Student Perceptions of Teaching Excellence: an Analysis of Teaching Awards Nomination Data

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Ice Breaker

• Please introduce yourself!
  • What institution are you from?
  • Choosing one image below, which would symbolise teaching excellence to you and why?
Teaching Awards Background

• Our Teaching Awards are the longest-running in the UK, now in their 9th year

• We normally receive 2,000 – 3,000 open-ended nomination comments from students

• There are eight award categories, including:
  o Best Overall Teacher
  o Best Feedback
  o Best Personal Tutor
  o Best Student Who Tutors
  o Best Research or Dissertation Supervisor
  o Best Support Staff
  o Best Course
  o Best Innovative Assessment
Teaching Awards Research

• Funded by a Principal’s Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS) small grant

• Research carried out by a Research Assistant (Kieran Bunting, Masters student) from Feb to Aug 2016
  o Analysing themes across all 2,926 nominations from 2014-15 using NVivo (research conducted during 2015-16)

• Follow-up during 2016-17 carried out by Elizabeth Harris on similar trends and identifying new areas of interest
Teaching Award Nominations Distributed Across All Colleges

- This is roughly in line with the student populations of each College
Four Key Themes in Student Perceptions of Teaching Excellence

1. Concerted, Visible Effort
2. Charisma, Personality & Engaging Teaching
3. Breaking Down Student-Teacher Barriers and Fostering Student Engagement
4. Consistency, Predictability and Stability of Support
Teaching Theme 1: Concerted, Visible Effort

- This theme had strong overlaps with all other themes, and especially the sub-theme of **approachability**.

- This theme highlighted visible staff effort in areas such as:
  - improving the course material or teaching to improve student engagement, and
  - acting on student feedback to improve the learning community.

- Students understood that teachers are very busy, which justified their appreciation of excellent teachers’ choice to **prioritise students**.

"She routinely gives over a page long of feedback, explaining strengths, weaknesses, and ways of improving. She gives students additional opportunities for feedback with formative assessments... Her feedback has helped me achieve the highest grades I’ve ever received and helped me get the most out of this course."

Student nomination comment for Lynne Copson, winner of the 2014-15 Best Feedback Award
Examples of Related Good Practice for Concerted, Visible Effort

• Replying to all queries promptly and with adequate attention and effort

• Being organised and prepared for teaching with transparent goals and showing how each lecture fits into a holistic view of the course as a whole

• When not having a response to an issue or question, taking the time to find the appropriate information for the student

• Including adding accessible, helpful material and links on the VLE

• Providing opportunities for ‘feedforward’ (e.g., mock practice tests, review sessions, feedback on essay drafts)

• Promptly delivering written and/or oral feedback while maintaining a focus on both quality and quantity
Teaching Theme 2: Charisma, Personality and Engaging Teaching

• Students highlighted the importance and impact of highly engaging, exciting and energetic academic experiences.

• Through their charisma and personality, excellent teachers in students’ eyes demonstrate care for students, a passion for teaching and up-to-date knowledge of their subject.
  o These teachers are approachable and student-focused, enjoy teaching, and often use humour to put students at ease and add to enjoyment of the class.
  o They stimulate students’ further interest in academic subjects and inspire students to pursue a new research project, secondary degree, or career in the lecturer’s field of expertise.

"The exercises she had us do in class were fresh and thought provoking. I really enjoyed how she makes a point to talk to the students and to encourage further learning. Her welcoming personality made me feel comfortable in class... It’s very obvious that she’s very invested in teaching and cares a lot about her students."

Student nomination comment for Amy Chandler, runner up for the 2014-15 Kendall Award for Teaching in Medicine
Examples of Related Good Practice for Charisma, Personality and Engaging Teaching

• Bringing energy and passion to every lecture, no matter the time or class size

• Showing students they enthusiastically care about the topic by demonstrating research-led, up-to-date teaching
  o Including examples from the teacher’s own research or perspectives on exciting developments in the field
  o Embedding new information and practical, real life examples into course material to develop students’ connection to the topic

• Creating an engaging, student-centred lecture method and style to facilitate engagement
  o Facilitating ‘interactive’ lectures including groupwork and problem-solving
  o Creating an environment where students feel more comfortable participating

• Delivering innovative methods of assessment and feedback
  • Facilitating a podcast as a method of assessment, or creating an audio file for feedback since students found literally hearing positive encouragement motivating
Teaching Theme 3: Breaking Down Student-Teacher Barriers and Fostering Student Engagement

• Students highlighted the importance of teachers developing a strong academic community by getting to know their students as individuals and by showing each student care and respect.

• Students praised excellent teachers who provide personalised feedback and support to help everyone in the learning community.

• Working in partnership with students is a strong aspect of fostering student engagement, showing that staff listen to feedback, work with student representatives and possibly co-create elements of the curriculum together.

"I loved how every week was different and you never quite knew what was going to happen... For example we were asked to act as policy makers in a nuclear war simulation and write a 'last order' to be locked on a nuclear submarine... For the feedback session we could give anonymous feedback on the course and Malcolm wrote an informative weekly blog entry in which he reflected about each week’s class."

Student nomination comment for Malcolm Craig’s course The Nuclear Cold War in Policy and in Public (1945-1989), winner of the 2014-15 Best Course Award
Examples of Related Good Practice for Breaking Down Student-Teacher Barriers and Fostering Student Engagement

• Creating a **strong academic community** with students, and demonstrating care
  o Knowing students’ names and organising informal, extracurricular events
  o Treating all student ideas and comments with validity and respect
  o Ensuring all students feel comfortable engaging and participating in discussions

• Providing **personalised support** (including personalised feedback)
  o Ensuring feedback contains encouragement and allows for a positive dialogue
  o Identifying students requiring additional help and reaching out to them

• Facilitating **student/staff partnerships** in learning and teaching
  o Including student-led seminars or presentations in classes
  o Allowing students to decide on their own assessment topics
  o Co-creating elements of the curriculum in partnership with students

• **Receiving and acting on student feedback** to enhance the overall learning experience
  o Working actively with student representatives, having individual meetings with students or receiving anonymous feedback about teaching improvements
Teaching Theme 4: Consistency, Predictability and Stability of Support

- A large number of nominations highlighted how teachers helped students overcome personal struggles and persevere with their studies.

- The trends in comments highlighted the importance of predictability and stability of support from staff; the most frequent word used throughout all nominations was "always".

- Students frequently discussed the proactive and positive attitude of staff who communicated well with and helped students. In courses, this also aligned with effectively communicating transparent and digestible expectations for student work and assessments.

"He prepared practice exam questions (on top of past exams) and told us to submit the answers for feedback... He will always try to provide us tricks on how to approach complicated concepts from an intuitive perspective... He has a mid-semester course survey so we can provide anonymous feedback on how the course is going... He would always include a little puzzle related to what we were learning!"

Iain Murray, winner of the 2014-15 Van Heyningen Award for Teaching in Science and Engineering
Examples of Related Good Practice for Consistency, Predictability and Stability of Support

• Being **approachable and proactive** in communications
  - Having an open door policy or clear office hours
  - Proactively providing supplementary material on the VLE, or signposting to subject-related events

• Being **organised**
  - Preparing for meetings and following up after
  - Organising scaffolded lectures with clear themes and content that builds
  - Maintaining an organised VLE that is easy for students to navigate

• Being **knowledgeable and up-to-date** on University administrative processes, services and resources share with students

• Ensuring **transparency and consistency**
  - Ensuring all students fully understand the grading criteria and marking scheme
  - Gathering, sharing and working on mid-semester feedback
  - Summarising assessment feedback for the whole class for complete understanding
A total of 2,412 student nominations were received between August 2016 and March 2017.
Student Views of Characteristics of Excellent Teachers

- Engaging teaching: 30%
- Knowledge and expertise: 16%
- Charisma, personality, and/or approachability: 24%
- Predictable, consistent support: 8%
- Encouraging my personal and professional development: 8%
- Encouraging my academic development: 14%

THIS YEAR’S NOMINATION TRENDS
What are your thoughts on the research?

1. Did any of these research findings surprise you, or the point that they are not surprising?

2. Do you have any questions about the research or the four key themes?
   - Concerted, visible effort
   - Charisma, personality and engaging teaching
   - Breaking down student-teacher barriers and fostering student engagement
   - Consistency, predictability and stability of support
Please share your best practices

1. What examples of teaching and student support practices do you already incorporate into your work relating to the four key themes?
   - Concerted, visible effort
   - Charisma, personality and engaging teaching
   - Breaking down student-teacher barriers and fostering student engagement
   - Consistency, predictability and stability of support

2. What other examples or ideas do you have?
I think that students should expect teaching to be enjoyable, humorous, and inspiring.

Agree or disagree (or somewhere in the middle)?
Physical Voting Line Discussion 2

I think that staff provision of consistent, predictable support can be factored into workload allocations.

Agree or disagree (or somewhere in the middle)?
Physical Voting Line Discussion 3

I think that excellence in teaching and excellence in research are mutually exclusive.

Agree or disagree (or somewhere in the middle)?
Other Discussion Questions

1. Even though staff may think they are accessible to students, what differences are there between student and staff perceptions of approachability and respect towards students?

2. How do you think you can work with students so that they become more active partners in pedagogical discussions (through processes such as co-creation of the curriculum) to foster student engagement in your course?
   - All students in your class
   - Student Representatives
   - Sabbatical Officers / Student Union staff

3. How do you engage with data highlighting best practices from student-led teaching awards at your institution? What would help you to use this data more to inform your work?

4. How can we negotiate and integrate TEF indicators of teaching excellence and student perceptions of teaching excellence?
Thank you!

The full report ‘What Does Good Teaching Look Like to Students: An Analysis of Teaching Award Nomination Data’ is available via www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/teachingawards on the Teaching Awards Research tab.

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