***The UKPSF through a Foucauldian lens, its origins and intentions, evolution and impact (0491)***

**Paul H. Dennison**[1] [1]*University of Greenwich, London, United Kingdom*

Origins and intentions

The professionalisation agenda, which gathered pace through the 1990s and was given form and structure following the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), has its origins in the accountability movement launched by Prime Minister Callaghan's "Ruskin" speech of 1976.  Teachers in HE should not only be professional, but should account for that professionalism with public evidence.  "It should… become the norm for all permanent staff with teaching responsibilities achieve at least associate membership of the Institute [for Learning and Teaching in HE]" (NCIHE, 1997, 14.30).

The ILTHE, founded in 1999, was "intended to be for *all* academic … staff with *any* interest in teaching and learning…" (King, 1998: 14, emphasis in the original), contrasting with SEDA which comprised (and still comprises) mainly academic developers, and which had driven the professionalisation agenda before Dearing.   The ILTHE transformed into the HEA in 2003 and this new organisation published the United Kingdom Professional Standars Framework, (UKPSF) in 2006.

Structure

The UKPSF has three-fold structure based upon the Affect-Behaviour-Cognition model of social psychology: Professional Values, Areas of Activity, and Core Knowledge.  It also bears uncanny resemblance to the analytic model for "professionalism as disciplinary logic" proposed by Fournier in her (1999) Foucauldian analysis of professionalisation in a non-professional occupational domain. She argues that "the mobilisation of professional discourse can serve to regulate the 'autonomous' conduct of employees through the articulation of competence" (Fournier, 1999: 290) which prescribes the areas of Practice of the practitioner, their Knowledge, and their Personal conduct.

The UKPSF *is* prescriptive although it uses ellipsis to avoid the language of prescription.  Individual teaching professionals in HE are "responsibilised" into measuring themselves (through recognition) or volunteering to be measured (through accredited teacher training) against the 15 elements (originally 17) of these three dimensions, in what Foucault would describe as the operation of normative power and the technologies of the self.  Teaching professionals are still autonomous, but they seek to comply with the UKPSF.   In part, this is because the UKPSF is so unobjectionable, so self-evident.   How can you disagree with it?  Foucault would smile.   The very question epitomises his concept "governmentality".

One of the advisory committees to the new "Institute", the ILT (subsequently the HEA) was the Booth Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, and it is obvious that their articulation of "academic principles" was influential in the formulation of the UKPSF Professional Values:

"When portfolios of evidence were first thought of as desirable for the assessment of teaching competence in higher education, the concept of academic principles was thought important.  These principles [were]…

- A commitment to scholarship in teaching, both generally and in the discipline;  (V3, K1)

- A respect for individual learners and for their development and empowerment;  (V1)

- A commitment to collegiality;  (V1)

- A commitment to ensuring equality of educational opportunity;  (V2)

- A commitment to continual reflection and consequent improvement in practice."

(Booth Committee, 1998: A3.1)

A year earlier, the Dearing Report (1997) had a completely different emphasis.

"There are, however, values shared throughout higher education and without which higher education, as we understand it, *could not exist*. Such values include:

- a commitment to the pursuit of truth;

- a responsibility to share knowledge;

- freedom of thought and expression;

- analysing evidence rigorously and using reasoned argument to reach a conclusion;

- a willingness to listen to alternative views and judge them on their merits;

- taking account of how one's own arguments will be perceived by others;

- a commitment to consider the ethical implications of different findings or practices."

(NCIHE, 1997, Paras 5.39 and 5.40, cited in McNay 2007: 44 – McNay's emphasis)

The question occurs: why do we take the Dearing values "for granted" but articulate the Booth values, and not the other way around?   Could the answer lie in the nature of accountability?

Evolution

In 2011, the UKPSF was amended (from 17 elements down to 15) and extended (V4 was new, as were the Senior and Principal categories of fellowship).   If one seeks, with Foucault, to unpick the "invisible" hand of governmentality, these changes are of interest.

Assessment was added to K2, the Knowledge and understanding of appropriate methods: assessment was *up*.   The integration of scholarship, research and professional activities was conflated with the evaluation of practice and CPD in Area of Activity A5: CPD was *down*.  Respect for individual learners was combined with a commitment to development of learning communities into V1 (*down*), while the catch-all acknowledgement of the "wider context in which HE operates" (V4) came out of left field (*up*).  None of the Dearing values gained admittance.

The two new categories of fellowship acknowledged for the first time progression and hierarchy in HE.   This led to renewed interest in recognition as a means of obtaining advanced professional fellowship status; recognition began to compete with qualification in terms of numbers.

Impact

The use of the UKPSF as a legitimating codification of professionalism varies widely across HE.  With the advent of TEF that legitimation has been given new impetus, which I seek to qualify and quantify in my presentation.  In the main, the impact of the UKPSF is seen as positive, but there are caveats and grey areas.  Ambiguity is one of the strengths of the UKPSF and one of the reasons why it is so effective.

References:

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