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SEDA recognition of programmes: overseas developments

Stephen Bostock, chair of the SEDA PDF Committee

SEDA's Professional Development Framework for programme recognition is ten years old and continues to develop. The number of named awards has grown to 16, and the number of programs currently recognised, and registered for recognition, grows steadily. One interesting feature has been the recent growth in interest overseas. The SEDA scheme is unique not only in the UK but internationally, and academic developers have been searching it out. The last two overseas programmes to be recognised were at Windsor University, Ontario, Canada, and at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It has been interesting to see how the PDF applies to universities in very different educational cultures.

Windsor University is the most southerly university in Canada, sitting amongst the Great Lakes, over the river from Detroit USA. The Center for Teaching and Learning is lead by Dr Alan Wright, a leading figure in the Canadian equivalent of SEDA, the Society for Teaching and Learning in HE. I had met Alan at a couple of STLHE conferences, the last one at Windsor, and he later contacted me about SEDA recognition of a new program they were developing for their faculty (which ultimately developed into three, linked programs).

It might have been possible to mentor the program development and the preparation for recognition at a distance, but the process was helped enormously by Windsor offering me one of their Visiting Fellowships, to cover the costs of me spending three weeks with them over Easter 2009. For some of that time I worked with Alan and his colleagues Mike Potter and Erika Kustra to develop three linked programs, each awarding an academic diploma. The first two were subsequently recognised for the PDF awards Supporting Learning, and Learning, Teaching and Assessing. Some of the components of the programs already existed, others were created for the purpose. The process of developing the programs was helped considerably by using the requirements of the awards (the SEDA values, the core developmental outcomes and the specialist outcomes) as a framework (hence the name!) One aspect of the discussions involved translating between Canadian and British English! This proved helpful in checking that everyone thoroughly understood what was intended and required. Alan and I gave a presentation at ICED2010 on this international collaboration in program recognition¹.

The recognition of the two programs was done at a distance by two recognisers in the UK, who were provided with some context information by me. (The third program's recognition is planned.) These were the first SEDA-recognised programs in North America. We hope that they serve as an example and a catalyst for STLHE, for example, to consider creating their own recognition scheme for programs for new teaching faculty, perhaps based on the SEDA PDF. As academic developers we are pleased to give it away!

King Saud University is the oldest and largest of the 37 universities in Saudi Arabia, ranked first in the country and 247th in the 2009 THE global rankings, but with ambitions to rise up the rankings quickly. With over 100,000 students it has separate campuses for male and female students, and for faculty and faculty development activities. The absolute separation of genders gave some pause for thought when the university registered for recognition, but it is not explicitly against the SEDA values so we decided to go ahead.

Mentoring was done by email by Jessica Claridge, and the recognition was done on site during a one-week visit. There would normally be two recognisers anyway, for an institution new to SEDA PDF, but in this case they had to be a male and a female to be able to meet

both courses – only females are allowed on the female campus. After one postponement due to difficulties in obtaining visas, Vicky Davies and I visited Riyadh in December 2010. We were warmly welcomed by the Dean for Skills Development, Dr Mohamed AL-Sudairi. His Deanship is relatively new and it has made rapid progress in establishing faculty development activities, using expertise from visiting academics from North America and Australasia. We were given excellent facilities and, although the course is delivered in Arabic, everything we needed was translated into English. When we visited, the third year of the program had recently ended and we were able to read the participants' teaching portfolios, some of which were in English. We made a number of suggestions for improving aspects of assessment in the program, which were readily agreed to and put in place. The program achieved recognition for the award Learning, Teaching and Assessing, the first PDF recognition in the Arab World.

The gender separation is inevitably interesting for a Westerner. The Deanship's headquarters is on the male campus and on one occasion two female staff developers who deliver the program on the female campus joined a meeting of all the academic developers ('trainers'), in traditional dress. We were given a guided tour of the male campus, next to which a new female campus is being built to the same standard and size. For one day Vicky visited the existing female campus and had a relaxed time with the faculty there in an all-female environment. Meanwhile, I performed the same activities on the male campus, in parallel.

(In the evenings, we had time to visit downtown Riyadh, with its impressive skyscrapers, and also an archaeological dig on the city outskirts. One evening we visited the old central market; all the stalls closed briefly for evening prayers, when everyone went to the central mosque.)

It is fair to say that the developmental side of PDF mentoring and recognition was appreciated in both these, very different, universities. It demonstrates the wide, if not universal, developmental value of the PDF awards and the recognition proves that universities in such different cultures found them valuable for program development, and worth the trouble and expense of being validated against.

We are always looking for new recognisers for the scheme, so if you have any involvement with a SEDA recognised programme, or experience of other forms of validation, we will be pleased to hear from you. All recognisers are trained every two years. We can't promise you foreign travel, but it is a possibility!

ⁱ Stephen J. Bostock and W. Alan Wright 2010 Accreditation of faculty initial professional -an international collaboration <http://www.keele.org.uk/docs/UTCBostockWrightICED2010-v5-slides.pdf>