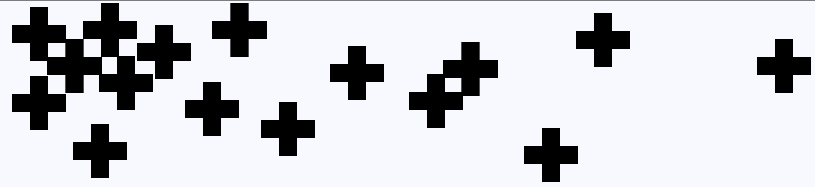




# **Exploring and re-imagining professional standards and recognitions in the changing landscape of tertiary education**

Alex Walker PFHEA NTF

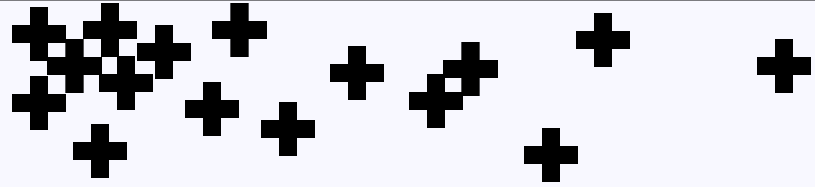
Head of Academic Practice Development, UHI



In this session we will explore:

- The changing landscape of the Scotland education sector towards a tertiary identity
- The Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges and Professional Standards Framework (PSF) for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023
- Our role as strategic leaders in an evolving tertiary landscape





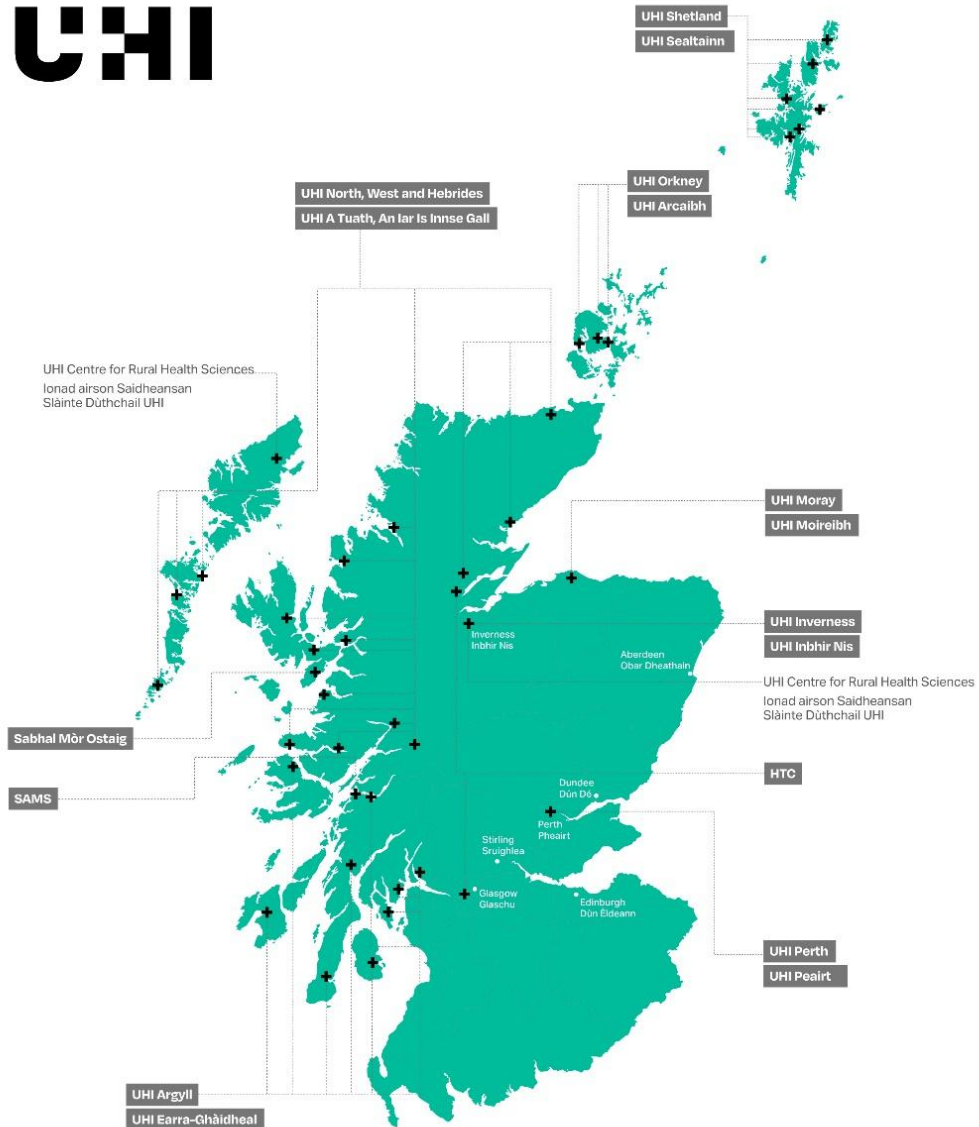
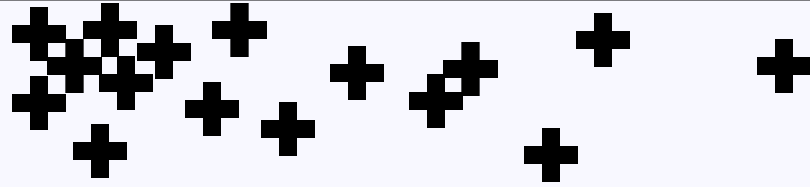
# Tertiary Identity

Does your professional identity most align to:

- Further Education?
- Higher Education?
- Tertiary Education?

In your context what does tertiary mean to you?



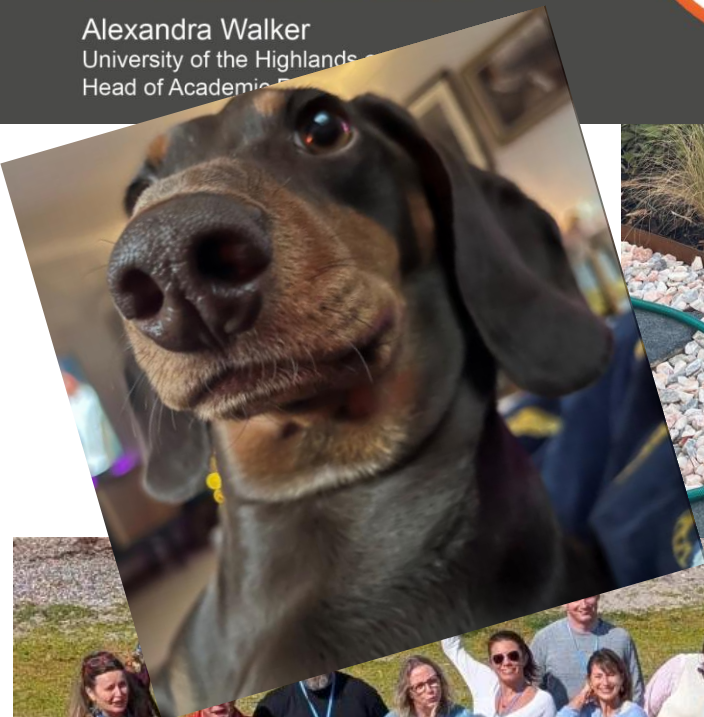


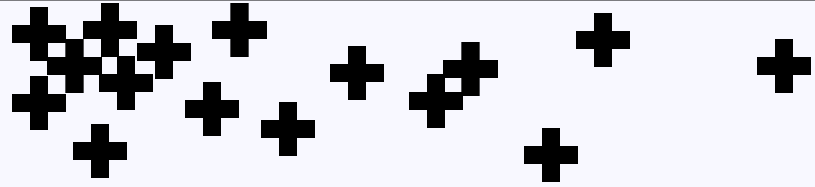
- Federated tertiary university
- 10 Academic Partners
- 40 plus campuses and local learning centres
- circa 10,000 HE students
- circa 25,000 FE students
- On-campus, blended, networked and online programmes of study





Alexandra Walker  
University of the Highlands  
Head of Academic

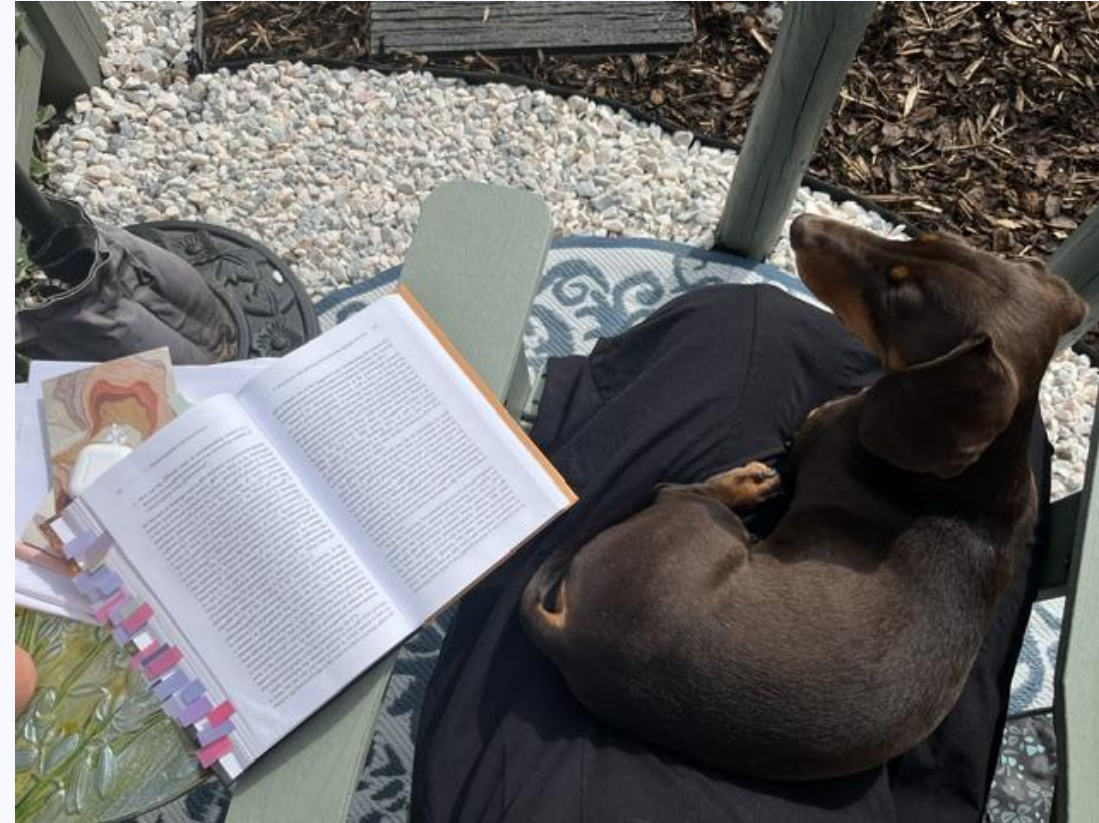




PhD:

Exploring the potential for an integrated set of professional standards for practitioners working in tertiary education contexts and institutions:

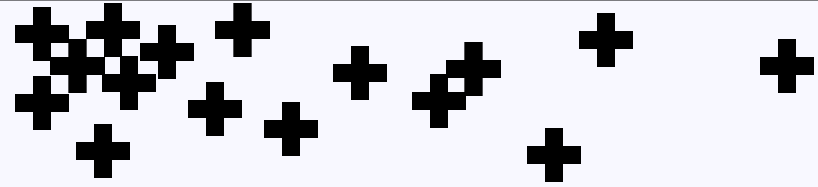
A phenomenographic investigation



Alex Walker: Academic Learning and Development: you, me and my PhD – Personal reflections and considerations on tertiary academic development and on my own learning journey.



What is tertiary?



## Tertiary: Scottish Funding Council: “post-16 or post-secondary level education that is typically undertaken at college or university”.

“Although the term tertiary education is being used with increasing frequency, **the people proposing this way forward rarely define what they mean by the term**”

(Morris, 2024 p123).

This is also reflected by Hazelkorn (2023) who states that many countries are reframing policy discussion around tertiary education but poses the question of **‘what is meant by a tertiary education system?’** and **‘what do we want to achieve?’**

“What we are still lacking, however, is a clear consensus about what, exactly, tertiary education is...”

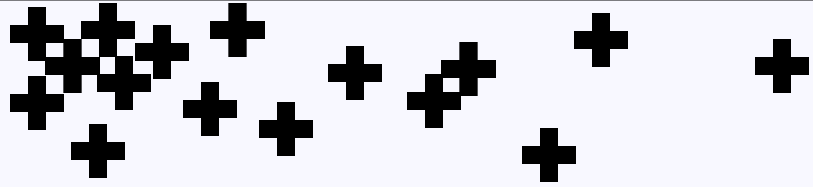
(Limb & Phoenix 2024)

**“Care needs to be taken that we are not simply engaged in ‘tertiary-washing’ – in other words, calling something tertiary which is really about university-level education”.**

(Hazelkorn, E. and Locke, W. 2023 p124)



Image by [chanwit whanset](#) from [Pixabay](#)



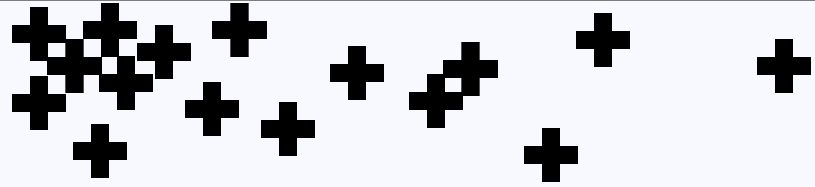
# 2020: UHI Learning and Teaching Conference

*“what ‘being tertiary’ means is singularly ill defined within UHI.”*

*“whilst we can demonstrate clearly the benefits and value the tertiary UHI model has had for individual learners, communities, employers and the region, it is much harder to define a governance model and organisational model that is equally fully tertiary, when we have to work within **separate quality** and **funding systems** and differently defined and nationally agreed **professional standards**, contract frameworks and career structures in the college and university sectors.”*

*Vice-Principal (Tertiary) for UHI: LTA Blog [What do we mean by ‘tertiary’ and why does it matter](#)*





## UHI Strategic Plan 2030

“UHI is a globally recognised tertiary institution and we are proud to celebrate our exceptional partnership of colleges, internationally recognised research institutions and specialist teaching centres.”

### About UHI

UHI is an integrated university combining further and higher education — the only institution of its kind in Scotland, and one of few in Europe.

We are more than a college and more than a traditional university: a diverse, flexible partnership, rooted in our communities and driven by their needs.

Our network of colleges, specialist teaching centres and internationally recognised research institutes delivers supported, flexible learning from access level to PhD.

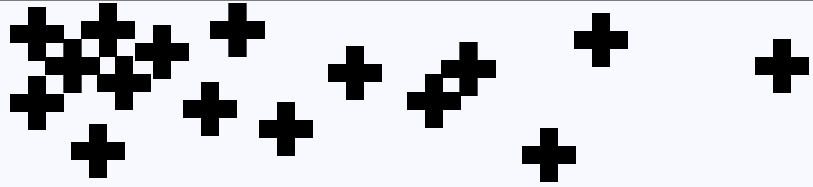
With 48 locations across the Highlands and Islands, Moray and Perthshire, we offer education that's local in focus and global in reach.

Students are at the heart of everything we do. Their success is our measure.

Through world-class teaching, research and knowledge exchange, UHI connects our regions to the world — and brings the world to our regions.

A scenic landscape of a Scottish coastline. The foreground shows a grassy hillside leading down to a rocky shore. The sea is a deep blue, and the sky is bright with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box at the bottom of the image.

**Scotland Education: Sector move  
towards a tertiary identity**

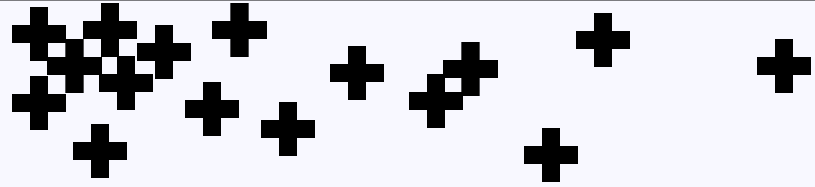


# Quality

In 2020 the Scottish funding Council were tasked by Scottish Government Ministers to review tertiary education and research and make recommendations to ensure good quality and sustainable research and education in Scotland.

The Coherence and Sustainability: a review of tertiary education and research (published June 2021)

The review acknowledged that external scrutiny of quality as a segregated approach, did not provide the oversight needed for an integrated **tertiary** system. Scotland's new **Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF)** was launched in colleges and universities in July 2024 with a focus on quality assurance and enhancement (Scottish Funding Council).



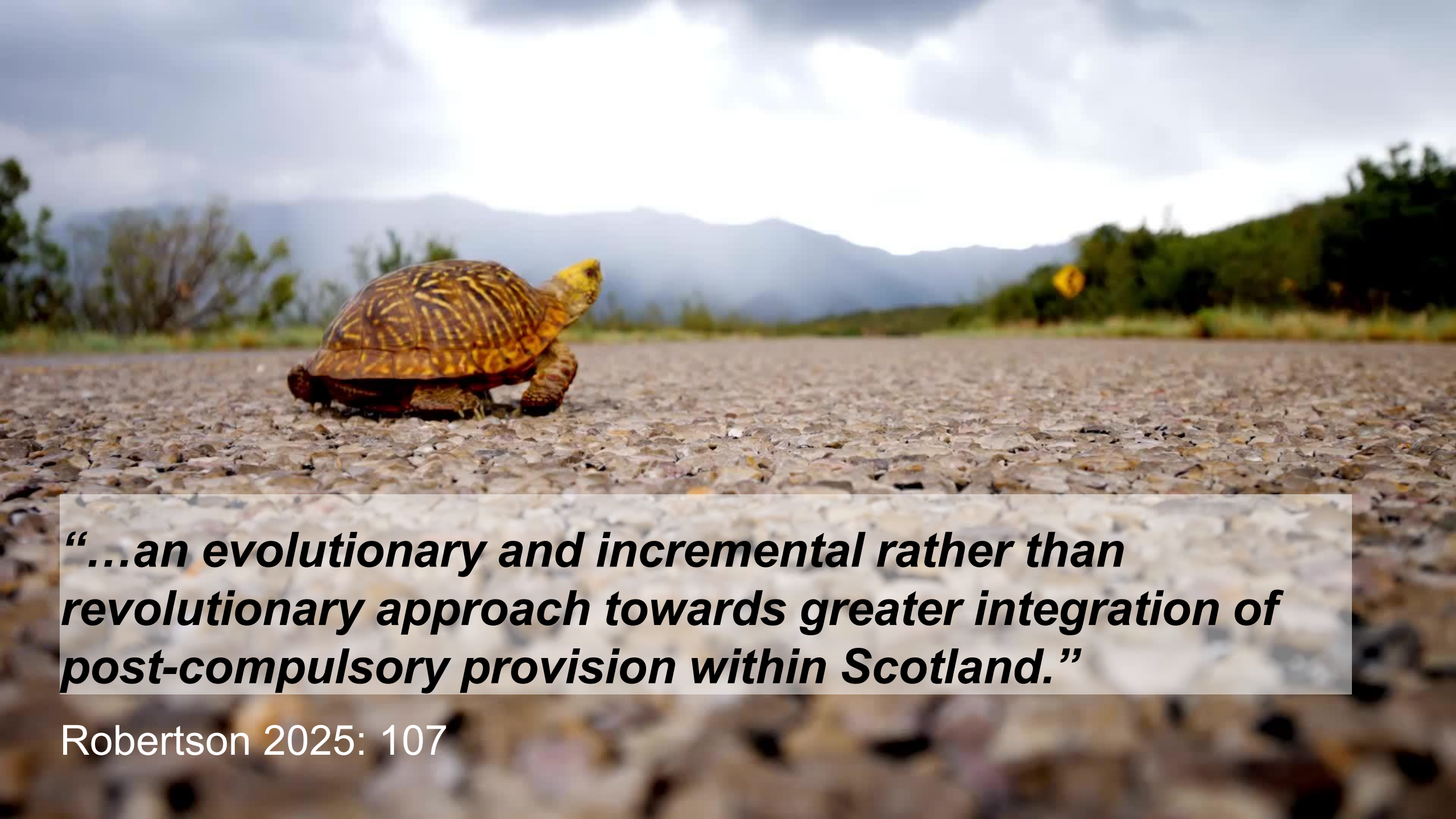
# Funding

The independent review commissioned by Scottish Government Ministers in 2022 of the skills delivery landscape. The Withers Review: published on 7 June 2023.

James Withers recommended:

*“[establishing] a new single funding body, which brings together responsibility for all post-school learning and training funding functions from SFC (Scottish Funding Council), SDS (Skills Development Scotland) and, potentially, the SAAS (Student Awards Agency Scotland).”*

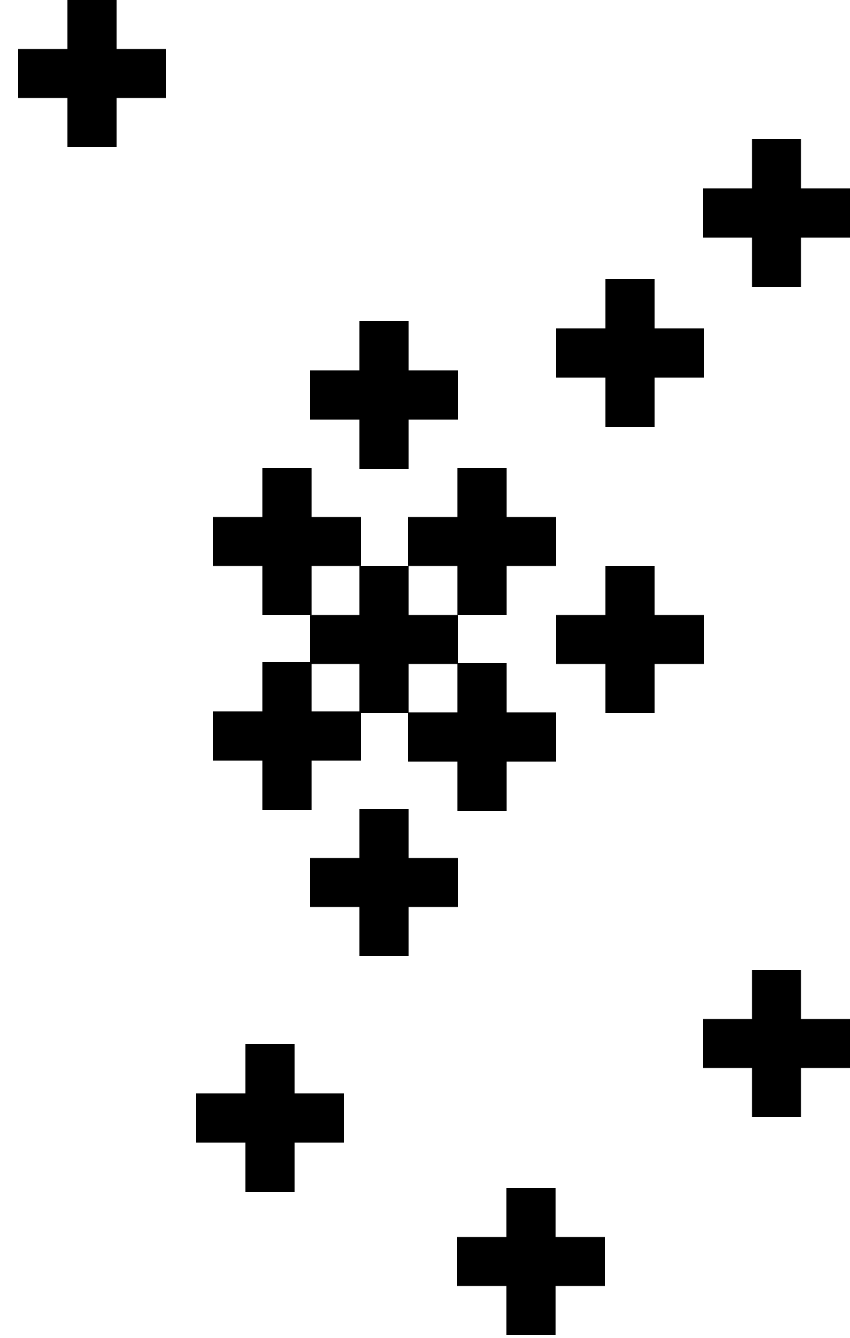
*SFC Response “We look forward to engaging with Scottish Government Ministers, partner agencies, and stakeholders on future reform decisions, as we continue to deliver for tertiary education and skills, research and innovation across Scotland.”*

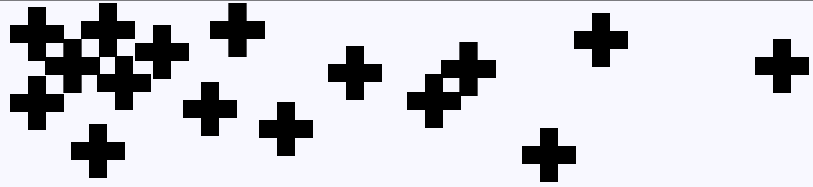


***“...an evolutionary and incremental rather than revolutionary approach towards greater integration of post-compulsory provision within Scotland.”***

Robertson 2025: 107

# Academic Development

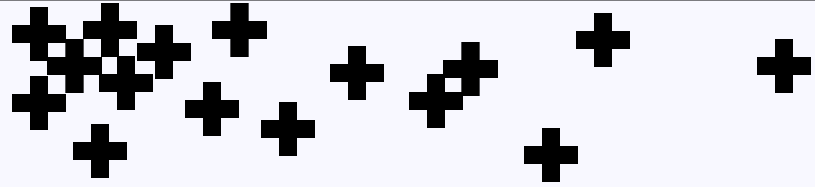




## My context as an academic developer and strategic leader at UHI

Considering professional development in our tertiary context including through:

- Events and conferences
- Mentoring scheme
- Professional recognition and awards
- Collaborative groups

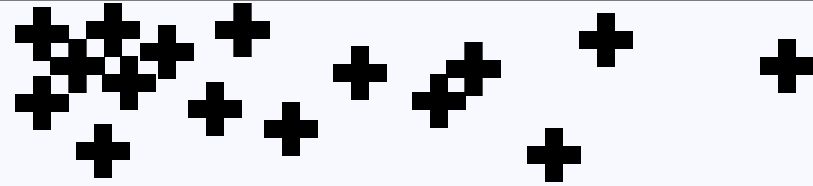


# Communities of tertiary practice: a tertiary voice

- UHI Mentoring Scheme Advocates and mentors
- Learning, Teaching and Student Experience conference organising group
- UHI Staff Development Group
- LTA Connect Series: sharing practice- internal and external voices and tertiary frameworks including the Sparqs Student Learning Experience (SLE) model



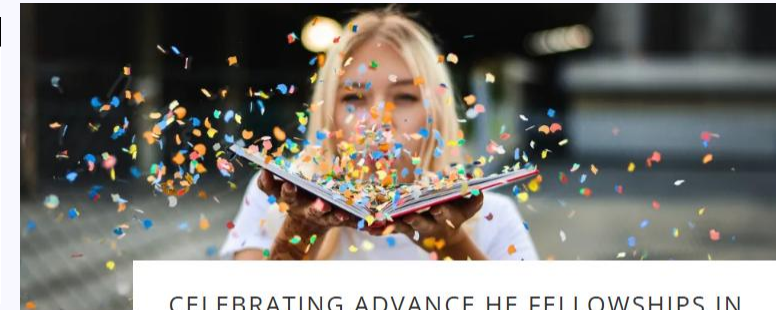
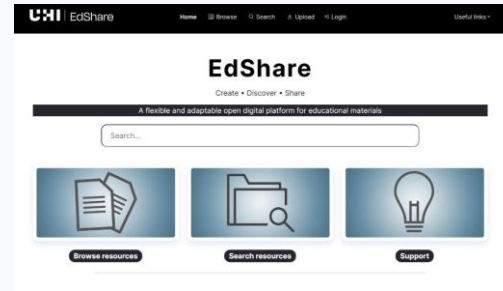
UHI Mentors and facilitators on the annual mentoring residential



# Inclusive initiatives:

## Expanding our recognition offering beyond HE:

- Certified Membership of ALT (CMALT)
- SEDA: Coaching and Mentoring
- General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Update
- Sharing good practice across tertiary through Advance HE Fellowship
- Championing professional services
- Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Conference



CELEBRATING ADVANCE HE FELLOWSHIPS IN THE UHI LIBRARY SERVICES

June 11, 2025  
Leave a comment

Image attribution: Image by Paul Stachowiak from Pixabay Celebration This blog focuses on and celebrates four colleagues who work in the UHI Library Service who have successfully completed the UHI ALPINE Portfolio Route to achieve Advance HE Senior Fellowship, Fellowship or Associate Fellowship. A short interview with Carol Hart, Library and LRC Manager at UHI Inverness, Mark Stirling, ... Continue reading

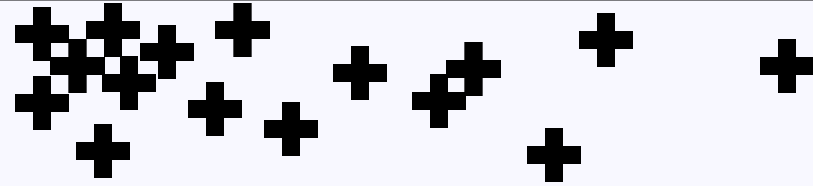
<https://ltauhi.wordpress.com/2025/06/11/celebrating-advance-he-fellowships-in-uhi-library-services/>



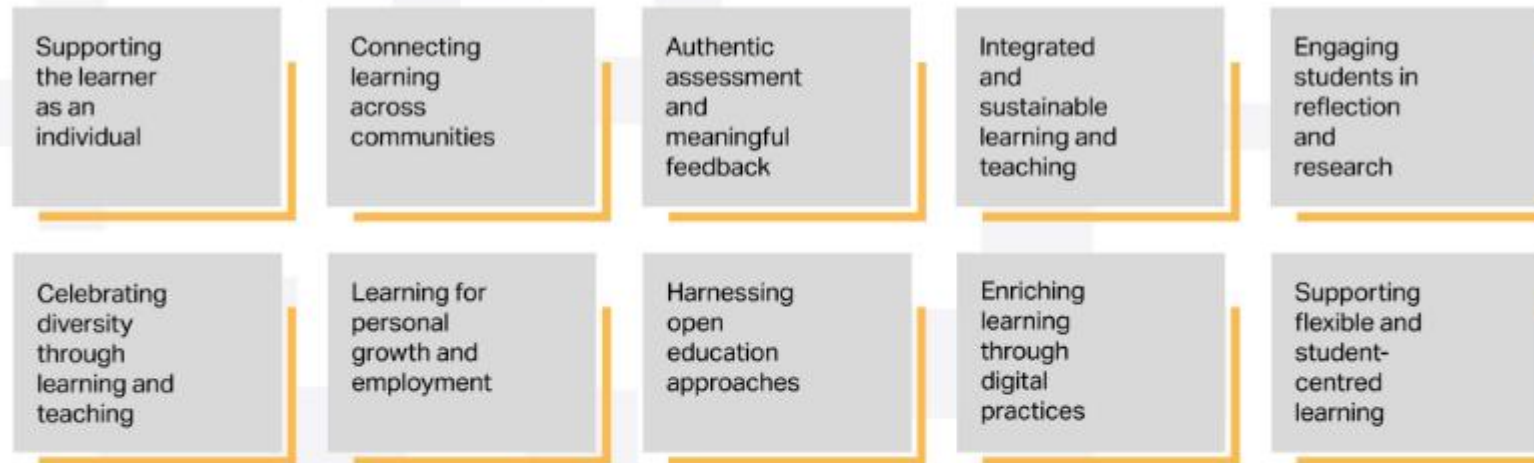
Vic Boyd, Head of LTA and Deirdre Anne Murphy City of Glasgow College



Carol Hart and Richard Hughes collecting the award on behalf of the LPG (photo provided by Advance HE)



## Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values



The **LTE Values** define the aspects or dimensions of learning and teaching that all of our students should experience during their time with UHI. The **Enabling Practices** define the activities that colleagues with learning and teaching responsibilities should engage in to inform their own professional practice and to contribute to the wider enhancement of learning and teaching.

 [www.uhi.ac.uk/ltes](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/ltes)

### Enabling practices



### Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy Values



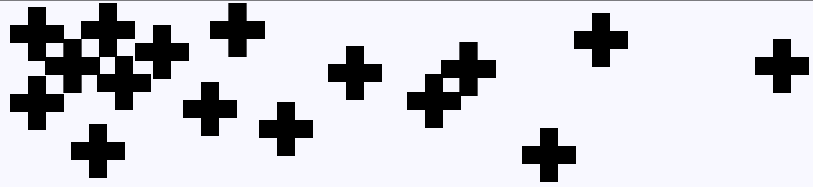
### Advance HE Professional Standards Framework

- + V1 respect individual learners and diverse groups of learners
- + K4 appropriate use of digital and/or other technologies, and resources for learning
- + A2 teach and/or support learning through appropriate approaches and environments

### Professional Standard's for Scotland's Colleges

- + 2.2.6 Understands how to meet the diverse needs of students.
- + 1.1.4 Commits to equality and diversity, and promotes inclusiveness, trust and fairness.
- + 1.2.3 Promotes, enables and empowers students to engage and achieve in learning in order to maximise their potential.
- + 3.3.5 Adopts creative approaches to the embedding of appropriate digital technologies for effective planning, delivery and assessment of learning.
- + 2.3.3 Understands how to embed appropriate digital technology

[lta-ltes.pdf](#)



## Sector

### Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice

[Current](#) [Archives](#) [Announcements](#) [About](#) ▾

- Call for proposals for a JPAAP Special Issue focusing on our **Tertiary landscape**.
- SHED Event: Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Development across the Scottish **Tertiary Sector**.





**Professional  
Standards at  
UHI**

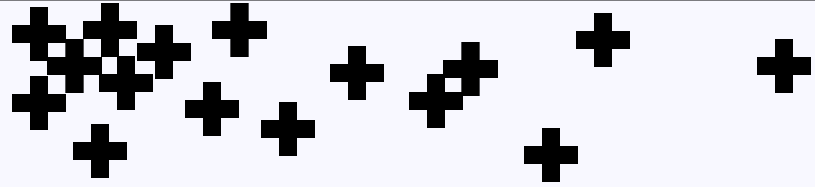
# Professionalism: Professional recognitions and standards

General Teaching Council  
for Scotland's Colleges  
(GTCS) and Professional  
Standards for Lecturers in  
Scotland's Colleges

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/professional-standards-for-lecturers-scotland-colleges.pdf>

Advance HE Fellowships  
and Professional  
Standards Framework  
(PSF)

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/professional-standards-framework-teaching-and-supporting-learning-higher-education-0>



Unlike FE, which is often more focused on vocational identity, in HE, educators will often seek qualifications first and focus on a research career before moving into teaching responsibilities. (Bryce et al. 2018).

**“Teaching in FE and HE in Scotland therefore often have complex professional roles and identities relating to their different communities of practice”**

(Bryce et al. 2018 p657)

- In Scotland's colleges 26% of student are studying HE level (SFC 2024a).
- In Scotland there are 19 universities and 25 colleges that deliver tertiary education Scotland.

(Data from Robertson article 2025)

**Commonalities** of the Professional  
Standards for Lecturers in  
Scotland's College and Professional  
Standards Framework for teaching  
supporting learning in higher  
education

# Purpose

## Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges:

- Developing **critically reflective and evaluative practitioners**;
- **Underpinning professional teaching qualifications** for lecturers in Scotland's colleges;
- **Supporting professional development**; and
- Contributing to **ongoing developments across the sector**.

## The Professional Standards Framework:

- Fosters **critically evaluative, reflective and evidence-informed approaches** to teaching and/or supporting learning in diverse academic or professional settings;
- Provides a **structure through which individuals and institutions may gain recognition** for approaches that support high-quality learning;
- Enables individuals and institutions to review and enhance practices in teaching and/or supporting learning, providing a focus for initial and **continuing professional development**;
- Provides a structure to support institutions and individuals in advancing higher education practices to meet the **evolving needs of learners and society, such as acting in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**.

# Three dimensions



THE STANDARDS ARE DEVELOPED AROUND THREE INTERDEPENDENT ELEMENTS WHICH DESCRIBE OUR:



**PROFESSIONAL  
VALUES**



**PROFESSIONAL  
KNOWLEDGE  
AND UNDERSTANDING**



**PROFESSIONAL  
PRACTICE**

## Commonality between the standards: just a taster...

### Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's College:

Understands how to meet the **diverse needs of students**.

Commits to **equality and diversity, and promotes inclusiveness**, trust and fairness.

Understands how to **support a student** to take the next steps in their learning journey.

Continuously and actively engages with up-to-date **research** and developments in learning, teaching and assessment to **inform practice**.

Political, social and economic drivers.

Critical reflective and **collaborative** practice in learning and teaching.

Understands the strategies required to support learning in a range of **learning environments**.

### The Professional Standards Framework:

Respect individual learners and **diverse groups of learners**.

Promote engagement in learning and **equity of opportunity** for all to reach their potential

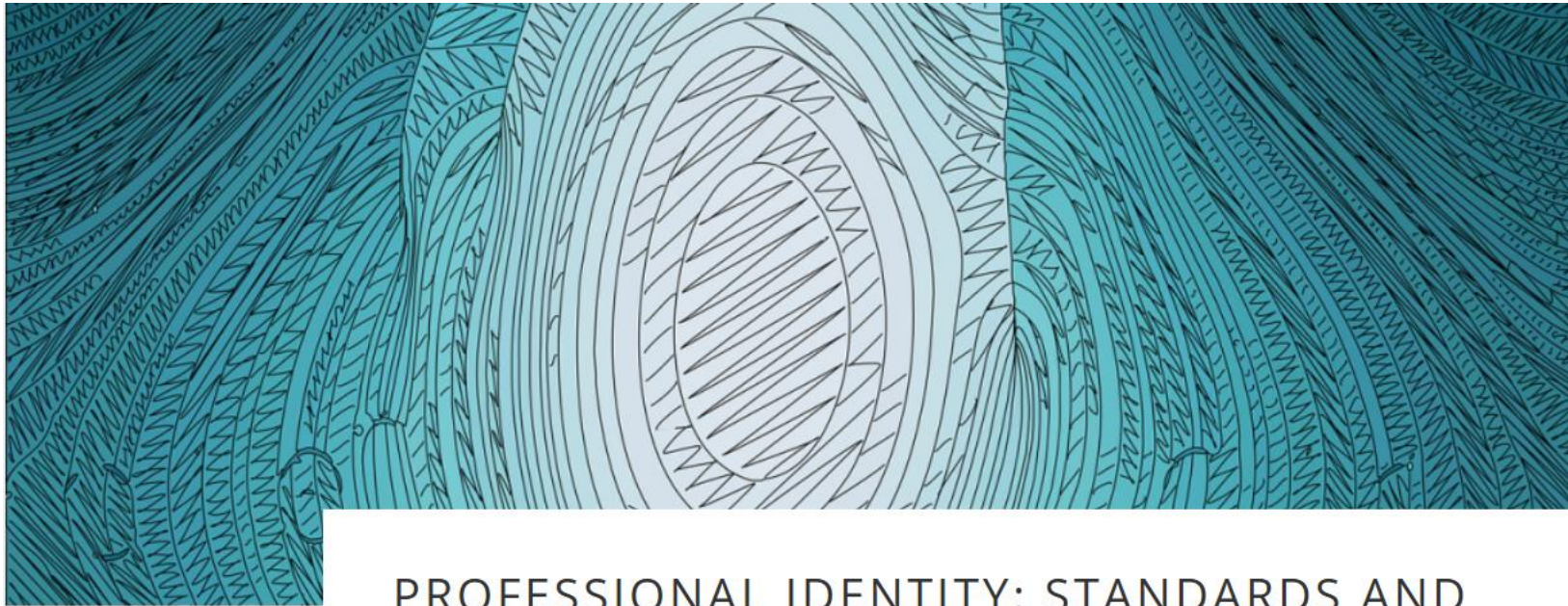
**Support and guide** learners.

use scholarship, or **research**, or professional learning, or other **evidence-informed approaches** as a basis for effective practice.

Respond to the **wider context** in which higher education operates, recognising implications for practice.

**Collaborate** with others to enhance practice.

Teach and/or support learning through appropriate approaches and **environments**



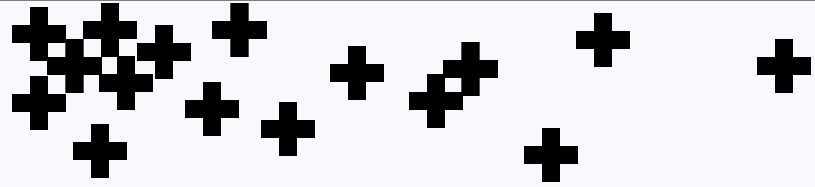
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: STANDARDS AND  
RECOGNITIONS IN THE CHANGING  
LANDSCAPE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION: RE-  
IMAGINING GTCS AND ADVANCE  
HE FELLOWSHIPS

[Blog: Professional Identity: Standards and recognitions in the changing landscape of tertiary education: re-imagining GTCS and Advance HE Fellowships – LTA@UHI](#)

[gtcs-psf-06-23.pdf](#): Mapping

# Re-imagining standards (testing the concept)

<b>Professional commitment and values</b>	<p>Commits and can demonstrate meeting the needs of individual learners and diverse groups of learners.</p> <p>Commits and promotes equality and diversity and empowers learners to reach their potential through support and guidance.</p> <p>Commits to evidence informed approaches and development of subject and pedagogic knowledge contextualised to individual's context and relevant across tertiary levels of study and learners needs.</p> <p>Commits to student/learner, peer, and partner collaboration enabling co-creation, wellbeing, and inclusivity.</p>
<b>Professional understanding and development of knowledge</b>	<p>Understands and responds to internal and external drivers, policies and contexts that influence tertiary curriculum and practice.</p> <p>Understands and promotes quality enhancement and assurance within their practice and to enhance the learner experience.</p> <p>Understands and utilises digital technologies and resources to enhance practice, learner experience and belonging.</p> <p>Understands the importance of and demonstrates a commitment to continuing professional development to enhance own and others practice and positively impact the learner experience.</p>
<b>Professional Practice and Activity</b>	<p>Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes and/or curriculum that champion tertiary transitions through and beyond education.</p> <p>Utilises learning environments to deliver and/or support learning that is appropriate for the subject and level of study.</p> <p>Engages in critical reflection, student and/or peer feedback and evaluation of own practice and emerging practices to embrace change and practice development.</p> <p>Design and deliver assessment and feedback approaches that are relevant to the subject and future employment and are inclusive and equitable.</p>



1. Views and perceptions of lecturers or practitioners who engage with the Advance HE PSF or GTCS Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges
2. Perceptions on where the two frameworks overlap and or complement one another in providing standards and guidance on how to teach and/or support learning in tertiary education settings.
3. Any areas of current or emerging practice relevant to teaching and/or supporting learning in tertiary education settings that are either absent or underrepresented across the two standards of GTCS and PSF.
4. Perceptions on the viability, challenges and opportunities that would be associated with the potential of having a single integrated set of national professional standards for practitioners who teach or support learning in tertiary institutions or wider tertiary education contexts.

**As HE strategic leaders, in your context what role do you have in this evolving tertiary landscape?**

***This might be in relation to policy or strategy, student experience, course marking, education, research and/or training and academic development.***

**Would there be value to having one standards framework for learning and teaching in tertiary education in Scotland (and beyond)?**

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“Care needs to be taken that we are not simply engaged in ‘tertiary-washing’ – in other words, calling something tertiary which is really about university-level education” (Hazelkorn, E. and Locke, W. 2023 p124).



# References

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**CHI**

Thank you  
Tapadh leibh