**The power of fellowship for student officers – Conor Naughton**

**Introduction**

Being a student officer at a Students’ Union is a vast and varied role unlike any other job in the world. Your role embodies countless aspects of teaching and learning, you are a voice on senior boards and committees and hold a valuable key to informing and sharing good practice that can have a positive impact on students experience. You also take part in more continued professional development in a short time than many will in a lifetime.

All of this outstanding experience makes any student officer a prime candidate for AdvanceHEs fellowship that recognises your expertise with the practice, impact and leadership of teaching and learning. In my final year as President of Nottingham Trent Students’ Union, I embarked on the journey to be awarded the status of associate fellow of the higher education academy or AFHEA for short.

As I reached the closing stages of my time as an officer, fellowship recognition helped improve the direction of my work, gave me much-needed space to reflect on my achievements to date and ultimately played a role in me securing a post officer job that I love. I firmly believe the journey to fellowship can make a fantastic contribution to any student officer's work and future career.

**Knowledge is power**

As a student officer sitting at the top table with seasoned and highly decorated academics and higher education experts can be an intimidating and daunting experience. Proving you understand that detailed policy paper on the teaching excellence framework or degree outcomes can feel difficult at times.

You have the knowledge and expertise you know it, I know it and the majority of those around the table know it. Nevertheless, there will always be some who meet your requests and ideas with resistance. I was grateful that during my two years as President of Nottingham Trent Students’ Union from 2020 - 2022 my thoughts and ideas were always valued by those I worked with. However, this won’t be the case for officers at every institution.

Despite my expertise, occasionally the doubt of do you belong in the room or does your opinion carry the same weight would surface. In completing my fellowship submission it quite literally validated that my expertise was valued and made an impact on students teaching and learning. This empowered me to be bold in the questions I asked, projects I led and made me a better officer as a result. When it comes to those who do not value the contribution you make I found having an internationally recognised acknowledgement of my commitment to improving the learning experience mapped by the UK professional standards framework ([UKPSF](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/ukpsf)) went a long way to building a bridge to collaboration and partnership with those colleagues who had been more resistant to begin with.

**Turbocharge your next role**

From a career and personal perspective applying for fellowship gives you a moment to pause on the often fun and sometimes difficult mayhem that is the day-to-day of life at a Students’ Union and gives you the chance to reflect on your work as an officer. From the new course representation system you introduced, the peer mentoring scheme you launched or the student submission you created for an Office for Students consultation. You have the space to do something very few officers do, stop, reflect and importantly celebrate the impact your tireless work has had on improving teaching and learning for the students you represent.

As a result of these reflections, you become skilled at translating that constant work as an officer into tangible examples with clear measures and successes outlined. For me, when the time came to start applying for jobs after my time as an officer I had clear examples to deploy into applications that mapped to key areas of the higher education landscape. Additionally, it gives you an accreditation that is regularly listed on person specifications as a desirable that few young professionals have giving you an edge when searching for that dream role in higher education.

**Ready to take your own journey?**

At Nottingham Trent University I was grateful to be supported by a fantastic dedicated team as part of the Trent institute for learning and teaching who guided me every step of the way, helped me translate my practice into words via workshops and conversations with colleagues across disciplines and gave me the motivation I needed to see my application over the finish line. I would recommend anyone starting out to have a look at what your own institution offers.

If you are unsure where to begin AdvanceHE have an absolutely superb suite of resources available for anyone considering starting the journey to fellowship that also includes a handy tool to find the category of fellowship that is best suited to you that can all be [found here](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship).

So, if you are a student officer reading this at the start of your journey or getting ready for a second term with an eye to what comes next I would urge you to take a moment to consider the power of fellowship to your work as an officer and to the career that comes next.

**About The Author**

Conor Naughton is an educational developer at Nottingham Trent University who specialises in student engagement, transition and course design. He was President of Nottingham Trent Students’ Union from 2020 – 2022 and is passionate about student voice, representation and the power of social mobility. You can follow him on Twitter [@ConorNaughton\_](https://twitter.com/ConorNaughton_) or on LinkedIn [Conorn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/conorn/)