

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NORTHERN IRELAND)**  
**THRESHOLD SCHEME**

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1. **THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME:  
INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This handbook is for all those lecturers in Northern Ireland who are eligible to apply for threshold assessment under the new Further Education Threshold Scheme arrangements.
- 1.2 Information about these arrangements has already been sent to colleges.
- 1.3 The Further Education (NI) Threshold Scheme sets lecturers eligible for threshold assessment a new challenge, but it also offers them a new opportunity.
- 1.4 It requires those who decide to apply to review what they have done as lecturers within the past three years against the four agreed threshold criteria, and to select evidence from their practice to show that they have been working broadly at these standards for the past two to three years.
- 1.5 It also gives eligible lecturers an opportunity to demonstrate that they have been meeting the needs of their students effectively and, having done so, to receive a tangible reward for all that they have achieved (and helped their students to achieve) in their classrooms.

The purpose of this handbook is two-fold.

- 1.6 It aims, first, to provide clear and accurate information about the Further Education (NI) Threshold Scheme, what it involves, what the roles and responsibilities of the various participants are and how and where further information can be found.
- 1.7 It also aims to provide lecturers, principals, line managers and others with guidance to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities and, by doing so, to make Further Education Threshold Scheme a success.

## **2. FURTHER EDUCATION THRESHOLD SCHEME : THE CONTEXT**

2.1 The Horisk Report (March 2000) examined the position of lecturers' salaries including the correlation with comparable sectors. The Report's findings highlighted the following issues, which must be addressed, if further education is to deliver effectively and efficiently the services required by Government, business, industry and the community living and working in Northern Ireland.

2.2 In summary, those **key issues** are:

- reversing the decline in FE Lecturers' pay when compared with that for teachers in schools by raising the baseline level of pay increases which have applied to teachers over the period 1991 – 1999
- securing improved management of curriculum delivery and rewarding excellence by creating a structure which allows rewards for carrying additional responsibility and also creates significant opportunities for promotion and progression for lecturing staff
- acknowledging the value of teaching by introducing a system of salary progression which is transparent, objectively based and accountable
- making the sector more attractive to new entrants by raising starting salaries and reducing the length of salary scales
- creating a system of promoted posts based upon a common grading which provides equal pay for like work or work of equal value across the sector and which seeks to address the under-representation of women in senior posts.

2.3 The Further Education Threshold Scheme gives lecturers an opportunity to reflect on their practice, but also a chance to use it to provide evidence to show that they are effectively meeting the needs of their students and to gain a tangible reward for their efforts as a result.

2.4 It is consistent with established good practice in performance review and professional development and will be a key element in the wider programme of changes designed to raise the status and professionalism of lecturing in Northern Ireland.

3. **THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME :**  
**AIMS AND PURPOSES**

3.1 The **key objectives** of the threshold arrangements are:

- to enable lecturers to obtain appropriate professional, academic and vocational qualifications, and to undertake continuous professional development
- to enhance standards by improving students' rates of participation, retention, achievement and progress
- to create a context that allows colleges to enhance their responsiveness to the needs of industry and the community
- to recognise and reward high calibre teaching and learning as well as effective mentoring, learning innovation and leadership
- to improve the recruitment, retention, motivation and morale of lecturers
- to improve career structures.

3.2 The Lecturers' Negotiating Committee recognises that any new salary scheme must reflect the following **underlying principles**:

- enhancing the performance of the sector, particularly with reference to classroom delivery and outcomes
- enhancing flexibility in responding to the needs of industry and the wider community at both college and sector level
- continued professional development of lecturers monitored through a process of appraisal
- the continuation of Regional Collective Bargaining arrangements for the determination of pay and conditions of employment.

3.3 **Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland will:**

- give recognition to the high calibre of Northern Ireland lecturers and allow those with relevant experience to gain due reward for their professionalism in the classroom;
- be based on four standards which reflect the significant characteristics of effective lecturers

- a) effective professional development
  - b) teaching and assessment of learning
  - c) contribution to raising standards through student achievement
  - d) supporting and working with other staff
- focus on the individual lecturer rather than the college;
  - promote equality of opportunity throughout the profession.

**3.4 Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland should:**

- contribute to the overall process of improving the quality of teaching and learning in colleges;
- support the further development of lecturers as reflective professionals and thereby contribute to the growth of self-evaluating colleges;
- build on the sound practice already established in the early professional development of lecturers.

**4. THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME :  
THE PROCESS OUTLINED**

- 4.1 The Further Education (NI) Threshold Scheme is designed to help eligible lecturers review their classroom practice against agreed standards and select evidence from that practice which demonstrates that they meet the four agreed threshold criteria.
- 4.2 The evidence which eligible lecturers present on their threshold application forms will be assessed by an Assessment Panel at their college who will be able to take into account, when making their judgement, not only the wider knowledge they have of each lecturer but also their understanding of the contexts in which they work.
- 4.3 The initial assessments of threshold application forms made by the panel will then be referred to the college principal who will advise the lecturer of the outcome. Unsuccessful applicants are entitled to appeal under the Appeals Procedure.

**THE PROCESS OUTLINED - ELIGIBILITY**

- 4.4 The first stage of the process involves identifying the lecturers in each college who are eligible to apply for threshold assessment.

To be eligible to apply for a Threshold Point under these arrangements, a lecturer shall:-

- be party to the contract for full time permanent lecturers in colleges, apart from principals and vice-principals
- have completed at 1 September, of the academic year in respect to which the application is being made, at least 1 year at the maximum of his/her appropriate existing salary scale, under his/her current contract of employment, and
- be in post on 1 September of that academic year.

Queries about eligibility should be referred, in the first instance, to the principal or his/her nominee. Where the question of the lecturers' eligibility to apply is in dispute the matter may be referred for determination to the Threshold Application Review Body, which is a sub-committee of the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee.

This applies to all lecturers on a full-time lecturers contract, including full time and associate lecturers

Lecturers working in seconded arrangements are also eligible.

- 4.5 The threshold criteria set out below are based on recognised professional principles and teaching attributes, and build on the competence which all lecturers are expected to have reached by the end of their early professional development. Assessment against the criteria will be based on evidence of performance with a principal focus on teaching and learning.
- 4.6 The criteria cover four areas, all of which relate directly or indirectly to classroom teaching: professional development; teaching and assessment of learning; contribution to raising standards through student achievement; and supporting and working with other staff.

### **The Application Process**

- 4.7 The deadline for receipt of applications in each year is 1<sup>st</sup> December. No application will be assessed prior to this date.
- 4.8 Any lecturer who does wish to apply is required to follow the process as outlined below.
- 4.9 The lecturer completes the appropriate application form, providing statements of evidence against the selection and quality criteria.
- 4.10 The lecturer submits the application form to the principal's office by the closing date.
- 4.11 The lecturer will be advised of the outcome not later than 31<sup>st</sup> January (following the closing date for applications). If the applicant is successful he/she will be offered progression to the Threshold Point with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September of the same academic year. If the applicant is not successful he/she may elect to invoke the Appeals Procedure.

### **The Assessment Process**

- 4.12 The principal appoints a panel of at least two persons. The composition of the Assessment Panel may include members of the Governing Body or members of staff senior to the applicant. The Assessment Panel will consider the application against the selection and quality criteria and make a decision based on the information provided. Where the assessment Panel requires clarification or background information to support the evidence on the application form the Panel will interview the applicant and if appropriate the applicant's line manager so as to enable those persons to submit supporting evidence, verbal or documentary to clarify the original application. They will communicate this decision to the principal in writing within 5 working days of the decision being made and this decision will be communicated to the lecturer within 5 working days, but not later than 31<sup>st</sup> January.
- 4.13 Lecturers are required to meet each criterion relevant to their job. It is the responsibility of the Panel to assess the evidence, and to give a judgement as to whether the criteria have been met. The Panel should note areas for further development, whether or not the applicant has met the

criteria. If requested, the Assessment Panel will state in writing the grounds upon which it found an application to be unsuccessful.

- 4.14 The assessment should be based on the evidence summarised on the application form and should use information from classroom observation and existing college monitoring systems to put the evidence into context. Lecturers doing a good job in challenging circumstances should be given full credit.
- 4.15 The Assessment Panel may need to request input from the team leader or other senior member of staff who has a more direct overview of the applicant's work, to help form this judgement.
- 4.16 The Panel may wish to speak to the individual member of staff or line manager to verify evidence cited in the application or carry out classroom visits.
- 4.17 All individuals involved in the assessment process must not act unfairly to any individual and, in particular, must not unlawfully discriminate on the grounds of a person's gender, religion, political opinion, sexual orientation, marital status, race, disability, or trade union activities.

### **The Appeals Procedure**

- 4.18 Unsuccessful applicants are entitled to lodge an appeal, in writing, stating the grounds for the appeal.
- 4.19 An Appeals Committee will be established which will comprise two members of Management and two representatives of staff, from within the college. The principal appoints two members of Management who may include members of the Governing Body or members of staff who must be senior to the appellant. Members for Staff Side will be drawn in sequence from a list drawn up by Staff Side. Potential conflict of interests should be avoided. Members of the Appeals Committee should not have been involved in the assessment process. The Committee will meet, within 15 working days of the appeal being notified, to assess the appeal. The Appellant shall have the right to appear in person before the Appeal Committee and to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague. The Appellant shall have the right to provide clarification or background information to support the evidence already presented on the application, which should not be completely new or additional. It may be necessary to interview both the members of the Assessment Panel involved in the original assessment and/or the Appellants line manager.
- 4.20 In the event that the Committee does not achieve a majority decision, the Committee will meet again under the chairmanship of a neutral Chair (to be drawn from a list of 12 people from within the Further Education sector - six nominated by Management Side and six by Staff Side). The evidence presented to the original panel will be re-assessed (no new evidence may be added at this stage). If a majority decision is still not reached,



the Chair will exercise a casting vote. This decision is binding on both parties to the appeal.

- 4.21 The Appeals Committee will communicate this decision to the principal in writing within 5 working days of the decision being made. The principal, or his/her nominee, will communicate this decision to the appellant within 5 working days.

### **UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS**

- 4.22 Eligible lecturers whose threshold applications are unsuccessful shall, upon request, be provided with a written statement of specific areas of performance to be addressed in order to meet threshold requirements and that the college shall make available to such a lecturer reasonable facilities and resources to enable that lecturer to improve their performance. They will be entitled to make a further application for the threshold assessment in the following year(s).

### **THE PROCESS OUTLINED - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 4.23 For the Further Education (NI) Threshold Scheme to work effectively, lecturers, principals and Assessment Panels, Appeals Committees and neutral Chairpersons need to have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and to work closely together. A summary of the main roles and responsibilities follows.

### **LECTURERS**

- 4.24 No lecturer is required to apply for threshold assessment.

#### **Lecturers who wish to consider whether or not to make application, will need to**

- attend the college—based briefings which principals are responsible for providing
- study the application packs which will be provided for them
- check that they are eligible to apply

#### **4.25 Eligible lecturers who decide to apply for threshold assessment will need to**

- select the evidence from their practice within the past 3 years which they believe demonstrates that they have worked at the four agreed threshold standards
- complete the application form and submit it to the principals office before the closing date.

## PRINCIPALS and ASSESSMENT PANELS

- 4.26 Principals have both the legal and the professional responsibility for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the colleges they lead and for ensuring that there are proper standards of professional performance.
- 4.27 Principals are supported by Senior Managers and Governors who will be appointed to Assessment Panels, as they are best placed to make the initial judgments of threshold applications submitted by eligible lecturers in their colleges.
- 4.28 **In order to be able to carry out this responsibility effectively, principals and others involved in assessment will need to**
- attend the training conferences organised by RTU
  - provide and attend in-college briefings and advice for all eligible lecturers
  - allow sufficient time for lecturers to complete their application forms
  - receive completed applications by an agreed date
  - assess the completed applications against the four agreed threshold standards, taking into account the wider knowledge they have of each applicant and the context in which he or she works
  - complete the assessment panel's declaration on each application form
  - make arrangements for appeals.

## **APPEALS COMMITTEE MEMBERS (NOMINATED BY LECTURERS' NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE)**

4.29 Appeals Committee members, appointed by both sides of the LNC, have an important role in the appeal process.

4.30 **In order to be able to carry out this responsibility effectively, they will need to**

- attend the training conferences organised by RTU
- attend in-college briefings and advice for all eligible lecturers
- assess the completed applications against the four agreed threshold standards, taking into account the wider knowledge they have of each appellant and the context in which he or she works.

## **COLLEGE GOVERNORS**

4.31 Governors may be appointed to Assessment Panels and/or Appeals Committees. Where a college appoints governors in such a capacity each governor should

- attend the training conferences organised by RTU
- provide and attend in-college briefings and advice for all eligible lecturers
- assess the completed applications against the four agreed threshold standards, taking into account the wider knowledge they have of each applicant and the context in which he or she works

4.32 The governors of each college will

- receive a report of the threshold assessment process in the college from the principal
- record in the minutes the outcomes of the process so far as the lecturers in their colleges are concerned.

## **NEUTRAL CHAIRPERSON**

4.33 The role of Neutral Chairperson is to adjudicate on appeals where an Appeal Panel cannot reach a majority decision. The Chairperson can exercise a casting vote which is binding on both parties to the appeal.

4.34 In order to carry out their responsibilities, the neutral chairpersons will need to

- attend the training conferences organised by RTU

- visit each of the colleges assigned to them
- discuss their approach to threshold assessment with the Appeals Committee
- examine completed threshold application forms in more detail
- verify the evidence submitted on the completed application forms, if necessary
- make a final decision about each application.

**5. THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME:  
THE CRITERIA**

**INTRODUCTION**

- 5.1 There are **four criteria** that lecturers eligible to apply for threshold assessment have to show themselves able to meet if they are to be successful.
- 5.2 Lecturers eligible to apply for threshold assessment must show themselves able to meet **ALL of the criteria relevant to their job**.
- 5.3 The **four threshold criteria in Northern Ireland** are:
- effective professional development
  - teaching and assessment of learning
  - contribution to raising standards through student achievement
  - supporting and working with other staff.
- 5.4 Each standard deals with a **different aspect of the work of a lecturer**, but, taken together, they reflect recognised professional principles and practice, and there is throughout a **strong emphasis on teaching and learning**.
- 5.5 When making application for threshold assessment, eligible lecturers will be expected to provide **evidence that they have worked at these four standards within the past three years** of their careers.

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME: MEETING THE THRESHOLD CRITERIA**

**PRESENTATION OF EVIDENCE**

- 5.6 Evidence presented on the threshold application form will normally be based on the lecturers work within the past three years. However, the lecturer may add information which he/she considers relevant to the application which would not normally have occurred within the past three years, such as a report by the Education and Training Inspectorate or having been involved in a curricular innovation.
- 5.7 For reasons of equality all evidence must be contained within the boundary/frame of the application form. Any application with information presented outside the boundary will be returned to the applicant. No supplementary material may be attached. The font for word-processed applications should not be less than size 10.
- 5.8 Lecturers should use the application form to give a concise summary of the evidence they think is relevant. The criteria are explained in these guidance notes and applicants should read them carefully before completing the form.



Applicants should be factual and concise. Practical 'prompts' for lecturers give advice on presentation and examples of the evidence that



might be used for each standard. Evidence presented against one standard may be relevant to other criteria. *Evidence should be relevant to your job, where you consider that a particular criterion is not directly relevant please provide an explanation as to why you believe this to be so on your application form.*

- 5.10 Evidence given should be open to verification. General monitoring and performance data should be available on a whole-college and, where available, Northern Ireland basis for lecturers to draw on. Lecturers are advised to ensure they have access to any key supporting material such as feedback from classroom observation, students' work, their own records or schemes of work and any other information sources relevant to their post. *Those lecturers whose primary function relates to institutional management should provide evidence directly related to their job.* This may be asked for in support of the application. No further information should be attached to the form.
- 5.11 The criteria are to be applied and assessed in the context in which the applicant works and the assessment is about the effectiveness of the lecturer in his or her own job.
- 5.12 The applicant is required to make a declaration that he/she is eligible for assessment and that the evidence on the form is accurate and can be verified. Applicants are asked to word-process or write legibly in black ink, and not use more than the space provided unless specified on the form. Applicants should keep a photocopy of their application form.

## **CRITERION I. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 5.13 This criterion requires evidence that lecturers are taking responsibility for their own professional development and use the outcomes to improve their teaching, students' learning and to make an active contribution to the policies and aspirations of the college.
- 5.14 **Eligible lecturers should demonstrate that they:**
- take responsibility for ongoing self-review and are aware of the importance of critical reflection in enhancing their professional practice
  - identify, through Performance Review and Professional Development scheme, or otherwise, areas in which they need to develop to meet college and personal development needs and have taken appropriate action to enhance their professional knowledge, expertise and skills, both as individuals and as team members, where appropriate
  - have acquired appropriate qualifications for subject specialisation for the teaching and learning role undertaken and acquired specific specialist qualifications.

### **Prompts for lecturers**

5.15 Professional development should be interpreted in its widest sense. It includes all the ways in which you personally have, over the past three years, pursued your own professional development inside and outside college and the ways in which you have contributed to the life of the college.

5.16 Potential sources of evidence may include:

- membership of internal/external working groups
- development/introduction of new initiatives
- co-ordination roles undertaken (e.g. subject area)
- relevant personal research
- observation of teaching or other learning/management activities
- pastoral responsibilities
- development of basic or Educational Learning Teaching skills as required to fulfil a college's strategic plan.

## **CRITERION II. TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING**

5.17 This criterion applies to those lecturers' whose main function is to deliver teaching and learning directly to students and requires evidence that lecturers consistently and effectively plan to meet students' individual learning needs using a range of appropriate strategies, which directly impact on teaching and learning.

5.18 **Eligible lecturers should demonstrate that they:**

- take responsibility for implementing curriculum development
- understand the range of factors that affect learning – social, emotional, psychological, cultural.
- take into account the need to set realistic but challenging goals which are shared with students
- take account of students' previous learning
- manage effectively and imaginatively a range of resources to support learning including, if appropriate, other adults within the college, e.g. Librarian, technical support
- use ICT effectively in supporting their teaching objectives. This should be considered in context of the lecturers' teaching programme, the level of training the lecturer has received and the access he/she has to equipment and software
- provide positive and targeted support for students with specific learning needs
- maintain high levels of behaviour and discipline, dealing promptly and effectively with unacceptable behaviour
- provide a positive and purposeful learning environment, e.g. appropriate rewards, celebration of students' work.

### **Prompts for lecturers**



5.19 Evidence, over the past three years, that you consistently and effectively plan

to meet students' individual learning needs using a range of appropriate learning and teaching strategies with effective monitoring and evaluation of students' learning may include:

- planning which indicates expected learning outcomes communicated to students
- planning which demonstrates professional reflection and evaluation
- planning which reflects a collegiate approach to teaching and learning
- planning which reflects a variety of teaching approaches and which employs a variety of resources
- lecturer observation reports
- planning the application of ICT
- students' work
- assignments regularly set and marked
- individual learning or training plans
- purposeful and positive marking in line with the college's assessment policy
- student assessment records
- reports and evidence of feedback to learners.

### **CRITERION III. CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING STANDARDS THROUGH STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

5.20 This criterion requires the Lecturer to provide evidence of effectiveness in relation to student achievement in light of relevant college and appropriate Northern Ireland information.

#### **5.21 Eligible lecturers should demonstrate that they:**

- are effective in contributing to raising standards by maintaining or if reasonably possible improving student participation, retention, achievements and progress in accordance with college strategic plans and sector wide objectives
- take account of the need to set realistic but challenging goals in their planning, which are shared with students
- manage effectively and imaginatively their teaching objectives. This should be considered in context of the job, the level of training received and access to equipment and software
- implement the college and sectoral policies on assessment and take account of college objectives, setting realistic and challenging objectives for improvement

5.22 The assessment panel is asked to make a professional judgement as to whether the progress made by the lecturer's students is at least within the range expected in the light of the local and regional context of the college.

5.23 Where available, evidence would be drawn from a wide variety of external and internal student data including:



- external examination results
- college-based assessment/test
- class-based assessment/tests
- course-work marks/grades
- records of achievement
- maintained or improved attendance rates
- maintained or improved retention rates.

### Prompts for Lecturers

5.24 Potential sources of evidence, over the past three years, may include

- records you have of the progress your students have made in a range of areas
- college tests or assessments which show prior attainment and progress achieved
- college-based assessments
- improvements in students' social and personal development
- how progress is monitored in line with college assessment policy;
- progress made;
- evaluation of progress;
- information on student retention rates from within your own college or across the sector;
- any particular factors you would wish to be taken into account.

5.25 In presenting evidence to demonstrate achievement, you can compare results/outcomes with the students' prior attainment. You are asked to present data that is representative of your students' achievements.

5.26 This information should, as far as possible, be:

- based on the students' levels of achievement/retention at the beginning and end of the chosen time period, which should be taken from the last 2-3 years in their teaching career;
- from 2 or 3 classes or groups where the applicant has been the main lecturer contributing to the students' progress over the time period in the subject(s) reviewed.

### **CRITERION IV. SUPPORTING AND WORKING WITH OTHER STAFF TO RAISE STANDARDS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING.**

5.27 Can provide evidence of supporting and working with other staff to raise standards in teaching and learning.

5.28 Eligible lecturers should demonstrate that they:

- have encouraged and supported others to raise standards in teaching and learning by participating in course team reviews and programme development

- can function effectively as members of college teams or sector-wide projects
- can establish and maintain constructive relationships with students and work colleagues
- are adaptable to curricular change and innovation and support other lecturers in adapting to changing circumstances.

### Prompts for lecturers

5.29 Evidence, over the past three years, that you have supported and worked with other staff to raise standards in teaching and learning may include

- supporting colleagues to raise standards in teaching and learning by participating in course teams, reviews and programme development;
- shared provision of information and professional support to colleagues;
- contributions made to the professional development of new lecturers;
- evidence of support for new staff or part-time staff will be particularly relevant

5.30 If you are a lecturer whose primary function relates to college management, you should provide evidence directly related to your job. Evidence may include;

- contribution towards college development plans;
- effectiveness in leadership and development of people;
- effectiveness in liaison with clients of the college.

## **6 THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR LECTURERS**

### **RULES AND PRINCIPLES**

- 6.1 For the application process to work smoothly and effectively, it is essential that certain basic rules and principles are not only understood by all those involved but also adhered to at every stage.
- 6.2 If these rules and principles are followed at each stage, the climate of trust that is so important to the success of the threshold process as a whole is much more likely to be developed and the process itself is much more likely to be worthwhile and productive.
- 6.3 These basic rules and principles deal with six key issues
- eligibility (see above)
  - equality of opportunity
  - confidentiality
  - professionalism
  - openness and transparency
  - sensitivity

### **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

- 6.4 Threshold assessment in Northern Ireland is open to all eligible lecturers, whatever their circumstances.
- 6.5 Those involved in the assessment process must not act unfairly to any individual or unlawfully discriminate against any applicant on the grounds of his or her gender, religion, political opinion, sexual orientation, marital status, race, disability or trade union activities.
- 6.6 No eligible lecturer must be **treated any less favourably** than any other eligible lecturer.
- 6.7 Threshold assessment is open to eligible lecturers working in **a variety of non-college settings**.
- 6.8 **Lecturers absent from college** due to maternity leave or long-term sick leave are also entitled to apply and their applications must be treated in the same way as those of lecturers remaining in that college.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

- 6.9 Each eligible lecturer's application should be treated with absolute confidence.
- 6.10 Application forms will only be seen by the principal of the college in which the lecturer works and by any member of the college involved on the Assessment Panel and/or Appeals Committee. The neutral Chairperson may also see the form.

## PROFESSIONALISM

- 6.11 Lecturers applying for threshold assessment are expected to behave professionally when completing their applications: they are expected not only to make a declaration that they are eligible for assessment but also to submit evidence in their application forms that is accurate and open to verification.
- 6.12 Assessment Panels are responsible for making the initial assessments on the basis of the evidence summarised on the application forms, but they should also call on their wider knowledge of each applicant, the contribution he or she has made to the achievements of the college and the particular context in which he or she is working:
- 6.13 In drawing on and making use of this wider knowledge and determining whether the evidence submitted by each applicant is both accurate and indicative of his or her overall performance, members of assessment panels **must** maintain the highest professional standards.

## OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- 6.14 It is critically important that threshold assessment in Northern Ireland is successful and, further, that it is seen as an essential part of the continuing professional development of lecturers here.
- 6.15 One of its fundamental aims is to contribute to the overall process of improving the quality of teaching and learning in colleges in Northern Ireland, but it also aims to 'give recognition to the high calibre of Northern Ireland lecturers and allow those with relevant experience to gain due reward for their professionalism in the classroom'.
- 6.16 If threshold assessment in Northern Ireland is to achieve these wider aims, it is essential that all those involved in it are open and straightforward about their actions at all stages.

### 6.17 This means that

- all lecturers in the same college should be treated in the same way and given the same opportunities to apply for threshold assessment
- every application made by an eligible lecturer should be assessed in the same fair and consistent manner
- the briefings that lecturers are given about threshold assessment in their colleges should be clear, straightforward and helpful
- any centrally-held college information on which lecturers applying for threshold assessment might wish to draw should be made easily available to them
- eligible lecturers should be given opportunities to consult their principals or other senior colleagues about their application forms
- completed application forms should be assessed as quickly as possible after the closing date
- confidentiality must be fully respected
- the opportunities which Assessment Panels have to draw on and use their wider knowledge of applicants and their contributions to the achievements of the college should be used fairly
- eligible lecturers who decide to apply for threshold assessment should know how the principals of their colleges intend to use this wider knowledge and information and be confident that they will use only such additional information as can be verified.

### SENSITIVITY

- 6.18 The Further Education (NI) Threshold Scheme is new. No one has any prior experience of it and no one can anticipate all the issues that are likely to arise.
- 6.19 Lecturers may find some aspects of the assessment process difficult to come to terms with. Assessment Panel and Appeals Committee members will need to take time to form a clear and confident understanding of their responsibilities.
- 6.20 **It is therefore very important that all those who have key roles in the threshold assessment process in Northern Ireland are sensitive to the concerns, apprehensions and uncertainties of the others.**

- 6.21 **Lecturers should bear in mind** that Assessment Panel and Appeals Committee members have very important responsibilities, especially for assessing applications against the threshold standards in a fair and consistent manner.
- 6.22 **Assessment Panel and Appeals Committee members should bear in mind** that many lecturers will need time and assistance to help them make their own way through the process and understand exactly what it means for them.
- 6.23 Lecturers and Assessment Panels should remember that Appeals Committees and neutral Chairpersons must be able to verify both the information provided on particular application forms and the process of assessment used in each college.
- 6.24 **If all those involved understand, sympathise with and are sensitive to the needs, apprehensions and uncertainties of the others, the fundamental aims of Further Education Threshold Scheme are very much more likely to be achieved.**

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: A GENERAL COMMENT**

- 6.25 **Eligible lecturers, Assessment Panel and Appeals Committee members all have important roles to play in the application process, and a summary of these roles follows.**

### **SELECTING THE EVIDENCE: GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ELIGIBLE LECTURERS**

- 6.26 Eligible lecturers who decide to apply for threshold assessment are advised to
- keep their applications **factual and concise**
  - **read all the information provided about the four agreed threshold criteria carefully** before starting to think about the evidence they might include in their application forms
  - **make sure that they know what each of the four criteria deals with and requires of them**
  - **select from the evidence available that which illustrates what they have typically done** or are doing as lecturers
  - read and **pay careful attention to the guidance** provided
  - keep in mind that the **examples given in the completed application forms must be open to verification**: there is no requirement for lecturers to make or keep portfolios of evidence, but they

must be sure that any source of information referred to in their application forms can be verified, if necessary.

6.27 **It is the eligible lecturer who is responsible for applying for threshold assessment.** This means that it is the eligible lecturer who is responsible for completing the application form and the equal opportunities monitoring form that must be submitted with it.

6.28 **The eligible lecturer who decides to apply for threshold assessment needs to**

- provide a **summary of evidence** to show that he or she meets each of the four threshold criteria in Northern Ireland
- use this evidence to **demonstrate that he or she has worked at the criteria required within the past three years**
- present the summary of the relevant evidence selected in the form of **concrete examples of his or her day-to-day practice**
- be able to **demonstrate that all criteria relevant to their job have been met.**

## **ASSESSING THE APPLICATIONS: THE ROLE OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL**

6.29 It is the responsibility of the Assessment Panel of the college at which eligible lecturers work to

- **make an assessment of each application form** submitted and **form a judgement** as to whether the four agreed threshold criteria have been met or not
- **make notes about any additional information used** to inform the assessment that has been made
- **note areas for each lecturer's future professional development,** whether or not the application has been assessed as successful

6.30 The notes, which Panels make on the application forms, will form the basis for the professional feedback that lecturers may request at the end of the threshold process.

6.31 In carry out these responsibilities, Assessment Panels are expected to exercise their professional judgement and to **keep very much in mind the basic rules and principles** that apply to all those involved in the threshold process in Northern Ireland.

**6.32 To be able to review the assessment process in each college the Appeals Committee and the neutral Chairperson will need to**

- have **relevant information about each of the colleges** for which he or she is responsible, so as to enable them and the work of those lecturers in them who have applied for threshold assessment to be put into proper context principals will be expected to make this information available
- **review completed threshold application forms upon request from the college** involved in the appeal
- **arrange to visit to the college** for which he or she is responsible for deciding an appeal to **discuss the operation of the threshold assessment process with the principal** concerned and to review a selection of the application forms in more detail
- **undertake classroom visits or arrange to speak to a lecturer** or a lecturer's line manager if it is necessary **in order to verify evidence**

**MAKING THE FINAL DECISION**

6.33 The Assessment Panel of each college make the first assessment of each threshold application form. The Panel's decision is referred to the principal who shall communicate that decision to the applicant. Where an unsuccessful application is appealed the Appeals Committee by a majority may decide the issue. Where the vote of the Appeals Committee is tied the matter shall be determined by the casting vote of the neutral Chairperson.



7. **THE FURTHER EDUCATION (NI) THRESHOLD SCHEME :  
AFTERWARDS**

**ALL APPLICANTS**

- 7.1 Because the Further Education Threshold Scheme is set in the context of professional development generally, **eligible lecturers who apply for threshold assessment may request feedback on the outcome of their application from the principals, or his/her nominee, of the college** in which they work.
- 7.2 This development feedback will be **based on the comments that Assessment Panel are asked to make on the application forms** which they assess.
- 7.3 In making their assessments of each application form, Panels **are expected to**
- a) make a **brief written comment** about the decisions they make on each of the relevant threshold criteria
  - b) note, in respect of each of the relevant threshold criteria, whether there are any **areas for further development** for the lecturer concerned
  - c) write **comments on the final page** of each application form on
    - the accuracy and relevance of the applicant's evidence
    - any additional evidence which has been obtained
    - any further discussion or correspondence which has taken place with the applicant prior to a decision being made

**SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS**

- 7.4 Eligible lecturers whose applications for threshold assessments are successful will be **notified of the outcome by the principal of the college within 5 working days of the principal being notified of the decision of the Assessment Panel. The principal shall also notify the Governing Body.**
- 7.5 The lecturer will be placed on the threshold point of their salary scale.
- 7.6 Successful applicants may request **feedback from their colleges.** This feedback will be based on the evidence presented in their application forms, the comments made by the Assessment Panel about the assessments they made of the evidence submitted against the four threshold criteria and any other relevant information. Its purpose will be to inform the lecturers' further professional development.

**UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS**

- 7.7 Eligible lecturers whose applications for threshold assessment have not been successful will be **notified of the outcome within 5 working days of the decision being given to the principal by the Assessment Panel. The lecturer will be advised of his/her right of appeal.**
- 7.8 Unsuccessful applicants will be **entitled to make a further application** for threshold assessment in the following year(s).
- 7.9 They may also request to have **professional development feedback from their colleges.** This feedback will reflect the assessments made of the evidence submitted on the threshold application forms and the notes made by the Assessment Panel, Appeals Committee or neutral Chairperson about areas for further development and any other relevant information.
- 7.10 The **purpose of this development feedback is to help lecturers whose applications have been unsuccessful to understand what more they need to do to meet the threshold criteria** (or those of them that they have not been able to meet) and how they can gather the evidence that will demonstrate that they have done so.

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