

# Development and benefits of a teaching standards framework

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## Summary

This paper shows how the development of a teaching framework at Niigata University is located in a broader international context. To help with this location, this paper summarizes the story of the development of professional standards for University teachers in the UK. The paper then suggests how Niigata University, and more broadly Japanese Higher Education, may be able to take some encouragement, and perhaps some small lessons, from the UK experience. The paper explores the shows how the Niigata framework relates to a broader international account of the issues a teaching standards framework must address. It concludes with some thoughts on possible approaches to implementation at Niigata.

The article is based on a presentation given to senior staff at Niigata University on May 2nd 2009, along with a presentation on the Niigata teaching framework by Kaori Kato, who is an associate professor of Niigata University.

## Then and now in UK

When I first became a higher education teacher, in 1970, I received a three-day course on how to lecture. This was unusual at the time, although not unique.

From 2006, every new University teacher in UK has been expected to take, and preferably to pass, a nationally accredited course in University teaching.

How did this change happen?

What have been the benefits?

What may be the implications for the University of Niigata, and more broadly for Higher Education in Japan?

## Professionalising University teaching - one country's story

Around 1990 in UK there was concern about the quality of University teaching, and concern that research received too much attention and teaching too little. The UK Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA – [www.seda.ac.uk](http://www.seda.ac.uk)) researched opinions on the abilities of a good teacher and the values behind good teaching. From this research SEDA devised a common national professional standard for university teachers. (Baume (2003))

We gave formal recognition to courses that met this standard. The process of recognition cost each university a few hundred pounds. Over five years, some 60 courses were accredited, in UK & other countries (2001-6), and some 3000 teachers were accredited.

Recognition of courses was entirely voluntary – there was no government involvement, and SEDA did not seek anyone's permission to undertake these recognitions. We simply did it.

Developers used the standard to say to their senior managers “We need a course like this, a course that that meets this standard, in our University – lots of other Universities are doing it and we don't want to be left behind.”

Developers also used the standard to design courses in their University. These courses were very different from each other, to meet the needs of their host University. But they all met the standard, in different ways. The Leaders of these courses were a valuable network, sharing ideas and experiences.

Who is the Staff and Educational Development Association?

SEDA is a professional association of academic developers, originally founded in the 1980s. Most UK Universities are now members. It published papers and books, runs conferences and workshops, provides training and qualifications for staff and educational developers, and offers a wide range of professional qualifications for University staff. (At its Conference in Birmingham in November 2009 it was host to 13 visitors from many parts of Japan.)

In our work on the professional accreditation of University teachers, we were driven by a principle – the need to improve teaching and learning.

We were also pragmatic – we influenced policy and practice

wherever we could.

SEDA had a significant influence on Government policy.

A National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education was set up by the UK government in 1996. SEDA gave evidence to the commission. We advocated the training and professional accreditation of University teachers. We used the argument that: *“Each student has the right to be taught well.”*

When the Commission in 1997, it reported, it recommended that *“.....all new full-time academic staff with teaching responsibilities are required to achieve at least associate membership of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, for the successful completion of probation...”* (NCIHE 1997)

A national Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was set up to provide this accreditation. Accreditation was not a requirement, but most UK Universities developed and ran a course for its new teachers. SEDA had significant input into the standards that the ILTHE set up and into the accreditation procedures it used.

Some ten years later a Government report repeated that *“All students are entitled to high quality teaching.”*, and recommended that *“New national professional standards for teaching in higher education will be established as the basis of accredited training for all staff, and all new teaching staff will receive accredited training by 2006.”* (DFES 2003) This has substantially happened, through a new national body, the Higher Education Academy – [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk).

In 2009 a Select Committee of Members of Parliament was set up to look at higher education. SEDA was invited to give evidence. SEDA recommended training and accreditation for all University teachers, not just for new ones. It seemed to us odd that University teachers, who train and educate the members of most professions, should not themselves be trained and accredited to teach. (House of Commons... 2009) The Committee of MPs accepted SEDA's recommendation. It is not clear whether this will become a requirement.

### Consequences and reflections

Every new University teacher is now expected to take, and preferably to pass, a nationally accredited course in University teaching. There was no great demand for training from

established and experienced academics, but new lecturers mostly welcomed being trained. Some of the new lecturers trained 15 years ago are now course leaders and Heads of Department. Teaching is slowly improving.

Higher education is changing. More students are going to university – approaching half of those who leave school. This growth in student numbers needs new approaches to teaching. These changes are needed to reflecting the new students' varied ambitions and abilities, and also to reduce the cost of teaching. Teaching is increasingly valued, and new synergies are being found and made between teaching and research. However, for many academics and many Universities, research rather than teaching is still seen as the best way to promotion.

A teaching framework allows each university to design a course which meets staff needs. This is important, and makes the framework much more acceptable. A framework does not say how course should be run and assessed. It only says what teaching capabilities academics need to develop and demonstrated, and what values and knowledge must inform and drive their practice.

The UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/our-work/institutions/ProfessionalStandardsFramework.pdf>) unfortunately gives little attention to the teaching of disciplines. This reduces the effectiveness of the framework. A national network of Subject Centres, run by the Higher Education Academy (accessible via [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)) provides support on teaching particular disciplines

There is alas not yet enough attention to continuing professional development once a teacher has been accredited, although this is growing.

### What does it mean to be an academic?

Is part of the responsibility of any academic to contribute to the future of their profession or discipline – through research, publication, advancing practice, and through teaching?

Is it also the obligation of an academic to do each of these things professionally – that is, with skill, with care, with professional autonomy, without prejudice, and informed by theory and by best current practice?

## What should a standards framework achieve, and pay attention to?

A standards framework and its sound implementation can:

- Provide a clear, attractive, adaptable, practical and rigorous basis to support both initial and continuing professional development and accreditation for all those who teach and support learning in higher education.
- Similarly allow experienced but untrained teachers to claim convincingly that they teach well
- Support justifiable pride in the role and work of the teacher, in synergy with their other roles — researcher, administrator, practitioner, etc.
- Give everyone evidence-based confidence that students are being taught well and supported to learn effectively by good teachers.

Any standards framework for teaching, and its implementation, should give attention to:

1. Individuals and their teaching roles – What are their particular teaching responsibilities?
2. The contexts of the teaching – What subject is being taught? What national and university policies are relevant?
3. The purposes for teaching – What learning outcomes should students achieve?
4. The necessary knowledge – What do teachers need to know, about learning and teaching?
5. Underpinning principles, values, virtues – What principles etc. should inform their teaching?
6. The competences or capabilities of a teacher – What teaching abilities does a teacher need?

(This list is based on work done for the European Union – Baume (2008))

The teaching standards framework at Niigata University, and its implementation, will address each of these six topics, and thus comprises good international practice.

1. Individuals and their teaching roles – implementation of the Niigata framework will be adapted for and by each teacher, to match their particular teaching.
2. The contexts of the teaching – teachers will study the teaching of their own subject. Also, the wider policy contexts for teaching will be addressed.
3. The purposes for teaching – the framework encourages teachers to plan what teaching should achieve for students.
4. The necessary knowledge – the framework refers to much necessary knowledge required for designing programmes.
5. Underpinning principles, values, virtues – respect,

commitment, responsibility and autonomy are described.

6. The competences or capabilities of a teacher – these are described under broad and powerful headings

Each is now considered in more detail:

### 1. Individuals & their teaching roles

- 1 Possible educational role or roles – lecturer, programme leader, subject leader, on-line tutor, learning technologist, personal tutor, instructional designer, graduate teaching assistant...
- 2 Other professional roles – research, management, consultancy...
- 3 Training and qualifications, in their discipline or profession, and possibly also in teaching in higher education
- 4 Particular current capabilities, enthusiasms, and development wishes as a university teacher

Each of these is clearly relevant to the development and qualification of each teacher, and to what it means for them to be a good teacher.

### 2. Some contexts for teaching in higher education

Contexts include:

- The national / regional higher education system.
- The University, programme, course, learning environment, class and individual learners.
- The discipline or profession, and then the particular topic being learned.
- The particular role(s) of the teacher in teaching and supporting learning.

Again, each is relevant to the development and qualification of each teacher, and to what it means for them to be a good teacher.

## A model of learning

It is important that a teaching framework is underpinned by an explicit model of teaching and learning. A model by Kolb is widely acceptable and used: figure 1.

This model explores how we learn from experience, rather than through being taught. For this reasons it is valuable to guide the planning of courses, of teaching and of learning.

### 3. Purposes for teaching

It is useful to be explicit about the purposes for teaching.

It is important that learners:

1. Understand, accept and value both the learning goals

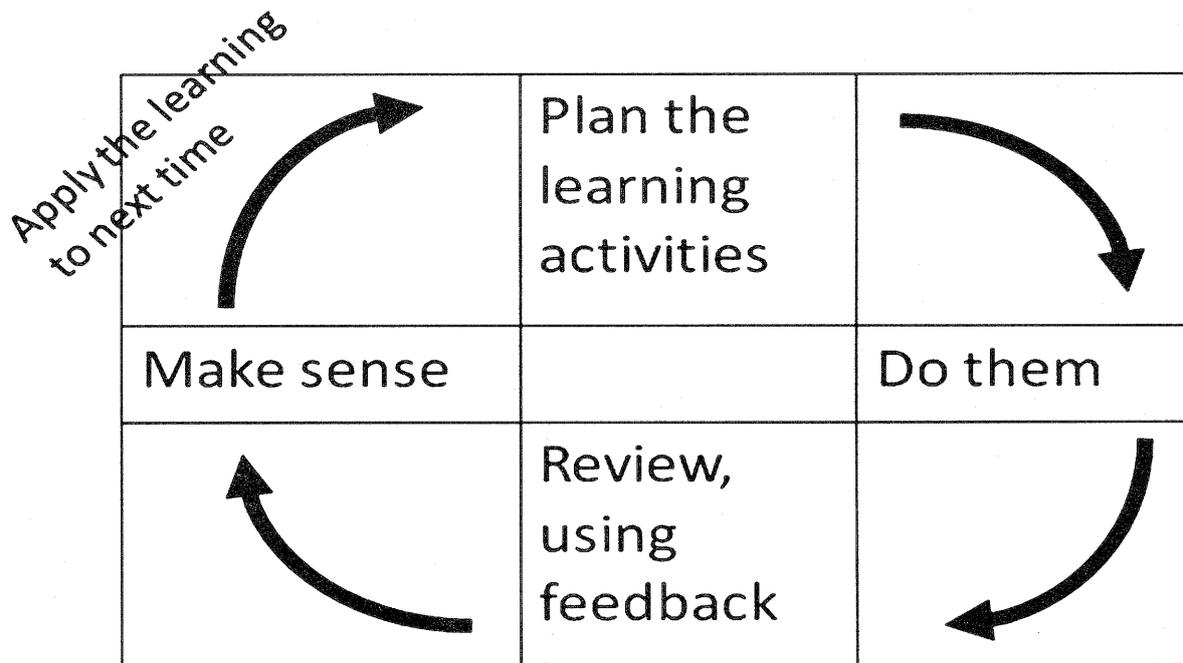


figure1: Kolb's model of teaching and learning

and the learning and teaching methods

2. Undertake appropriate activities to achieve their learning
3. Know their progress in learning, and know what to do next
4. Review the effectiveness of their learning methods
5. Revise their learning approaches, perhaps also some of their goals for learning

Students are supported in all of these stages by teachers.

These learning activities take different forms in different subjects.

#### 4. The necessary knowledge

At a minimum, teachers need to know:

1. The capabilities and expectations of their learners
2. The subject being taught
3. Theory and practice related to the particular learning and teaching
4. Any professional, regional or national standards in the subjects
5. Relevant national, university and disciplinary codes and requirements, including quality assurance

It is important that teachers apply such knowledge to course design, teaching, assessment, etc. It is not enough simply to know these things.

#### 5. Underpinning principles, values, virtues;

commitments to, for example:

1. Scholarship; in the discipline, in designing educational processes, and in teaching and assessment
2. University educational philosophy
3. Respect for and co-operation with colleagues, learners
4. Working with diversity and promoting inclusivity
5. Continued reflection on and improvement of practice
6. Enthusiasm for the discipline and for learning
7. The proper use of professional autonomy and of the power inherent in the roles of teacher and assessor

These are not beliefs to be espoused. They are virtues, which are visibly present in a good teacher's practice

#### 6. The competences or capabilities of a teacher

Teachers need at least these abilities: to

1. Plan programmes, learning outcomes, learning methods and ways to support learning
2. Support learners in their learning activities (teach)
3. Ensure learners receive and understand feedback, and where appropriate marks and grades
4. Help learners to review both their learning and the teaching they receive
5. Help learners to develop new learning approaches
6. Develop new teaching approaches

Training should help new teachers to develop these competences, underpinned by the knowledge and values.

All teachers should show how they do these things in their

work.

### Implementing the Niigata teaching standards framework

There may be merit in:

1. Faculties and subjects each providing their own interpretation of the framework
2. Training new staff in relation to the framework
3. Self- and peer-assessing through a portfolio in which staff show how they meet the standards framework
4. Senior staff also producing a teaching portfolio

There may also be merit in:

5. These processes being supported by central and faculty-based academic development
6. Using the framework for continuing professional development
7. Rewarding and recognising success
8. Thereby celebrating the proven quality of Niigata University teaching

### Benefits of the Niigata teaching standards framework

1. It enables teaching in higher education to be a profession, either part of or alongside the profession or discipline that we research, practice and teach
2. It enables us to provide evidence and proof of our teaching ability
3. It helps to value teaching alongside research
4. It helps us to retain our professional and academic autonomy
5. It makes it harder for government and management to impose inappropriate external standards on our work
6. It helps the University to compete successfully for good students and staff

7. Professionalising university teaching is an international movement, of which Japanese higher education may wish to be a part

### Conclusion

Niigata University is very well placed, through its teaching framework, to rapidly develop an enhanced reputation for the quality of its teaching.

I am very grateful for the hospitality shown to me by many colleagues at the University during my visit in May 2009.

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November 2009

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