**Transcript of an interview with Michele Raithby, Colleges of Human and Health Sciences, March 2019 about Why she sought HEA Senior Fellowship recognition.**

Soundcloud link to interview: <https://soundcloud.com/user-320469767/why-i-applied-for-hea-senior-fellowship>

**Michele –** I’m Michele. My title is Associate Professor of Social Work, I work on the pre-qualifying BSc and MSc Social Work programmes and I first came to full time social work education after a career as a qualified social worker and doing other things as well. I did a PhD and then went to Nottingham Trent University and that was 20 years ago. So I was 10 years at Nottingham Trent University which is one of the post 1992 universities; and I’m half-Welsh (half-laugh☺) and when an opportunity came up to come back to Swansea (in a very different kind of working environment), I took that chance, so I’ve been at Swansea for 10 years now coming up this year.

**Louise -** I think you already had Fellowship recognition previously through some other means. So, you’ve recently gained recognition as a Senior Fellow so why did you apply for that?

**Michele -** It really was a logical progression really. I’d done my postgraduate certificate in higher education at Nottingham Trent, I’d brought that with me and, as part of that, I’d made the application for Fellowship of the HEA. And so, I felt that I’d gained a lot more experience really, and a lot more thinking time and doing time whilst at Swansea and lots of different opportunities had opened themselves and I felt that Senior Fellowship really was a very valuable thing to do to help me continue to think about my practice in learning and teaching and also place it within a wider context of higher education and so it really was the next logical stage to go to.

**Louise** - In applying for Senior Fellow, Michele, what do you think are the key criterion for applying for Fellowship?

**Michele** – I think thinking about the impact that you are making or have made both on students and on colleagues as well. So it’s just not about your own experience and your own process of continuous learning, but its also about thinking wider than that, so that aspect of impact and strategic thinking as well is very important. I want to be able to contribute beyond the immediate classroom. When I first came into higher education and social work education, my immediate concern was **that** class I was going to be working with **that** day and that’s where all my anxieties focused as well and the sweaty palms on the door knob as I went in and that initial scare when they write everything down that you say and you think ‘don’t write it down, I don’t know anything’ and then you get beyond that obviously. It’s also about well how does my thinking about learning and teaching, has it evolved, how does it continue to evolve to meet the needs and the changing needs of students today because we’re working with such diverse group of students.

And where does my learning and teaching fit in with the ideas of other people as well, not just at Swansea but in the wider sector of HE, including internationally.

**Louise -** What did you get for yourself of that process of getting the Senior Fellowship recognition and aligning your practice to the UK Professional Standards Framework?

**Michele –** Well it really does stimulate you to think in the context that you wouldn’t otherwise necessarily think. To think about how much you do have to draw on, and help consolidate your practice but also look forward as well. Because you can’t just rely on your past experiences and your own experiences of your own education. You’ve got to keep moving, well at least not sideways (laughs), try to keep moving forward and the application, both for Fellowship (because I see other peoples applications for fellowship) but my own application for Senior Fellowship it did help me try and piece those bits of the jigsaw together to see the experience of learning and teaching, what I brought to it, what I still needed to learn, where things had gone well, where things didn’t go so well and what I could learn from that.

And I see that its not an end point, these are all really starting points, and points on the way of your progress in your job. So it helps you think not just what you’re doing but why you are doing it as well as how you’re doing it. And that’s the aid to help you reflect on it further.

**Louise** – you talked a little bit there about seeing it as an ongoing journey, an ongoing development. What I wanted to ask is then obviously you gained Fellowship recognition, 10 years ago, and then Senior Fellow now. You’re quite a new Senior Fellow, so what kinds of things have you been doing to keep good standing, which is an expectation that you don’t just gain Fellowship you’re expected to continue to work or operate at the same category that you’ve got recognition for. So, tell me some of the things you’ve done for Senior Fellow.

**Michele­** - as you’ve said, I am “newly-minted” as a Senior Fellow and actually the process of application has brought me into close contact with SALT for example, so part of that impact on colleagues has been putting myself forward to be an assessor of other peoples’ applications both at Senior now and previously at fellowship level.

And acting as mentor in that wider community and other bits and pieces, video for the PGcert and things like that and the Open Door teaching programme as well, I see it as a community of interest, and also within my team, immediate team and the inter-professional links that we’ve got, I think the keeping in good standing, is not setting myself up as a model, but having that discussion with other colleagues who may be at different points in the career. Some with a lot more experience than me, some who may be relatively new to teaching as well.

So, I’ve been developing as well as informal, “well just have a sit down and sort of chat over this”, but more formal mentoring opportunities within the team as well and the peer observation processes etc. And keeping plugged in as well to the ongoing research and new initiatives that are happening because one of the things for example that we want to do within the team is completely revamp our curriculum. So that involves a lot of thinking about, “well what are the principles that we want to operate; what are the core values that everything else will stem from? What do we want our students to look like when they have gone through our qualifying courses; what kinds of social workers would we aspire for them to be”?

**Louise** - What have you found for yourself about Open Door?

**Michele** – Yes, the Open Door teaching programme where you offer across the university for people to sign up if they want to come along and observe a particular teaching session so it’s about identifying what might be aspects of the particular sessions that you’re offering that might be distinctive or illustrate a particular approach and then people are free to come along. So, I’ve had a couple of takers for that so far, including somebody from a completely different discipline and we work with fairly small numbers and have small group work and they were working in a bioscience discipline with maybe a 100 students, so it was comparing the different approaches that could be taken so again that wider discussion among a community of interest.

**Louise** - You alluded to a little bit about the focus on your revalidation. How do you thinks it’s changed, this ‘having Fellowship’ about you think about educating learners?

**Michele** - I think there’s been a much longer process for me moving away from thinking that my role was of imparting knowledge, just doing the little screw-top heads and pouring it in to people – to being more far more student-centred. Things flow from that.

Gaining more knowledge about the process of curriculum development as well, some of the nuts and bolts has been very important and applying for the Senior Fellowship, it linked in to what we were already doing but it also made me think more about it - I’m going to have to do that in more detail. It stimulates my more general interest in the way that higher education works and can work better so it’s also led me involvement in other revalidation panels which are forthcoming as well so it’s interesting insight to be…

We did our revalidation last year. It’s a bit like poacher and gamekeeper from being on the receiving end. But seeing it from both sides. Actually the ways that I think they work best. I’ve seen them done well which I think really is a constructive dialogue and critical friends and I’ve seen it done very badly, where it’s been done in quite an adversarial way, and people had felt very fearful about the process. You think, that’s no good for the teams involved and ultimately it’s not good, why would that produce good outcomes for students either?

**Louise** – in terms of what you think about the UK Professional Standards as a Framework, lots of debates about the 3 elements of it, but is there any particular one of the Areas of Activities, Core Knowledge or Professional Values that you particularly attune to?

**Michele** - I think of them as the “What, Why and How?”

Some of them are descriptions about what you do and then it goes into more detail as to how you do them but I think the most fundamental things is Why you do them? Because I think that drives the other two, so the ones that I think are the starting point for me (and I would say this probably because of our education programme is about social work), but it’s the values and I particularly like V1, (why not start at the beginning!) the one about respecting individual learners and diverse learning communities. Our students are a diverse community; they have lots of changing and different interests now, they are paying our wages to a certain extent, and they have expectations of us that perhaps we had different expectations. Thinking from our own experiences of education. And we don’t know sometimes what the differences are until we ask the students and actually have that dialogue and we have to be ready to be surprised and challenged on that and not get defensive about it. Because in the end we all want, we hope, the same thing.

I like V3 as well about using evidence-informed approaches and outcomes from research etc. Because that is something what I liked about Swansea that I had more opportunities to do was actually to undertake research. But it’s not the research that I think my experience is of my own education when I was 18 where the professors did the research and their doors were never open because they didn’t see students ever, ever, ever! You just saw these dusty figures retreating down a corridor. You certainly didn’t hear about it in the teaching then. And I think now the expectation, quite rightly is that if you’re doing research its not just to peers in obscurely written journals, this needs to be conveyed with students as well.

**Louise** – for somebody who wasn’t sure about applying, what words of encouragement could you offer?

**Michele** – it i ot just to peers in ob you'ts nbout coming to Swanseadards Frameworkteamts, it is sometimes about thinsg taht ing idnivdiual les rewarding in itself, its intrinsically rewarding, but you will be supported and I think there’s a really, really good infrastructure of support and information and clarity about the tasks that you need to do. It will help you place your own work in the wider educational context and theoretical context and read stuff about that. And it’s a process obviously valued by the University. But you’ll also learn a lot from others (for that read: pinch their ideas ☺) to some extent but that is part of the dialogue. Oh, “they are doing it that way, that’s really good, maybe I can try that?” and maybe it’ll work, maybe it won’t work for you. But I think in itself it is something to be proud of so I really would encourage people to apply and undertake it and take advantage of that discussion with other people and all the support and input you can get.

**Louise -** So, any particular top tips to putting it together?

**Michele** - **Do take the opportunities for the mentoring that’s on offer**. The application it’s about you but it’s not a job application, it’s not just a list of your tip top achievements, it is sometimes about saying where things that didn’t go to plan and that’s some of the essence of being reflective as well so it’s OK to be honest.

**It can’t be done overnight**. It’s an iterative process. **So I think a top tip is “Leave yourself plenty of time”**, because the deadlines can seem an awfully long way away when you first start and if you don’t pay heed to some of the timescales and the milestones that are given to you, then suddenly its upon you and it isn’t just something that you just draw together necessarily overnight or it could be very stressful if you’re left with just a very short period of time.

**Think about the UKPSF but incorporate them in a meaningful way**, in a way that’s meaningful to a reader. By that I mean don’t just do a scattergun approach like you’ve just chucked a firework into a tin of paint and they just land where they land, and don’t just give them as a list either. Actually integrate them within your narrative so that’s its clear actually where it’s relevant and where you think THAT they apply and it clear to the reader for that.

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