City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Interim Project Report: Teaching Excellence: what is this and how can we assess and recognise this
Dr Pam Parker, Associate Director Learning Development Centre, Julie Attenborough, Associate Dean Education (School of Health), Maggie Cunningham, Development Support Manager (Academic Services), Wayne Holland, Associate Dean Education (Cass Business School), and James Perkins, Vice President Education Student Union

Abstract
This article discusses an ongoing project focused on recognising teaching excellence. The article begins with a brief overview of the project and the aims, the members of the project team and, the range of activities that are being used to collect data for the project. The article then provides a summary of two activities undertaken to date and some of the key findings from these. The article will conclude with discussion of future activities and how you can become engaged in this project.

The Project
City University London is taking part in the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Change Academy focused on recognising teaching excellence. This is a one year project which fits well with two of the activities in the University Vision around the education theme. These are *"supporting and encouraging our staff in pedagogical innovation and educational development"* and "*recognising excellent staff performance in education and capturing and sharing models of good practice*". The aims of the project are outlined in the table 1 and the project team are listed in table 2.

• Explore the current recognition and award processes and analyse the criteria used within this scheme for teaching excellence
• Examine individual discipline criteria for teaching excellence and draw out core teaching excellence principles for the whole University
• Define a development and recognition process that is aligned to the UKPSF for Teaching Excellence
• Facilitate the individual's development and progression through the scheme to National Teaching Fellow or equivalent
• Outline and enhance the student voice within the scheme
• Enhance our current process for disseminating good practice
Table 1 – Aims of the Project

Julie Attenborough - Associate Dean Education (School of Health)
Maggie Cunningham - Development Support Manager (Academic Services)
Wayne Holland - Associate Dean Education (Cass Business School)
Pam Parker – Associate Director LDC and Team Leader
James Perkins - Vice President Education Student Union
Table 2 – Project Team

For more than ten years the University has recognised teaching excellence through an award scheme which includes school recognition awards, student voice awards and Learning

Development Projects. The existing award scheme has been reviewed and developed regularly since it started in 2000 however, exploring what teaching excellence at City University London is, both in terms of generic and discipline specific criteria, will enable the scheme to be strengthened and recognition to be linked to these criteria.

The project team will meet the aims of the project through a range of activities which were included in an application for ethical approval. These activities include:
- a literature review focused on key areas such as teaching excellence, awards and recognition.
- a review of recognition schemes within other institutions both in the UK and internationally.
- data from the past and current award scheme.
- short discussions, meetings and workshops with staff and students.
- interviews with staff and students.
- the collection of case studies from award winners.
- Use of a project Blog for staff and students to contribute their views and ideas to, the link for which is http://blogs.city.ac.uk/teachingexcellence/ .

The paper is now going to focus on two activities we have undertaken to date to collect data. One of these was held on 6th December 2012 in the main university walkway and provided an opportunity to engage with students and collect their views of teaching excellence. The second activity was a workshop with some of the Learning Development Fellows.

Student Views

In December the Learning Development Associates setup stalls in the main University walkway to engage students with a number of topics including learning spaces, the technology environment and teaching excellence. For this project we chose to focus on two key questions related to the teaching excellence which were:
- *"What do you think makes a good teacher?"*
  and
- *"What do staff do to help students learn?"*

Fifty three students provided their views on paper and there is a wordle using their responses to the first question on the next page.

As can be seen from the wordle, students was a key word mentioned in their responses which highlighted to be a good teacher, you need to be someone who is approachable to students, friendly, has good knowledge, is enthusiastic, interesting, interactive in class and can communicate well. The responses when analysed further provide three main categories which are personal attributes of the lecturer being cheerful and enthusiastic, areas related to the lecturer's role included being knowledgeable about their subject, making the topic interesting and linking it to "real world" practice and, the lecturer student relationship which focused on being interested in the students, their learning and building a relationship with them.
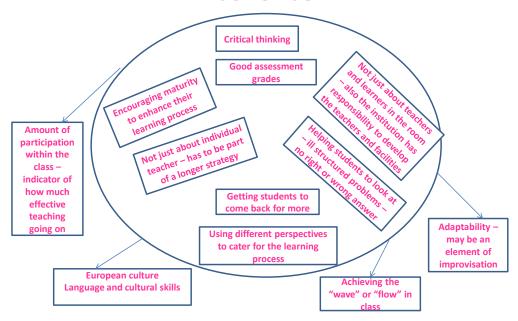
In response to the second question *"what do staff do to help you learn?"* there were some similar responses around being approachable but the responses mostly focused on the actual engagement in supporting learning. Students liked having one to one interaction when they needed more explanation of a topic, they found having materials posted on Moodle in a timely manner such as class notes, videos and other resources to follow up and they preferred interactive classes where they felt challenged.

Staff Views

On 4th March Julie Hall, who is Director of Learning and Teaching Enhancement and Interim Director of Research at the University of Roehampton, facilitated a workshop for some of the Learning Development Fellows. Twenty one staff attended this event and represented all Schools. Julie provided an introduction focused on the challenges of recognising teaching excellence and how to assess, this drawing upon a project she had been involved in around pedagogic practices and student identity. Some of her findings where staff had said classes lacked debate, focused on passive learning and provided too much for students reducing their need to engage. Students however had said they wanted to engage and produce their own ideas. This all provided a good background to us thinking about teaching excellence. In groups we then asked to consider what we thought were generic characteristics of Teaching Excellence. Some of the thoughts from the five groups are shown on the next page.

General Characteristics for Teaching Excellence

Critical thinking

Good assessment grades

Encouraging maturity to enhance their learning process

Not just about teachers and learners in the room – also the institution has responsibility to develop the teachers and facilities

Amount of participation within the class – indicator of how much effective teaching going on

Not just about individual teacher – has to be part of a longer strategy

Helping students to look at – ill structured problems – no right or wrong answer

Getting students to come back for more

Using different perspectives to cater for the learning process

Adaptability – may be an element of improvisation

European culture Language and cultural skills

Achieving the "wave" or "flow" in class

General Characteristics for Teaching Excellence

- Providing clarity and extending knowledge
- Engaged students
- Making students curious and challenged
- Students contributing
- Leading to independent learning
- Giving students confidence
- Provide external context for teaching
- Students to grow

Some key points from all the groups were the importance of providing students with clarity around expectations, being adaptable using diverse approaches, having passion and enthusiasm for your subject creating an inspirational culture and encouraging critical thinking and independence.

We were then asked to individually consider what teaching excellence in our discipline would look like. We were encouraged to use words, images or draw. This was an interesting activity and provided much discussion when sharing these views. Here are some of those showing the diverse views that we shared:

- A conveyor belt of tools
- A gardener sowing seeds and nurturing growth
- A beautiful woven tapestry including knowledge, skills, behaviours, ideas
- Dead Poets Society - inspirational
- All aspects of the profession – in the office, on site and with the raw materials

Whilst these all have some differences there were some key themes threaded through such as providing students with a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes but so they were woven together in their experience, supporting students growing and being inspirational. This was compatible with earlier views of generic characteristics.

Lastly we focused on how we might assess or recognise teaching excellence. This created a lot of discussion about the difficulty in doing this and from whose view. Is it enough to have students views of their teaching through evaluations and nominations for the Student Voice award or should we be looking at impact further down the line in terms of the students and the outcomes of their learning. We also discussed issues that were beyond lecturers' control that also impacted on students' views such as class sizes, the physical spaces and resources such as IT and reading materials. There was a discussion around whether we should explore using criteria similar to those used for research to assess teaching excellence and some thoughts around this are shown below.

Assessing Excellence

- **Peer review** internal and external
- **Outputs** range of courses, numbers, range of levels, assessment results, student satisfaction, publications, conference presentations, curriculum development
- **Impact** Case study, reflection from alumni, employability
- **Income** students
- **Knowledge Transfer** encouraging peers to teach well, projects, publications, conferences, mentoring junior staff, CPD
- **Esteem** NTFS, key notes, NSS, fellowship, HEA, External examiner/reviewer, chair panels
- **Environment** Academic leadership, group ethics

The workshop had provided a group of us with time to reflect on these issues and at least start to identify criteria that might be useful for the recognition and assessment of Teaching Excellence.

Future Activity
The project team aim to have drafted some generic and discipline specific criteria to use for the award scheme commencing in 2013/2014 and some guidance on assessing and recognising teaching excellence as well as guidance on evidence that could be used. The team will continue to collect data through questionnaires, interviews and workshops over the next four-five months to support this. We are keen to have as many staff and students involved as possible so do think about how you can become involved. Go to the blog and start posting your views or contact Pam Parker via e-mail P.M.Parker@city.ac.uk if you are willing to be interviewed or can provide a case study. We plan to disseminate the findings beyond City University London but will maintain your anonymity in any conference presentation or publication.