

'Improving the status and valuation of teaching in the careers of UK academics': Summary of discussion at 28 March workshop regarding processes for evidencing and evaluating good teaching

The aim of the session was to draw on the experience, perspectives and expertise of the workshop delegates to develop an understanding of the variety of potential or existing mechanisms and processes for evaluating teaching; and the pros and cons, specifically regarding generating evidence (e.g. by individuals aiming to be promoted) and its use in evaluation (e.g. by promotion panels). The summary below captures the themes of discussion - it does not represent the views of any of the sponsor organisations, separately or collectively, nor any particular individual.

Throughout the discussions there were frequent comparisons to research appraisal methods; it was felt that a similarly widely-established system, e.g. the metrics used for research achievement, should be developed for teaching. This will require acceptance in the sector that qualitative opinion is a fundamental aspect of teaching appraisal. However, this is no less the case in research appraisal: many quantitative research metrics are in fact manifestations of considered qualitative opinion (e.g. REF decisions). Therefore it is necessary to evolve existing – and develop new - mechanisms that manifest considered opinion of teaching, which capture both activity and impact, and provide sufficient confidence across the sector to become widely established.

Mechanism/process	Notes
Student Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student feedback is an important part of the overall package of appraisal. It is necessary to ensure that all of the following are considered: the National Student Survey (NSS), Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs), student-staff liaison, e-voting, focus groups (with an independent chair), and getting feedback about personal tutors.</li> <li>• Concern was expressed that surveys can sometimes be used for purposes for which they were not designed, rendering them not fit for purpose. Opportunities to improve surveys – including minimising response bias – should be fully explored.</li> <li>• There is a widespread view that the NSS provides no value in evaluating individual staff teaching.</li> <li>• The Student Unions could be approached by academics and departments to encourage student participation on student-staff committees, where there is currently difficulty in recruiting student members.</li> <li>• Alumnus feedback is commonly more reflective than immediate student feedback: it was suggested that social media should be more effectively exploited to encourage this form of feedback.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student feedback procedure might be improved by demonstrating to students that their feedback is subsequently actioned; the use of e-voting to increase participation; and the removal of the lecturer from the process to encourage frank comments.</li> </ul>
Evidence of support for students and peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be difficult to get quantitative evidence of support:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Student support often occurs via informal mechanisms.</li> <li>◦ Mentor-mentee relationships are easy to quantify, but it remains difficult to establish the quality of the mentorship.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The differences between academic (teaching/research) and pastoral support need to be considered.</li> <li>• Individuals could be encouraged to keep a comprehensive evidence portfolio from the outset, perhaps including evidence of impact through feedback or follow-up.</li> </ul>
Evidence of effective personal reflection on teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection needs to include consideration of, and evidence for, the impact of an individual's teaching. There was a suggestion that evidence of personal reflection on development would identify those who are committed to improving and 'going the extra mile', and not just 'good at their job'.</li> <li>• Guidance and mentoring would improve the reflection process.</li> </ul>
Evidence that teaching has contributed to student learning (e.g. through exam performance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal systems that measure student learning are influenced by multiple variables beyond the control of the teacher, such as time spent in individual study and use of online resources, etc.</li> <li>• Exams remain the archetypal evidence of student learning, but they are designed to assess individual students, not individual teachers. This is further complicated as teams of teachers, rather than an individual, usually contribute to a single exam.</li> <li>• Using student exam performances for personal career development could potentially invite undesirable manipulation of the system, e.g. by setting easy questions.</li> <li>• Possible solutions:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The only robust way to generate quantitative evidence about the impact of an individual's teaching on student learning is to perform randomised controlled trials where the only variable is the individual delivering the teaching. However, this would be impractical, if not impossible.</li> <li>◦ The development of team awards should be explored.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Peer review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is trust in the peer review system, and acknowledgment that it is very important for continuing professional development and enhancement of teaching skills. It was felt that there is no substitute for peers attending and discussing teaching approaches.</li> <li>• Peer review is a good way to identify innovative practice and should be used as evidence in appraisals and for promotion.</li> <li>• Peer review should occur across the entire range of teaching formats e.g. lectures, tutorials, practicals, marking assessments etc.</li> <li>• Quantifying the 'knowing' of colleagues' teaching quality within departments should be explored.</li> <li>• The ability to accept criticism may change with career stage: it is easier when more established i.e. more difficult for earlier career academics.</li> </ul>
UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and membership of professional teaching bodies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Education Academy (HEA) membership should function as a genuine means to improve teaching ability rather than a hurdle to be jumped for career development.</li> <li>• A continuing professional development approach at all stages of career development could be more appropriate.</li> <li>• A cultural change is likely to be required in order to ensure that promotion boards in all institutions take teaching qualifications into account when considering applicants for promotion.</li> <li>• Mentoring academics to develop an evidence portfolio against frameworks such as the UKPSF is an example of good practice.</li> </ul>
Scholarship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was much discussion of what is meant by teaching and learning (T&amp;L) scholarship. There is a need to understand how teaching is actually delivered and the differences between reflective pedagogical practice and educational/pedagogical research.</li> <li>• Pedagogical research is part of T&amp;L scholarship, but not the only part. Academic staff should be expected to read around their subject as well as the pedagogy that supports it.</li> <li>• Whilst subject expertise is important, engagement with T&amp;L scholarship to reflect upon and enhance practices is vital. This should be evidenced by improvements in student academic attainment and/or engagement with their learning (e.g. through the academic progress they have made, or through the development of their skills, attributes and</li> </ul>

	<p>confidence in the subject).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dissemination of scholarship-based improvements of practice is also key, e.g. by case studies to highlight good practice, conference presentations, publications etc.</li> <li>• Methods for improving engagement with educationalist colleagues should be explored.</li> </ul>
<p>External roles and recognition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External recognition was felt to be essential for career progression. There were a number of categories of external recognisers:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Other universities (e.g. external examiner roles);</li> <li>◦ Schools/educational institutions (e.g. Governor roles);</li> <li>◦ Government bodies/quangos (e.g. conferences, committees);</li> <li>◦ Learned societies (e.g. committees, conferences, prizes, funding).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More external prizes and teaching-linked funding, as well as HEA (fellowships) and scholarship (publication in journals) would highlight teaching success</li> <li>• Proving the impact of external activities could be simplified by encouraging formal comments/feedback from the external institution.</li> <li>• This is more easily achieved when in a senior position, whilst it can be difficult in earlier career transitions (e.g. Lecturer to Senior Lecturer).</li> <li>• More guidance should be provided for individuals on how to prepare a portfolio, perhaps through mentoring or published case studies.</li> </ul>