University rewards for teaching:  
Comparing Research and Teaching in University Promotion Criteria

Abstract

This article categorises the different criteria and weightings used to determine academic promotions in UK universities. The criteria were analysed to determine the extent to which they recognise research and teaching equally. The results show that universities have largely adopted formal parity in the criteria for senior and principal lecturers. However, for the higher and more prestigious ranks of reader and professor most universities exclusively require research excellence and do not allow similar applications based on teaching activities. Furthermore, there is a distinct and significant difference between promotion criteria in pre and post-1992 universities, with the post-1992 universities much more likely to recognise research and teaching equally.

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University rewards for teaching: Comparing Research and Teaching in University Promotion Criteria

There is currently a movement in the UK to strengthen rewards for teaching excellence in universities (DfES 2003; Gibbs 1995; Gibbs & Habeshaw 2003; Greenbank 2006; NATFHE 2003; UCEA 2006). Most universities proclaim their commitment to teaching though mission statements, learning and teaching strategies and human resource strategies. Despite this public endorsement, universities’ dedication to teaching remains ambiguous in the face of its historically subordinate status to research and the intense pressure to increase research productivity driven by the RAE.

The most important incentive universities wield to motivate academic staff is pay and reward (Diamond 1993; Fairweather & Rhoads 1995; Fairweather 2002; Young 2006), so promotion criteria represent one of the most tangible indicators of the status of teaching in universities. In the UK, the traditional dominance of research over teaching in most universities’ career structures has been well documented (Becher 2001; Coate, Barnette, & Williams 2001; Court 1998; Court 1999; DfES 2003; Hannan & Silver 2000; Light & Cox 2001; NCIHE (the Dearing Inquiry) 1997; Rowland 2000). Universities often claim to reward teaching, but in 1994 they reported only 12% of promotion decisions being made primarily on the basis of teaching excellence and 38% of institutions made no such promotions (Gibbs 1995). Staff could easily interpret such clear signals and a survey carried out for the Dearing Report found that only 3% of academics thought the system rewarded excellence in teaching (NCIHE 1997). Dearing’s report documented that academic staff thought payment systems should reward excellence in teaching but were not seen to do so. The 2003 White Paper gave the clearest signal yet from government that
teaching should be better supported, while admitting the lack of progress, declaring that:

In the past, rewards in higher education—particularly promotion—have been linked much more closely to research than to teaching. Indeed, teaching has been seen by some as an extra source of income to support the main business of research, rather than recognised as a valuable and high-status career in its own right. This is a situation that cannot continue. Institutions must properly reward their best teaching staff; and all those who teach must take their task seriously. (DfES 2003, p. 51)

The rhetoric of the White Paper clearly supported teaching, but the pace of change in promotion criteria increased more dramatically with the Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Pay Structures (JNCHES 2003; JNCHES 2004). Higher education trades unions and employers negotiated this agreement to modernise pay arrangements and ensure equal pay for work of equal value. Career pathways and promotion criteria were created in many universities for staff in purely teaching, administration, or research roles as a result of the implementation of the framework agreement. These changes have been driven both by the increasing prominence of teaching but also by concerns over potential equality claims from staff in such positions (JNCHES 2004; NATFHE 2003). However, promotion criteria for most academic staff, who are not on teaching-only or research-only contracts, remain largely unexamined.

**Aims and Approach**

The aims of this study were to:

- analyse university promotion criteria and categorise the various types;
- determine the extent to which universities include indicators of teaching in promotion criteria;
- determine whether these criteria afford teaching equal status with research;
- analyse the differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities’ promotion criteria with regards to the status given to teaching compared to research.
Various initiatives and policies have attempted to move teaching towards a position of greater equality with research, and many vice-chancellors have endorsed the goal of parity between research and teaching (Hanson 2003; Henkel 2000; Lynch 2001; Oxford 2008). The Framework Agreement recommended that there should be “parity of esteem” between research and teaching in progression criteria. Formal equality between teaching and research is a specific policy goal against which the objective provisions of promotion criteria can be measured.

**Methodology:**

University promotion criteria were sought for senior/principal lecturers, readers and professors from all UK universities. Documents were obtained from university websites and by contacting human resource or personnel departments in 2007–8. The universities’ promotion criteria were analysed and coded into the following descriptive categories:

*Role profile: the all-rounder:* This area is relatively new to universities and was developed through the process of job evaluation that the framework agreement instigated (JNCHES 2004). Role profiles list all the duties for each level of position and require that applicants show they are meeting all the criteria of their current level and most (usually 75 percent) of the criteria for the next level in order to receive promotion. They do not explicitly weight or require any particular part of the job description be entirely met so long as, overall, 75 percent of the description is met.

*All-rounder with a specialism:* This category emphasises a minimum satisfactory performance in all areas with exceptional performance in one or two areas. This approach allows candidates to select their particular areas of excellence from research, teaching and administration without specifying any particular area. However, evidence of satisfactory achievement in all areas must also be met.
Specialist: This approach requires applicants to demonstrate clear evidence of excellence in any one or two areas with no further requirements. It allows candidates complete control over the area chosen for their application. Excellence in one or two areas from research, teaching and, sometimes, administration is deemed sufficient without regard to performance in other areas.

Well-rounded teacher: This model requires excellence in teaching with satisfactory or excellent performance in research and administration. It is extraordinarily rare to find teaching elevated over research in importance for promotion but it does occur in one university.

Researcher with other excellence taken into account: This category requires applicants to demonstrate excellence in research but will take into account excellence in other areas such as teaching or administration. The key aspect of this category is that, while research is the primary means of determining promotion, a slightly lower level of excellence can be offset by excellence in other areas. For example, a candidate could submit evidence of excellence in research to a national, rather than international, standard if the application also included evidence of a high level of excellence in teaching.

Well-rounded researcher: This category requires excellence in research with satisfactory performance in other areas. Performance in teaching and administration must only reach minimum thresholds. Showing particular excellence in these areas does not affect the primary measure of the application, which is research excellence.

Pure researcher: This model requires applicants to demonstrate clear evidence of excellence in research alone with no regard at all for performance in teaching or administration.
Results

Promotion criteria from all 140 institutions in the UK with university status as of January, 2008 (DfES 2007) were sought from their websites. If the criteria were not available, then the personnel office, human resource office, or university was directly contacted to obtain the criteria. Some universities were changing their criteria, were specialised professional schools that did not have comparable ranking systems, or carried out no undergraduate teaching. These particular cases were excluded from the analysis.

Senior/principal lecturer

Promotion criteria for senior/principal lecturer were obtained from eighty-nine out of one-hundred and fourteen universities. Four universities were changing their criteria and thirteen were not applicable, providing a return rate of seventy-seven percent.

Table 1: Promotion for senior/principal lecturer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Profile</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Pre-1992</th>
<th>Post-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FreQUENCY</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>FREQUENCY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Specialist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Profile</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Rounder with a Specialism</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research With Other Excellence Taken Into Account</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Researcher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for senior/principal lectureships show evidence of rapid change in promotion criteria as well as remarkable levels of consensus. The vast majority
(74%) of universities use the categories of ‘role profile’ or ‘all-rounder with a specialism’ for this level of promotion. The other remarkable result is the rapid adoption of role profiles among both types of universities, though more predominantly in post-1992 institutions. This form of criteria is relatively new, being associated with the adoption of the Framework Agreement. While its use provides formal equity between teaching and research, little is yet known about its use and potential impact.

Reader

For reader five universities were changing their criteria and thirteen that were not applicable. Criteria were obtained from eighty-four out of one-hundred and thirteen universities, providing a return rate of seventy-four percent.

Table 2: Promotion to reader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Specialist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Profile</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Rounder with a Specialism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research With Other Excellence Taken Into Account</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Researcher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Researcher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for readerships show a strong trend towards research oriented criteria, though the results also indicate much less consensus over promotion categories than for senior/principal lectureships. The most common category was the ‘pure researcher’ with just under forty percent for both types of university. The two
most common categories for readerships, the ‘pure researcher’ and ‘well rounded researcher’, accounted for just over half (57%) of the total with a greater spread of universities across the different categories.

Universities also differed more clearly by type. Forty-five percent of pre-1992 universities used the more research oriented categories the ‘well rounded researcher’ and ‘research with other excellence taken into account’, but only twenty-one percent of post-1992 institutions did so. Correspondingly, thirty-nine percent of new universities used ‘specialist’ or ‘role profile’ categories while only twenty-five percent of old universities did so.

**Professor**

For professor, there were five universities changing their criteria and thirteen that were not applicable. Criteria from eighty-six out of one-hundred and fourteen universities were acquired, giving a return rate of seventy-five percent. The return rates appear very high and suggest a high level of confidence in the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Promotion to professor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Rounder with a Specialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research With Other Excellence Taken Into Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Rounded Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results for professorships show little consensus over particular categories of criteria but a very clear division between pre and post-1992 universities. Every single category except for the ‘role profile’ shows very strong differences between old and new universities with the proportions of one type of university differing from the other by more than two to one.

**Rewards for Teaching in Post-1992 and Pre-1992 Universities**

The results suggest a clear difference between pre and post-1992 universities. Post-1992 universities were established primarily as teaching institutions with almost no research allocations, so they naturally tended to support teaching and reward achievement more robustly (Halsey 1995). Traditional universities, with the strong ethos of research and teaching, tended more towards rewarding research. However, there should not necessarily be a large division between pre- and post-1992 institutions.

RAE driven development of research profiles in post-1992 universities has made them more like pre-1992 institutions and undermined the status of teaching (Coate, Barnette, & Williams 2001). Staff in post-1992 universities do not appear to emphasise teaching any more than pre-1992 institutions despite its greater importance to those universities’ missions (Young 2006). Teaching institutions have undergone shifts towards stronger research cultures in other countries as well. Research from the United States demonstrates that even liberal arts colleges, which built their reputations on their emphasis on teaching excellence, moved to adopt the more traditional university preferences for research and scholarship as criteria for academic advancement (Fairweather 2005; Fairweather 2002; Massey 2003). To what extent
have post-1992 universities maintained their emphasis on teaching with regards to academic promotions?

The promotion categories can be differentiated by those that do and do not recognise formal parity between research and teaching. The results show the proportion of universities that formally recognise research and teaching as equally valid routes to promotion. The first three categories, including the ‘role profile’, the ‘all-rounder with a specialism’ and the ‘specialist’, allow candidates to choose either teaching or research as the primary basis for their application. The last three categories, including the ‘researcher with other areas of excellence taken into account’, the ‘well rounded researcher’ and the ‘pure researcher’, all treat research as a more important category than teaching. Each requires research excellence to proceed and does not allow teaching excellence to be the primary basis for an application. The proportion of universities with promotion criteria in the first three categories indicates the extent of formal equality afforded teaching in the UK. The results from the analysis of promotion criteria were recoded into those universities that formally recognise parity between research and teaching versus those that emphasise research. The data was used to construct a typology based upon equity for teaching and research differentiated across pre-1992 and post-1992 universities. Chi square tests were computed for each typology to test whether there is a significant statistical difference between the types of universities for each level of promotion.
Table 4: Equality of teaching and research in promotion criteria by type of university for senior/principal lecturer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equal Teaching/Research</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Pre-1992</th>
<th>Post-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal Teaching/Research</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square=0.06, df=1, p=.806

The career grade level of senior lecturer/principal lecturer has seen widespread inclusion of teaching in promotion criteria. Ninety-one percent of universities provided formal parity between teaching and research in their criteria. There is no significant difference between the different types of universities, as the chi square indicates. Certainly at this first level of promotion, universities have shifted adopted teaching excellence as a legitimate route for advancement alongside research.

Table 5: Equality of teaching and research in promotion criteria by type of university for reader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equal Teaching/Research</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Pre-1992</th>
<th>Post-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal Teaching/Research</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square=7.591, df=1, p=.006

Many academics view the post of reader, by its very title and its history, as referring exclusively to research activity. Even universities that provide an equivalent teaching-led route to this level of post often change the title to clearly differentiate between research and teaching activity. Many universities that have adopted career ladders for teaching-only staff now find themselves in the uncomfortable position of
allowing teaching-led promotions to readership for this category of staff but not for core academic staff.

An overwhelming majority of sixty out of eighty-four universities (seventy-one percent) prioritise research criteria for promotion to reader. Even a majority (fifty-five percent) of ‘new’ universities do not value teaching equally. Differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities appear equally clear. While a bare majority of ‘new’ universities prioritise research, an overwhelming eighty-two percent of ‘old’ universities do so. The table shows a clear difference in approach between the two types of universities. The chi-square test confirms that the difference is significant to a very high degree of confidence.

Table 6: Equality of teaching and research in promotion criteria by type of university for professor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Pre-1992</th>
<th>Post-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Teaching/Research</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal Teaching/Research</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criteria for promotion to this level show that fewer than half (44%) of universities provide formal equality between teaching and research. Further, the difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities are even larger. An overwhelming majority (sixty-nine percent) of ‘new’ universities use formally equal criteria while an even larger proportion (seventy-three percent) of ‘old’ universities do not accept teaching on an equal footing with research. The chi-square test confirms the statistical significance of this difference to a very high level of confidence.
The results show that most universities accept parity between research and teaching for the lower rank of senior or principal lecturer. However, most reject this parity for the more prestigious ranks of reader and professor. Further, it is largely the ‘old’ universities that are reluctant to provide equality between research and teaching at the higher ranks.

**Conclusion**

University promotion criteria do formally recognise teaching equally with research at the level of senior or principal lecturer. However, this formal parity does not apply to the higher ranks, with fewer than half of universities taking teaching activities into account equally with research for applications to professorships and barely over a quarter for applications to readerships. Oddly, these higher level criteria prove more transparent and less controversial to measure. Such promotions demand evidence of national or international reputations in their area, which requires activities in professional or discipline bodies outside of the university that are more visible and easier to validate. Debates over how to measure excellence in the more private arena of classroom performance create the most controversy. Yet, senior and principal lectureships, where classroom performance plays a large role in many cases, are the one area where universities have moved towards formal equality between research and teaching. The highest levels of advancement and reward in universities, though much less troublesome to evaluate, remain largely the exclusive reserve of researchers. Promotion criteria for these higher levels clearly demonstrate the lower status of teaching compared to research and this lack of parity contradicts universities’ public statements about the extent to which they value both teaching and research.

The differences between pre-1992 and post-1992 universities are also revealing. These differences in formal promotion requirements have largely
disappeared at the level of senior or principal lecture because ‘old’ universities have
embraced formal parity between research and teaching. However, large differences
between ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities appear for promotions to reader and are even
greater for promotions to professor, where ‘new’ universities are clearly more
supportive of teaching than ‘old’ universities. This gap clearly reveals the lack of
progress among ‘old’ universities. However, it also demonstrates the extent to which
some ‘new’ universities have embraced a more traditional research culture. Almost a
third of ‘new’ universities, despite their historic support for teaching as central to their
missions, do not formally recognise teaching activities equally with research for
academic staff, which is larger than the proportion of ‘old’ universities that have
adopted criteria that equally recognise teaching and research.

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