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Principal Lecturer to Principal Fellow: on cloud nine with a few clouds in between

Dr Heather Prince

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Dr Heather Prince is Associate Professor of Outdoor and Environmental Education/Principal Lecturer at University of Cumbria. In this post she talks about her journey to becoming a [Principal Fellow of the HEA \(PFHEA\)](#), and the sense of achievement she felt when she was finally awarded PFHEA.

I was on cloud nine when I found out that I had been awarded the status of Principal Fellow. I felt honoured to have been recognised for my institutional, national and international achievements in teaching and in the support of learning but it was not an easy journey.

I am the first PFHEA in my institution and was supported and encouraged at the [University of Cumbria](#), a university that is less than ten years old where teaching and learning, alongside research and practice, is at the heart of all that we do. I feel, and have always felt, that it is important to celebrate excellent teaching and to contribute to the processes that support students in their learning. I have long been a strong advocate of the HEA and unlike many Fellows, as I have progressed through my career I have used its supportive and rigorous framework for achieving Fellowship, Senior Fellowship and now Principal Fellowship. I've also seen it as really important to encourage others to seek Fellowship (and have even [written](#) about it!)

So where were the 'clouds'? Well, my academic background is in the non-traditional subject area of [Outdoor Studies](#) and I have spent many years helping to establish this as an [academic discipline with a research base](#). I believe that teaching should be creative, innovative and inspiring so that learners benefit from pedagogy which addresses their needs, interests and aspirations in terms of inclusivity, employability and professional practice. Each student should be enabled to find a pathway through learning which not only prepares the individual for lifelong learning and employment, but also enables personal maturation. It is the teaching of these meta-skills and their recognition and manifestation that is so important in higher education. I'm also just a Principal Lecturer (now also an Associate Professor in teaching and learning) so I had a considerable challenge in evidencing cross-institutional impact. One of the silver linings was that I had been involved in a number of new initiatives in the university as well as taking up external (examination and consultancy) roles. I aim to motivate and influence others using situational and agile leadership and that involves taking risks, progressing from an outcome focus through mentoring and coaching, with a participative and reflexive style.

A dark cloud loomed when I found out that I had not been successful on my first submission. It had taken much time with many iterations. I had an external mentor but it was difficult to judge the level of expectation without any prior applications at that level from my workplace. However, I was encouraged by a member of staff from another institution who is familiar with my work and who had just been awarded PFHEA himself and I had feedback from my first application. After a bit of a meltdown (condensation from the cloud?), I saw the opportunity for resubmission as a chance for renewed and deeper reflection (a key to all levels of Fellowship) and a positive learning experience that would help my institution and myself. My main question to myself was, "What significant impact and influence have I had across my institution, nationally and internationally and how can I evidence it?"

There's nothing like the opportunity of departure for an expedition to focus the mind (good thinking time but not great for writing!). I spent a lot more time thinking and reflecting but then I sat down and wrote my resubmission. No more iterations other than adjusting the word count to fit the web-based portfolio. I am a determined individual but I also have learned more about the importance of reflection and reflexivity.

Every cloud has a silver lining!

What level of risk do you need to take and accept for significant change in teaching and learning?

Blog work area:

[Accreditation, Recognition and Reward](#)

From HEA blog - See more at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/blog/principal-lecturer-principal-fellow-cloud-nine-few-clouds-between#sthash.R9VmFRB5.dpuf>