily from the data in the second theme to complement and expand on the
10 quantitative outcomes.

11
12 **Findings**

13 To examine quantitatively participant profiles and choices, data for 156 staff were used
14 between the two institutions. Across all categories of Fellowship, the dialogic review option
15 proved slightly more popular than the written, with 54% of applicants choosing the former.
16 However, this choice was strongly associated with category of Fellowship. The proportion of
17 staff choosing the dialogue, as opposed to the written option, increased from 28, through 52
18 to 63% moving from Associate, through Fellow to Senior Fellow categories (Figure 1). This
19 difference was highly significant (Chi-Sq = 11.128, DF = 2, P-Value = 0.004).

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21
22 Figure 1. Percentage of applicants choosing dialogue or written review options by HEA
23 Fellowship categories (Associate Fellow, Fellow and Senior Fellow)

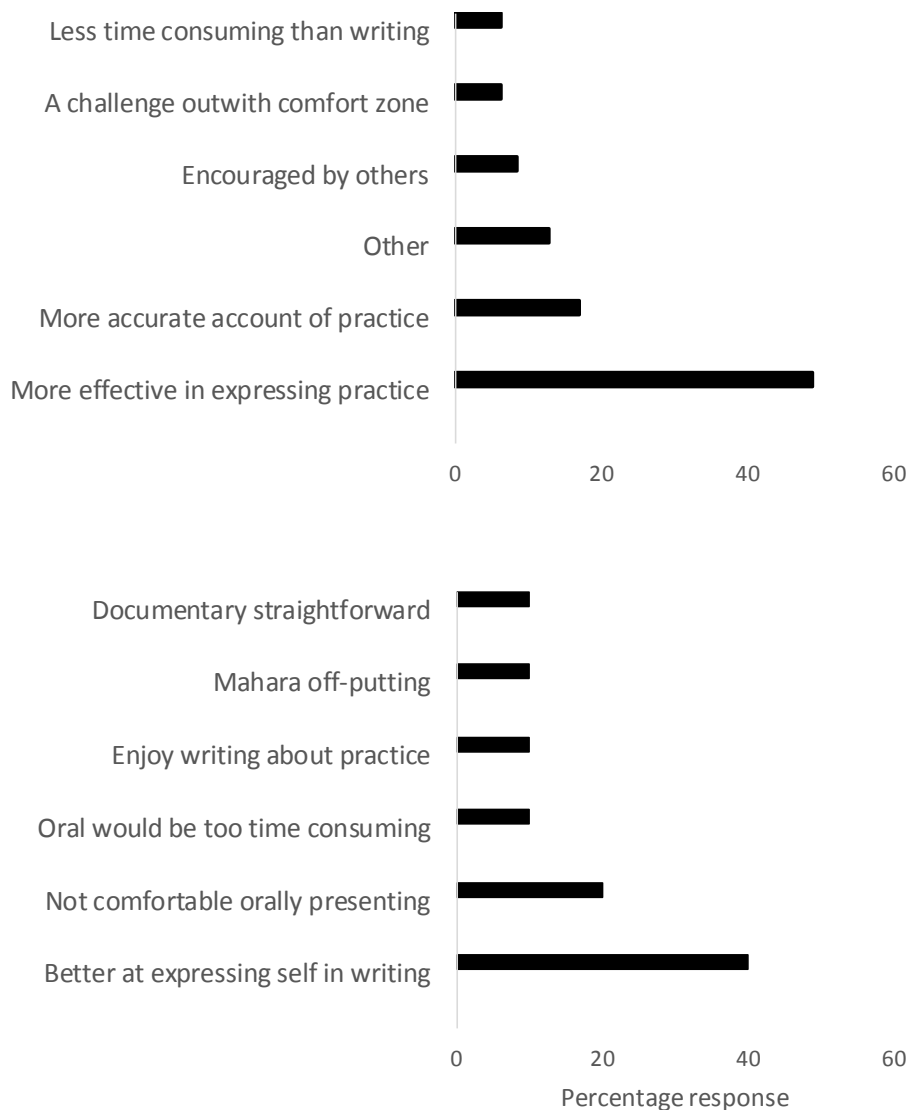
24
25 91% of all applicants were successful, with only 9% found 'not yet ready'. The chances of
26 success at first application were associated with choice of review option. 15% of applicants

1 choosing the written option were found 'not yet ready' compared with only 5% of those who
2 chose the dialogue, a significant difference (Chi-Sq = 5.046, DF = 1, P-Value = 0.025)

3

4 *Reasons for review option choice*

5 Respondents to the questionnaire were asked for the reasons for their choice of review
6 options. Of those who chose the dialogue, 68% said that this was because they felt it would
7 be more effective or more accurate in communicating or expressing their approach to teaching
8 (Figure 2).



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Figure 2. Reasons for choosing the dialogue (top) and written (bottom) routes Amended table provided separately.

Data gathered in the interviews adds richness to our understanding. For some participants³, the choice was simple, with *PA* stating they chose the dialogue because ‘I prefer to talk than to write to, it was much better for me’. *PF* said something similar ‘Yes, I chose the dialogue because I like to talk basically’, adding later ‘I absolutely knew where I was going with that. It’s just my preferred learning style’. *PE*’s decision presented as simple too – ‘I’m better at blethering than writing’, so too *PC* who explained ‘I felt I didn’t do academic writing usually and I felt more comfortable explaining my role in a dialogue and I think that was correct’, adding

³ P is used to denote participant in the presentation of findings. The participants are identified using A – K.

1 that they found it 'really enjoyable'. *PD*'s reasoning added more detail, speaking to 'fit' but
2 bringing in the dimension of time and head space:

3

4 ... it seemed like it was a good fit, actually, because that's what lecturers do, we talk a
5 lot and we ask students to be articulate and to be good at communicating, and if we
6 can't communicate what we do...so I think it was a relief [...] that I could do it by talking
7 about it. Because I know that, actually, I can express myself probably better in talking
8 about it than the time it would take me to write it down. I could, yes, put it in a document,
9 but I didn't have the time or the head space to think about putting it into such a big
10 written piece of work. For me that seemed much more difficult.

11

12 *PH* echoed *PD*'s thinking in respect of fit of the dialogue option to role saying, 'I've been in
13 academia now for 20 years, and I thought, if I can't stand up and talk about what I do, you
14 know, after 20 years, I think it's going to be very sad.'

15

16 *PE* seemed to focus on effort, explaining that whilst they believed the dialogue to be 'more
17 engaging', they also perceived it to be 'a lot simpler and less onerous and just better', adding
18 that 'it worked for me, anyway, you know'. Further into the interview *PE* introduced another
19 aspect to their decision making:

20

21 'I got the sense that if I was shy in an area they would focus on that area to try and
22 tease it out. It's not a test. I think everybody wants everybody to succeed and be
23 accredited but it's kind of horses to water, if you like'.

24

25 For *PH* the choice was obvious because they had lobbied for a dialogue option:

26

27 'And that was one of the ideas that I had said, I think that would be a really good way
28 to do it. And so when it was offered, that seemed, to me, the obvious route, 'cause I'd
29 asked for it.'

30

31 Interestingly, *PD* spoke about waiting for a dialogue option to become available:

32

33 'I just thought, okay well there's been some chat about an oral route, and I thought well
34 I'll wait until that comes on and then I'll maybe do it'

35

1 The choice was not immediate for everyone as *PG* explained:

2 'at first, I was going to do the documentary⁴, because I thought, I think I could be a little
3 bit more objective about my practice through words rather than having to speak to
4 somebody, but then in the fullness of time, having spoken to a few more people, I
5 thought, no, I'll just do the dialogue'.

6

7 *PI* also spoke to the dialogue not being their initial choice and of it having the effect of bringing
8 them 'out of their comfort zone':

9 'I would have gone for the written route but the staff organising it [...] suggested I did
10 the dialogue route which I thought would be good for me because it wasn't the route I
11 would normally take from the point of view of talking about myself I find quite hard but
12 also the e-portfolio, I'd never done anything like that before and I'm a bit of an IT
13 dinosaur so both of those two things made me be apprehensive but I'm really glad I
14 did it that way because, yes, it taught me a lot and I realised that there was nothing to
15 be frightened of'.

16

17 *PI* went on to speak about persuading others to choose the dialogue option, bringing in a
18 quieter, but important idea, connected with impact:

19 'I've supported lots of people through the process of fellowship, so obviously I've
20 supported people who are in the same position as me feeling a bit apprehensive and
21 a couple of people who have gone for the written route I've actually coerced,
22 encouraged to [...] change to the dialogue route and they were apprehensive for the
23 same reasons as me and they'd gone through the dialogue route and, sort of, been
24 quite grateful that they had been given the encouragement to do so but, yes, it's
25 been...it's been...I think it's definitely having a bigger, longer impact'

26

27 Two of the participants spoke about selecting the written review option, but for two very
28 different reasons. For *PB*, the dialogue was excluded as a choice because:

⁴ Some participants refer to written approaches interchangeably as documentary.

1 'I talk too much and I mean I said to you I've got bees in my bonnet, is somebody asked
2 me a question that goes for something that I'm passionate about I would have a
3 tendency to go on about that so I thought I'd better not do that'

4 In direct contrast, PK explained:

5 'the dialogue wasn't an option when I did mine, so. And I...to be honest, I wouldn't have
6 chosen that. I liked the written one [...] I am a paper person, I do quickly...for example
7 I really liked doing the mapping across all the different domains, and looking at how I
8 could demonstrate that. I think doing that in a dialogue I think I would be distracted and
9 I wouldn't be able to think about what I was saying because I'd be so busy thinking
10 about how am I demonstrating this value or... you know, so actually having the time to
11 look at it and get it to a standard that I was really happy with, the written approach was
12 best for me. I don't think I would have gone down the documentary route....eh, the
13 conversation one, because I just think that's not my, kind of, strength'.

14

15 **Discussion**

16 Most participants chose to apply for HEA Fellowship via a dialogue, rather than a written
17 option. This is despite the perception, recorded in the literature (e.g. Asghar & Pilkington,
18 2017; Huxham et al., 2012) and expressed by some of our interviewees, that oral assessment
19 processes might involve greater stress or vulnerability than written approaches. The main
20 reasons given for choosing the dialogue option concerned the congruence of this form of
21 interaction with the professional practice of the individuals, whether employed as academics
22 or in professional service roles. There was little evidence that participants in general
23 anticipated the dialogue would prove easier than the written option although a few respondents
24 to the questionnaire said they thought it would take less time. That said, an equal number
25 deliberately chose to engage in a dialogue to challenge themselves. Some interviewees
26 discussed how one or other of the review options immediately seemed easier and more
27 natural, however a few described choosing the dialogue after reflecting on their learning
28 needs. Others articulated arguments based on their personalities and perceived 'fit' with them
29 as an individual. So, in our schemes, offering a choice of review options has proven popular
30 with dialogue suiting a majority of participants.

31 However, there were significant differences between the proportions of staff choosing dialogue
32 or written options among the categories of Fellowship. Candidates for Associate Fellow were
33 most likely to choose the written option and those for Senior Fellow were least likely. Although
34 categories of Fellowship are explicitly non-hierarchical and do not always reflect seniority,

1 there is a strong implied trend here of increasing choice of dialogue with increasing
2 experience. This probably reflects the perception that oral assessment exposes participants
3 to a greater degree of vulnerability than an ‘impersonal’ written approach, with some of our
4 respondents acknowledging that anxiety was the reason they chose the written approach. This
5 anxiety is likely to reduce with greater experience and seniority. Our findings reveal an
6 important argument for enabling choice in Fellowship schemes. Insisting on dialogue only, or
7 appearing to favour it, may inadvertently disadvantage particular groups of staff, especially
8 those with relatively less experience or confidence. This is an important implication for
9 academic developers considering implementing such schemes in the UK, and internationally
10 as the number of institutions engaging with the UK PSF and Fellowship grows.

11 As carefully designed developmental processes, the routes to Fellowship that we describe
12 both achieved high levels of success; large numbers of failures would suggest something
13 wrong with the support and guidance provided. Nevertheless, some participants were judged
14 ‘not yet ready’ for the award of Fellowship. Importantly the probability of this outcome was
15 related to the review option chosen, with a higher proportion of unsuccessful applicants
16 electing for the written approach. This finding was not confounded by the different choices that
17 applicants for different categories of Fellowship made; there was not a higher failure rate for
18 Associate than for Senior Fellowships. Previous work comparing oral with written
19 assessments testing the same knowledge has found higher rates of success in the former
20 (Huxham et al., 2012), in part because oral assessments provide the flexibility for examiners
21 to clarify the meaning of questions. This helps avoid the classic examination error of answering
22 a different question than the one that was asked. Our findings may reflect a similar
23 phenomenon; it is certainly common during dialogues for reviewers to be asked to re-phrase
24 and re-state questions. In addition, our anecdotal experience is that the small proportion of
25 participants who appeared less engaged with the process (for example, those less likely to
26 attend 1:1 mentoring (xxxx) or the mentoring circles (xxxx)) were also more likely to choose
27 the written approach. We suggest that committing to a dialogical review option may in itself
28 encourage greater engagement; the idea of ‘filling out a form’ is perhaps intrinsically less
29 inspiring for many staff.

30 In navigating the potential tensions between pursuing Fellowship as a form of corporate
31 signalling and as a rich and meaningful experience of personal development, we were
32 concerned to facilitate learning communities among our participants. This has both positive
33 and negative implications for academic developers. Mandating engagement of staff in the
34 process has in our experience brought academic colleagues out of their silos and opened up
35 conversations about teaching across disciplinary boundaries. It has required careful

1 management by academic developers in working with the willing and demonstrating the value
2 in the process in order to bring on board more reluctant colleagues. Whilst this can be done
3 with written options, we would argue that dialogical approaches are more likely to foster
4 sharing of practice and create opportunities for pedagogical and critical reflection (Larrivee,
5 2010). This has implications for educational developers in terms of having a role in facilitating
6 such opportunities beyond the use of dialogue for just achieving Fellowship recognition. We
7 are of the view that encouraging reflective peer to peer conversations more broadly can have
8 a positive impact on professional development as others have found in a variety of settings,
9 including university and school education. This includes dialogic learning as both an internal
10 and external practice that supports reflection on, and a reimagining of, experienced teachers'
11 professional identities (Vloet, Jacobs & Veuglers, 2013); the promotion of (co)meta-reflection
12 for middle university managers as a means to explore collaboratively, and find solutions for,
13 the challenges they face (Thorpe & Garside, 2107); and the generation of "transformative
14 spaces" which engender(ed) agency in a profession being pressed into compliance and
15 performativity" (Edwards-Grove, 2013, p31). While none of these examples involves a formal
16 review and award of Fellowship, in our collective experience the involvement of colleagues as
17 mentors and reviewers in face to face dialogue with participants in itself created opportunities
18 for mutual learning and the affirmation of experience, in a way that must be very rare or
19 impossible in written assessments. As two participants noted:

20 '...once it actually came to sitting down and having the dialogue with a very senior
21 colleague who I didn't really know, once I got settled I really enjoyed that process
22 because that was the, sort of, penny dropping moment when I realised I had something
23 to say and that people were interested in what I'd done and that I could be proud of what
24 I'd done really'.

25 'the dialogue was great...and it was really good that they had a person on the panel who
26 had worked a bit in my field so understood some of the problems and the debates there
27 but then they also had somebody who had no idea what we were talking about so it was
28 a really, I think, productive discussion.'

29 In conclusion, we used the opportunity provided by our Fellowship schemes and their review
30 options to compare the popularity and value of the dialogic and written approaches and to ask
31 whether particular groups of applicants were more likely to choose one or another. The
32 dialogic option proved more popular and was more likely to result in success. We would also
33 argue that it is generally perceived to be a better fit with the professional practice of colleagues
34 and is better able to facilitate a community of mutual learning. However, many staff still
35 preferred a more traditional written approach and this preference was particularly evident for

1 less experienced colleagues. It is clear that the process of achieving Fellowship can be an
2 important affirmation of the value of teaching and/ or the support of learning and is an
3 opportunity for educators to reflect on and enhance their practice. Therefore, it should be
4 available for as many colleagues as possible. Hence, whilst we argue that the evidence in
5 favour of dialogue is strong we also recommend supporting a choice of approaches to
6 encourage engagement by all. We also argue that academic developers are ideally placed to
7 maximise the value of Fellowship recognition schemes, so the benefits extend widely across
8 the University, impacting on the student experience.

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