**Writing for professional recognition in higher education: understanding genre and expertise**

# Abstract

This study draws on the theoretical frameworks of genre theory and writing expertise to explore how educators manage and excel in writing for professional recognition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four educators from different disciplines in which participants discussed their experiences of preparing and writing for Senior Fellow. Despite the fact that writing for professional recognition can be a contentious genre to manage with its reflective features favouring those from certain disciplinary backgrounds, the participants described positive and affirming experiences. The findings also suggest that educators are strategic in their approach, and that the writing process can have unexpected affordances including a developed knowledge of writing, professional confidence and a sense of empowerment. The findings have implications for developing systems and resources to support educators preparing for fellowship.

**Key words**: professional academic writing; writing expertise; genre theory; empowerment; academic development

# Introduction

Writing for professional recognition is a highly contested practice in which educators have to negotiate fluid discourses and often unfamiliar genres (Nygaard, 2017). Due to the current focus on teaching quality, and the expectation of accountability in teaching, universities worldwide are increasingly expecting academic staff to obtain recognition for their teaching activities (Ashgar & Pilkington, 2018; Beckmann, 2017; 2018). One scheme which offers professional recognition is Advance HE (AdvanceHE, 2018) which operates not only in the UK but worldwide (Ashgar & Pilkington, 2018). Advance HE has provided a UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), and professional recognition under this scheme, in the form of Fellowship, is often awarded based on an evaluation of a written reflective account. In certain institutions, a professional conversation follows in the process. With reference to Gardner and Nesi’s (2013) classification of genre families, writing for professional recognition is a ‘higher order’ genre, with the educational purpose of demonstrating an understanding of professional practice, and fellowship writing with its very specific focus on demonstrating impact is a subset of this genre.

In this paper we seek to analyse what we call the genre of fellowship writing and explore how educators who are preparing for fellowship writing manage the social practices of this often unfamiliar genre. We draw on the conceptual frameworks of genre theory (Swales, 1990) and writing expertise (Tardy, 2009) to inform our understanding of the fellowship writing process . Through revealing the challenges and benefits that educators experience we question how educators position themselves in relation to the new genre based on their previous experience and knowledge of scholarly writing. We contest Leigh’s (2016) point that ‘enforced’ reflective writing is unlikely to promote individual development and instead argue that the reflection on practice through writing can lead to empowerment and “professional renewal” (Aharonian, 2016, p. 214).

# Background and literature

## Professional recognition

Both in the UK and internationally, academic staff with teaching responsibilities are encouraged to apply for professional recognition for their educational activities. As mentioned above, the Advance HE scheme offers professional recognition at four levels: Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow. Typically, individual HEIs have internal schemes accredited by Advance HE for staff at all levels, and academics make their application depending on the breadth and scope of their pedagogic practice. An essential requirement of this process consists of writing one or more reflective accounts based on education practice (Asghar and Pilkington, 2018; Beckmann, 2017; Scales, 2017). Although there may be some variation across institutions, a typical application for Senior Fellow (SFHEA) amounts to a 6000-word text. Institutional mechanisms through which applicants approach the schemes are typically linked to probation, appraisal, promotion and broadly speaking an individual desire to progress in the teaching profession, not uncommonly overshadowed by the pressures (both institutional and individual) of research (Botham, 2018a). While the expectation to achieve fellowship is compulsory for early career academics (typically required for satisfying the requirements of probation), academic staff are nevertheless encouraged to engage with Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow of HEA as they progress in the profession, for example through promotion or when taking over increased responsibilities. An ability to articulate experience, practice and impact through a coherent reflective account is thus essential for both professional development and recognition (Asghar & Pilkington, 2018, p. 142).

However, the elements assessors deem crucial in a successful fellowship application are often assumed and therefore obscure to academics approaching the compilation of this type of text for the first time. In order to demystify the genre, applicants are mentored through the process by a more expert colleague who holds fellowship at the same level as that of the application or above. While this ‘buddying system’ is widespread in HEIs, mentors are typically academics who have been through the process already, but may not necessarily be able to guide applicants through this new genre. Lea and Stierer (2009, p. 424) state that academics find writing about the profession an unfamiliar genre even though they felt it was useful for “codifying practices around teaching”.

The fellowship writing process therefore ‘formalises’ HE teaching practice (Shaw, 2018) and concurrently supports the professional development process. Although the role of fellowship writing in evidencing both teaching knowledge and professional practice has been heavily contested (Stierer, 2000; Leigh, 2016), the reality is that professional recognition is used as a criterion for promotion, appraisal and cv currency. The main aim of this study is to illuminate the genre of fellowship writing in more detail and to surface the experiences of educators writing for fellowship. The key contribution of this research is to inform systematic and evidence-based professional development support.

## Fellowship writing as a genre

Genre refers to “abstract, socially recognised ways of using language” (Hyland, 2007, p. 149) which are “formed to carry out actions and purposes” (Tardy & Swales, 2014, p. 166). It has been argued that knowledge of the genre’s specific features can support the writing process (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016). Many would argue that fellowship writing is fundamentally reflective writing (Botham, 2018a, 2018b, Leigh, 2016) which is a notoriously subjective and a complex rhetorical activity in higher education contexts (Ryan, 2011). Challenges include the use of the first person pronoun and the use of academic conventions, such as citations (Rai, 2006), as well as the lack of clarity and definition of reflection (Ryan, 2011).

Attempts to identify common rhetorical and linguistic features of reflective writing have found that this genre often consists of the following moves: explantation and evaluation (Reidsema & Mort, 2009), description, explanation and discussion (Ryan, 2011), evidence and argument (Rai, 2006), and “presenting one’s best work” (Wharton, 2012, p. 490). In terms of linguistic features, the use of the first person pronoun, nominalisation, disciplinary lexis, and academic conventions, such as citations, have been identified as typical (Rai, 2006; Ryan, 2011).

Yet, despite studies which highlight the inherent features of this genre and the difficulties of reflective writing for students, there is little awareness of how *teachers* might manage this genre. Exceptions include Aharonian’s (2016) school study which found that the unfamiliarity of reflective writing presented obstacles for teachers’ professional development, and in an HE context, Botham (2018a, pp. 185-6) cites the “lack of familiarity with reflective practice and reflective writing” as one of the hurdles preventing academics from engaging with HEA Fellowship schemes. In particular, there is little consideration of how those whose disciplinary practices value more objective, structured and linear genres (Hyland, 2008) might manage the expectations of reflective writing. Similarly, as far as we know, there has been no study which identifies the rhetorical features of fellowship writing.

A further challenge of fellowship writing derives from its nature as an occluded genre (Hyon & Chen, 2008; Yin, 2016). There are no public examples on the awarding body’s website and the evaluation is made by a “small-group audience” (Yin, 2016, p. 4) who act as gatekeepers. Exemplars that do exist belong to previously successful applicants, and so therefore are “private or confidential, and thus cannot be readily used as models” (Loudermilk, 2007, p. 190). In reality, however, due to the support of mentors and institutional activities, such as writing retreats, fellowship writing is not fully occluded (Loudermilk, 2007) and participants may gain access to examples of previously written submissions from their mentor. The role of the mentor in professional academic writing has been widely recognised (Botham, 2018a), not just in terms of sharing exemplars, but also in their role as academics and literacy brokers (Lillis & Curry, 2006).

## Writing expertise

A model which we found useful for understanding dimensions of genre knowledge is Tardy’s (2009) framework of writing expertise. A knowledge of a particular genre is necessary for the writer to be able to “communicate actively, appropriately, and successfully within a specific domain or disciplinary community” (Tardy, 2009, p. 19). Writer expertise encompasses a knowledge of the formal, rhetorical, process and content dimensions of the genre (see Table 2). Despite the challenges associated with demarcating the genre of fellowship writing described above, we have used this model to better understand what educators know about fellowship writing, how they develop their understanding and in what areas they need further support. As a result, educators are engaged in a variety of professional academic writing activities and there is considerable fluidity of identities across membership of these communities (Nygaard, 2017). Therefore notions of the ‘correct way’ (Bhatia, 2008) are often implicit and educators may be faced with a process of acculturation into the new genre and discourses (Hathaway 2015).

It is clear then that professional academic writing is fraught with linguistic and rhetorical demands. The communicative purpose of fellowship writing is to evidence professional learning and development. As outlined above, not only students but also educators may struggle with these rhetorical demands. The style of first person reflective account favours those from a social sciences and humanities background (Hyland, 2008) and the linguistic expectations and requirements therefore may act as a barrier to those from a more STEM background. The scant research on writing for professional recognition has inhibited a comprehensive evaluation of this genre in its professional context. This study thus aims to fill the gap in our understanding by addressing as yet unexplored questions about educators’ knowledge and experiences of writing for a very specific and occluded genre and how they manage the process of writing reflectively for professional purposes.

# The study

## Contexts and participants

This study was conducted at two UK HEIs. The study incorporated two distinct phases: the first phase was centred on an appreciation of the applicants’ writing experiences and how these impact on writing about one’s academic profession; the second focused on a genre analysis of the texts submitted as part of the application process and illuminated prototypical moves (Hyland, 2013), steps and corresponding linguistic devices of fellowship writing (*Authors,* in review). This paper analyses and discusses the outcomes of the first phase. In working with participants on professional development schemes, we realised that we needed to understand how academics approach this ‘new’, genre to understand how they position themselves in relation to writing about their profession. Participants in this phase of our study are teaching fellows, lecturers or educators in academic services with teaching or student support responsibilities. At the time of the study, all four participants were engaged in the process of writing their fellowship application. The four case studies presented in this paper reflect the writing experiences of four academics with different disciplinary backgrounds in the process of writing their application for Senior Fellowship of HEA (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants in the study

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Case Study** | **Discipline** |
| John[[1]](#footnote-1) | Biosciences |
| Tom | Science |
| Marie | English Language Teaching |
| David | English for Academic Purposes |

## Methods

An semi-structured interview protocol was devised to capture the participants’ reflections about their approach to fellowship writing. Use of semi-structured interviews allowed a richer and deeper perspective on the social context of writing, as well as a perspective on experiences and participation in the community (Flowerdew, 2005). The questions asked (see Appendix A) aimed to explore their experiences with the process, their approach to the fellowship genre, and to provide a holistic, contextualised perspective on their writing. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Rapley, 2008) in NVivo 11.

We have used individual case studies to allow for a more nuanced and fine-grained understanding of educators’ experiences in writing. One of the benefits for a case-study approach is that any single case study “provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 253). Case studies also narrate stories and are for this reason meaningful presentations of experiences (Tardy, 2005).

## Ethics and researcher reflexivity

We were granted ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of both institutions. Informed consent was obtained before interviews and an opportunity to withdraw was given to all participants at any stage of the data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were kept at all times and a system for record keeping discussed and implemented during the project, in agreement with university guidelines. Acknowledgment to the fact that both investigators are language teaching professionals and academics is also due. Both authors were involved in the project as ‘specialist informants’ and thus in a privileged position for receiving information about the context but also about the genre itself (Flowerdew, 2005, p. 329). Similarly, both of the researchers act in the role of ‘literacy broker’ (Lillis & Curry, 2006) through supporting educators at writing retreats at their institution. Our position is potentially a limitation of the study due to preconceptions in data analysis (Rickard et al, 2009, p. 520). However, a collegial approach has been adopted whereby work in progress has been shared with colleagues at conferences and the resulting paper has benefitted from expert colleagues who have acted as both a ‘critical friend’ (Sowa, 2009) and mentor, for example by reviewing the analysis of the data and by providing expert advice.

## Analysis

The data collected in the interviews were analysed in detail using software NVivo 11, appropriate for the collection and qualitative analysis of data sets. We examined the data from each case study with reference to the four areas of writing expertise as discussed in Tardy (2009), as well as challenges and benefits of writing for fellowship. Table 2 (below) outlines the four dimensions of expertise, with topics in blue representing recurrent themes in the application and writing process.

Table 2: Writing expertise (Tardy, 2009, diagram adapted from Negretti & McGrath, 2018)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Content knowledge**  Disciplinary, specialised knowledge of theories, methods and research results *e.g. educational research, educational theories* | **Rhetorical knowledge**  Social and relational aspects of academic genres: reader expectations, audiences *e.g. reviewer expectations, purpose of fellowship writing* |
| **Process knowledge**  Knowledge of how academic texts are produced, tools, strategies and procedures *e.g. steps in preparing for fellowship writing, using online resources, access to mentors* | **Formal knowledge**  Textual conventions, including structure, and lexico-grammatical features *e.g. appropriate (educational) terminology, correct grammar, structure* |

# Findings

In this section we present short vignettes of the four participants which reflect their experiences of writing for professional recognition in terms of their knowledge of writing expertise and their experiences about the process.

## John

John is a teaching fellow, and as such, is not expected to research and publish. He regularly presents his teaching ideas at departmental and university workshops. He had been preparing for professional recognition for some years and had therefore amassed considerable knowledge of what content was required by the awarding body. He had browsed the Advance HE website for guidance and knew that the reflective account should reflect his development as a teacher, the projects he has led on and the need to provide evidence for these claims.

He started by describing his identity as a scientist, a writer of science, and how he therefore struggles with reflective writing *“What I found quite difficult is the reflective writing I'm not naturally not a reflective, I'm naturally reflective but only to myself”*  and *“There's quite a big change from going from writing a scientific paper to writing a pedagogic paper you know”*.

He argues that reflective writing has a gatekeeping function as it is *“thinking like a social scientist you know qualitative data you know collecting qualitative data not just numbers”*. Interestingly, John’s awareness of the rhetorical differences between scientific and reflective writing, as outlined by Hyland (2008) has made him more aware of the importance of writing for scientists. He explained that he found essay writing at school hard and so chose science to avoid writing. However, he now realises that the two are not mutually exclusive and written communication is a crucial science graduate attribute: *“it's quite clear that science IS about writing”.*

As a result of this new understanding, he talked about the support his own undergraduate students need for their academic writing. In other words, his experience of writing for fellowship has changed his views about the centrality of writing for all students, both in and beyond education.

John showed a strong awareness of the rhetorical demands of fellowship writing and the expectations of the genre. He explained how he needs to be reflective, show engagement with others, and demonstrate professional development and leadership. He talked about the self-promotional expectation of the writing: *“what's actually important for this fellowship you know what is it, you're trying to sell yourself so what characteristics are you trying to sell because you have to convince someone who's never met you”*. He was also aware of the genre and its gatekeeping function. *I think the [awarding body] comes very much from a social science perspective which is not natural for the biosciences but it is more natural for the social sciences because in the social sciences there's much more discussion about things, there's not that kind of didactic kind of teaching and I think that the writing of this report has to reflect that”.*

Possibly the length of time that John had been preparing and thinking about his application meant that he had considerable process knowledge. He had printed out all the guidance from the website of the awarding body and brought all these papers to mentor meetings. He accessed all the support provided by his institution in terms of mentor support, professional development sessions and other technological support. He had some sense of the formal knowledge and linguistic features of the writing genre. He was aware of the type of vocabulary he should use: *“manage, supervise words like that”* . The main challenge he faced in terms of the genre was the use of the first person singular. He found this style unfamiliar as it differs from the genre of scientific reports and papers.

## Tom

Tom is lecturer in a scientific discipline. He has teaching responsibilities as well as an obligation to publish the outcomes of his research. Publishing in academic, peer-reviewed journals is thus an essential aspect of his job’s remit. Particularly, he is required to write communications, i.e. short texts dense with scientific information written in a technical format. Tom identifies as a scientific writer, where scientific means that the texts he writes are based on figures, data and tables and are laid out in a characteristic format, recognised within his discourse community. Tom had been writing his case studies for his Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA henceforth) submission for some time and at the time of this interview he was preparing for the professional conversation.

In terms of process knowledge, he explained that his own approach tended to be rather “*verbose”* at first. He explained: ‘*I am a very reflective person and when I write it comes across that I have thought about things a lot first*’. He demonstrated considerable rhetorical knowledge, noting the differences between a ‘personal’ dimension to fellowship writing and the genre of scientific writing: ‘*I suppose there is an emotional side particularly in the context to writing for SFHEA*’ and goes on to highlight that ‘*perhaps that contrasts with when I write scientifically which then it is very much driven by laying out hypotheses and then designing the study before going to analyse the results and to draw a conclusion. So I think writing for SFHEA is fundamentally a different kind of writing’.*

Tom discussed his challenges with the rhetorical purpose of the fellowship writing, and acknowledged that his scientific background led him to write more descriptively than reflectively, something that he has been addressing during the writing process: *‘it [the application] started out very descriptive and then it became a lot more about the challenges, my own journey and how I overcame those challenges and learnt from the teaching process’*. In terms of rhetorical knowledge he realised that he needed to reflect specifically on his teaching philosophy. Tom was also aware of the gatekeeping function of this genre and that he was approaching it as a novice. In terms of process knowledge, he talked about the vital role that mentors have in supporting candidates. Tom’s mentor provided him with a gateway to the community of HEA fellows and helped him to make sense of the UKPSF. Although he struggled with the novelty of the reflective genre, he acknowledged that his mentors ‘*created an environment he could relate to and a framework he could work from’.*  Tom became increasingly familiar with the nature of reflective writing and the rhetorical expectations of the genre of fellowship writing. He had support from his mentors in his conveying the innovation inherent in his teaching profession. This approach made the writing a social (socially-supported) process which helped Tom with both the content and rhetorical knowledge he lacked. He also mentioned that in applying for fellowship he aspired to join a community: *‘people who are involved in HE, motivated to improve and innovate’*.

## Marie

Marie’s background is in English language teaching and study skills. She had been preparing for her professional recognition for six months prior to the interview. She explained that she did not feel confident as a writer and that as a perfectionist, external critique was difficult: *“a bit of a perfectionist and I think that's probably what's happening here that I don't want to show anybody because I think they're just going to look at it and roll their eyes and think what on earth who does she think she is (laughing) yea so I think that's just a confidence thing”.*

Marie had some limited experience of professional academic writing *“ I've written a couple of papers and one short chapter which are both are sort of in the stages of sort of peer reviewed so I'm quite new to professional academic writing I would say I've written for my own studies my grad cert my masters”*. Possibly due to her role in the university as a learning advisor, she was familiar with the genre of reflective writing, felt confident about its expectations, and indeed, felt strongly about teaching this to students: *“I find reflective writing actually quite straightforward that's something that I've been quite passionate about teaching so I teach it a lot with students I work a lot with the nurses and the vets so reflective writing is a big thing and I've done a lot of study of myself over the years so that's something that I don't find challenging so much it's the other types I find more challenging.”*

In terms of rhetorical knowledge, Marie understood that the purpose of fellowship writing is to evidence experience and impact. However, she felt uncomfortable about the self-promotional communicative function of the genre: *“What I know what I need to do is to show my impact and my influence which is quite an uncomfortable place to be because I'm not used to doing that. I am not used to being in a position where I actually feel like I'm kind of I’m trying to make myself look really important and I find it really hard to do”.*

However, these rhetorical expectations of fellowship writing and the need to state impact produced interesting consequences. Marie described how an awareness of her practice and impact had shaped her confidence. She talked about how she recognized her value: *“I think about it, what it's doing for me inside is actually making me is actually making me feel much more driven now and it's making me realise that I'm better than I thought I was and that actually I need to start valuing myself a bit more so it's been a really really good experience.”.* The process of fellowship writing and the genre expectations had surfaced her achievements and developed her professional identity. She described how the process of writing had been empowering and had prompted her to develop her professional activities: *“it's made me realise I don't feel more stuck but I know and I'm more aware that I need to do something about it and I want to do something about it. And it has driven me to do lots of things it's driven me to get back on my blog it's driven me to join lots of forums where I'm writing stuff it's driven me to contact people I'm going to visit [another university] I'm doing lots of things as a result”.*

In terms of process knowledge, Marie used different writing strategies. She explained that she used questions to analyse and reflect on her work, and then used these questions ultimately to structure her writing. Her strong process knowledge could be due to her current role in the university in supporting students with study skills. Like John, Marie also made use of the resources available to staff writing their fellowship submission. She accessed the materials on the Virtual Learning Environment, she attended the introductory workshop and writing retreats and was in regular contact with her mentor to discuss her writing and receive feedback.

## David

David is a teaching fellow in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). He writes a variety of academic texts, including assignments as he is currently enrolled on a Master’s programme. As a teaching fellow in EAP he is required to read and evaluate students’ writing, thus his he has considerable awareness of the linguistic features of academic writing. David thinks of himself as a good writer and is aware of the issues inherent in the writing process both as an academic and as a student. Unlike other participants in this study he commented on the affective aspects of the writing process: *“I related [...] to all the feelings that come with writing such as being positive one day and then the next minute thinking it just doesn’t work”.* David explained that he was unfamiliar with the genre of fellowship writing and as a result felt that the support of a mentor was essential. In particular, David highlighted the importance of the social aspect of writing for fellowship: *“I have talked to friends who had done it [the application] but also talked to people who are applying for Fellow HEA and looked at their examples”.* Talking to others and looking at exemplars highlights the strategies he uses to better understand the genre.

In terms of process knowledge, David approached the writing by selecting examples from his teaching practice which would demonstrate his professional practice and impact, and started to think how he could write these up as case studies. He tackled the writing without preparation: *“I just sat down writing it without preparing too much and that is the kind of rough version that I have”*. A second stage of this process was to look at the key points that David wanted to express in his writing and combine these with the criteria. His rhetorical knowledge of the genre involved an awareness of the need to provide impact and evidence to substantiate his examples. He became aware of this dimension to the writing through reading other people’s submissions and by consulting with his mentor.

Similar to Marie, through the writing process David has recognised his achievements and was proud of these: “*I can say that I am also quite proud of these things that I have done”.* This realisation has given him confidence. He noticed that during the writing process his application has changed as a result of becoming gradually aware of his being on a professional journey: *“I think [the application] has developed in different ways it’s not quite the same it was six months ago”*. He is hopeful that becoming Senior Fellow is about accessing a community of like-minded professionals who share an interest in innovating education practices. This awareness reflects the shared perception applicants have that they are novices in the genre of fellowship writing.

David developed personal strategies and knowledge of the process while writing. Similar to John the process of writing for fellowship has developed a greater awareness from a learner perspective and he brings this awareness to his practice with students: “*one thing I find fascinating is that all the procrastination all the editing and going back to the things, now that I am in one-to-one situation with a student when they are writing for assignments I say oh I know that, too I know exactly how you are feeling so it has given a good insight into what I do”*. He recognised that there is a box-ticking aspect to the writing but also emphasised how writing about his own experience of teaching has enabled him to implement new approaches to writing useful in his own teaching as well as to look at where his journey is taking him in terms of teaching practice. *“I wrote a draft which was mostly about what I did but my mentor said that I need to relate it to the criteria”.*

# Discussion

This aim of this study was to illuminate the generic features of fellowship writing and examine how four educators effectively manage the process of writing in a hitherto unexplored genre. Through the lens of genre theory and a writing expertise framework, we discuss which dimensions of writing expertise the participants possessed, how they managed a new genre, and the strategies they used to be successful. It was clear that the four participants held varying levels of writing expertise for this particular genre but all had developed a repertoire of strategies to manage the process. A further finding was that the role of the literacy brokers was crucial in the development of the application. Perhaps the most surprising finding was the unexpected consequences resulting from the process of writing.

Educators in this study utilized strategic resources and positioned themselves as informed writers in the new and unfamiliar genre. Contrary to expectations of the authors and the literature on the challenges for academics from a STEM background (Hyland, 2008), the participants in this study possessed considerable writing expertise of the fellowship writing genre (Tardy, 2009). In terms of process knowledge, participants accessed information about the content and the writing process through various institutional resources such as introductory workshops, tutorials, online resources and writing retreats. John and Marie in particular relied on these resources. Similarly, despite their relative position as novices in the fellowship writing context, all participants talked confidently about the rhetorical demands of the writing, in particular about the types of knowledge that was valued in the professional discourse. In this way they demonstrated considerable rhetorical knowledge. In particular, they were aware of the self-promotional tactic that was necessary for the genre (Tardy, 2005), and the need to establish evidence for impact. John refers to “selling yourself” and Marie acknowledges the importance of showing impact and influence. Despite this knowledge, however, writers recognised that self-promotion was at odds with their experiences of other professional academic writing (Lea & Stierer, 2009) which often rested on the scientific text, whether a journal article, project report or communication. Marie talks of the discomfort of making herself look important and the challenges of self-promotion. This resonates with Tardy’s (2005) study in which one student talked of the tactic of ‘boasting’ which was “taking a stance that he felt was discordant with his own sense of self” (p. 334). Only one participant, John, referred to lexico-grammatical features of fellowship writing genre, suggesting that participants were not aware of the linguistic features of fellowship writing, and that formal knowledge, in terms of structures and appropriate terminology, is potentially an area which needs to be more explicitly focused on in writing support activities. A further area for awareness-raising is the difference between content and rhetorical expertise. Participants demonstrated little awareness of the differences between what counts as educational theory, practice and impact, and the rhetorical moves to establish these features in a convincing way.

A significant strategy used by participants was leveraging the experience and knowledge of a community of senior fellows, in particular, their mentors. In this way writers could see exemplars and obtain advice. David acknowledges his communication and support from colleagues who were fellows, and Tom recognises the vital role of his mentor in gaining access to the community of fellows. We would argue that much of the affirmative nature of fellowship writing results from the mentor-mentee relationship. As pointed out above, writers perceived an ideal community of fellows which represented both sources of support and aspiration. Access to mentors’ successful writing provides relief from the occlusion of the genre. In their role as academic professionals and literacy brokers (Lillis & Curry, 2006), mentors provide educators with an opportunity to “peek behind the curtain” (Loudermilk, 2007, p. 203) of a fellowship community. The data demonstrates that a collegial approach to writing and access to a network of professionals is central to developing both writing expertise and confidence in what is often a challenging and unfamiliar genre.

Perhaps the most striking finding to emerge from the case studies is the emancipatory power of this process, in opposition to views that the process is merely an unengaging tick-box exercise (Shaw, 2018) which does not encourage deep learning and development (Leigh, 2016). It has been recognised that the fellowship writing can boost confidence through the focus on achievements (Botham, 2018b). Despite the tension around expressing achievements, impact and evidence, participants benefited in different ways. For Marie it was a growing awareness of her skills and therefore how she could mobilise these skills beyond her current role. This prompted her to seek further opportunities in other departments and also ‘make a name for herself’ in other institutions. For John it was the opportunity to see how important the writing process is regardless of disciplinary background. Although he himself polarized writing and his identity as a scientist, his own experiences of navigating a new writing practice have prompted him to think more about how he can support his students, avoiding the challenges he experienced. David also talked about how his experience of writing for fellowship made him more sensitive to the challenges his students’ faced. Thus Leigh’s (2016, p. 80) argument that: “enforced reflective writing becomes a process of being seen to jump through required hoops to achieve a goal… it is unlikely that an individual will develop and learn through the process of reflective writing” is not necessarily the case, especially if the writing process is seen as professional development in its own right.

# Conclusion

This paper aimed to illuminate the genre of fellowship writing and the inherent benefits and challenges in the process of writing. Transparency around these challenges can inform pedagogic support on the part of the academic developer (Lea & Stierer, 2009) and a renewed focus on the affordances and learning gains from the process of fellowship can be made more prominent. A pedagogic approach which places the genre and writing expertise model at its centre can empower educators through an understanding of the rhetorical organisation and linguistic devices (Paltridge, 1996). Recognising the importance of emotions, as described by some of the participants, alongside this approach would be a focus on the affective (Nygaard, 2017) by exploring the experiences of professional academic writing, the context of fellowship writing and the expectations of the community (Lea & Street, 2006).

With the expansion of professional recognition schemes around the world, the challenges that educators may face in writing, and the tensions they experience in moving between different discourse practices must be acknowledged. At the same time, however, the strategic approach that educators adopt and the emancipatory power of systematic and rigorous evidence-based reflection cannot be undervalued.

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**Appendix A. Interview schedule (participants)**

· What types of writing do you generally do as an academic?

· Describe yourself as a writer.

· What do you know about writing for HEA fellowship?

· How have you approached this writing?

· What is the purpose of the writing?

· Who is the community or audience you are writing for?

· What do you think their expectations are?

· What have you learned so far about writing?

· What challenges do you face?

· What support do you feel you need to help you with this writing?

· Does reference to exemplars help you?

1. pseudonyms [↑](#footnote-ref-1)