Teaching excellence initiatives: modalities and operational factors

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Introduction

The debate about teaching excellence has intensified and become increasingly politicized over the last two decades as the knowledge society and global competition have emerged. Teaching excellence is now a significant dimension of higher education policies and institutional strategies (Teichler 2003; Skelton 2005, 2007). Though studies indicate that conceptions and perceived purposes of teaching excellence are diverse, and that its meanings remain somewhat protean (D'Andrea 2007; Gibbs 2008), nonetheless there has been a perceptible recent shift of meanings from what were hitherto often internal private discussions of academics at programme level, to those of the evaluative state. The latter has seemed increasingly concerned to link the notion of teaching excellence to the performance and assessment of higher education institutions (Clegg 2007; Lanzendorf and Verburgh 2003).

The purpose of this small-scale study has been to survey and analyse the nature and current direction of initiatives and strategies for fostering, recognising and rewarding excellent practice in teaching and learning in higher education worldwide. Such initiatives are widespread and have burgeoned in a generally unorganised and somewhat chaotic manner (Olsson and Roxå 2008) in particular areas of the world (North America, North-Western Europe, Australasia, Hong Kong, and South Africa) while remaining unusual and rare in other regions (Southern and Eastern Europe, former Soviet bloc countries, the Middle East, India, Africa, and Latin America). In the regions of more intense activity excellence initiatives now present a variety of modalities and forms, with an accompanying range of intentionalities. Definitions of excellence in the pedagogy of higher education have proved somewhat protean. As early as 1998 Elton emphasised the multi-dimensionality of teaching excellence, arguing that individual teaching excellence (beyond mere competence) should be matched with complementary excellence at departmental and institutional levels.

This study explores that multi-dimensionality. To take account of these factors the report adopts a tripartite structure. The first section seeks to rationalise and categorise the range of modalities currently in operation and to identify and discuss the varied purposes for which they are employed. A range of examples are provided of an illustrative nature. These illustrations do not pretend to be comprehensive. The modalities give rise, in turn, to a range of operational factors which future policy makers or funding agencies contemplating the introduction of similar initiatives might wish to consider. These factors are discussed in the second section of the report in relation to specific kinds of initiative. The analysis of these factors leads in the third and final section to the construction of a framing tool posing a range of pertinent questions and implementation considerations for potential adopters. In addition, this section concludes with an analytic diagram linking the intentionality of various forms of initiative with such related evaluative categories as 'context of excellence', 'informing priorities', 'notions of excellence', 'gains', 'risks', 'dimensions of trust'.

Method

Given the small scale and short time frame of the study, data was gathered primarily through desk-based research. Data was gathered from widely differing sectors, across six continents, and initiatives identified at institutional, national and occasionally international level. It was enriched by a series of 20 short face-to-face, telephone, or Internet interviews with expert respondents in the UK, Ireland, the US, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Russia, Poland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Germany, Turkey, Colombia, Spain, Ecuador, and Costa Rica. Certain of these interviews served to confirm an understanding of little or negligible activity in

terms of initiatives. Sampling was necessarily partial and indicative rather than representative or comprehensive, and the findings of this study should be viewed as illuminative and informative rather than universal.

1. Modalities of teaching excellence initiatives

In a study for the Higher Education Academy (HEA) concerning addressing the diversity of excellence schemes, Gibbs (2008) identified twelve different conceptions[1] of teaching excellence that could be further sub-categorised. We take a somewhat different approach in this study. A range of *modalities* were identified behind the variety of excellence initiatives that we observed internationally. These can be rationalised horizontally according to a range of modalities and dimensions of excellence that are being rewarded through the various schemes. These modalities represent ideal forms and, of course, specific institutional or national initiatives might embrace more than one, or perhaps several of these dimensions.

In addition, it is possible to categorise these same initiatives vertically in terms of increasing career status, scale of recognition or degree of impact. An adapted version of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) categories for transition from novice to expert has been used for this purpose, permitting a diagrammatical representation as follows:

Table 1: An adapted version of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) categories for transition from novice to expert		
Level of excellence	**Modality**	**Nature of criteria or indicators**
Competence (Precondition of excellence)	Courses of initial training such as PGCert in Teaching and Learning, PG Cert in Academic Practice, PGCert in Higher Education, LTA courses, Doctoral training.	Evidence of performance that meets an agreed institutional or national minimum set of standards to enter a teaching career in higher education
Proficiency	Rewarding individual practitioners or teams	Performance beyond routine or habituated practices, exceptional or distinctive performance
	Rewarding excellent programmes	
	Rewarding the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)	
	Student-led awards	
	Rewarding collaboration	
	Rewarding internationalisation	
	Rewarding and recognising disciplinary teaching excellence	
	Rewarding and recognising Inter-disciplinary teaching excellence	
Advanced proficiency	Rewarding innovation	Performance indicating a senior level of practice or experience, leadership or recognised authority in a given domain
	Citations for outstanding contributions to student learning (COCSL)	
	Rewarding leadership	
Expertise/high recognition	Rewarding impact	Distinguished performance which is widely acknowledged and merits a special degree of reward or ceremonial recognition
	Rewarding great teaching ideas	
	Creating new institutions of excellence	
	Rewarding lifetime achievement	
	National Teaching Fellowship schemes	
	Prime Minister's/presidential awards	
	Partnership awards	

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[1] http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/evidence_informed_practice/Gibbs_Report

Gunn and Fisk (2013) in their HEA review[2] of the teaching excellence in higher education research literature, concluded that it would still be hard for institutional teams, individual academics, and students "to get a sense of the qualitative and quantitative differences between university teaching that is *satisfactory* and teaching that is *excellent*." (p. 47)

> What is demonstrated clearly by teaching excellence awards is that individual excellence has primarily been defined by initiatives and individuals which have come to be recognised as excellent, rather than as having been identified through theoretically robust, systematic or strategic models … One of the difficulties this presents universities with, however, is that such a retrospective qualitative process does not necessarily allow for either a transfer of a readily adaptable framework to evaluate rapid changes in teaching practice (such as in the case of MOOCs) or mainstreaming approaches which take local activity and enhance practice beyond the locality.
>
> (Gunn and Fisk 2013, p. 47)

They point to the absence of "systematic and transferable principles and conceptualisations" of teaching excellence which has led, in their view, to mainly institutionally-generated definitions and operational responses. Such responses, again in their view, are inadequate to establish effective cross-institutional (and, perhaps it should be added, cross-sectoral) benchmarking "as an enabling process in response to the need for some institutions to improve their engagement with teaching enhancement" (Gunn and Fisk 2013, p. 47).

With this caveat in mind the modalities are now discussed in more detail within our categorising frame and with illustrative examples.

1.1. Competence level

Most UK, Australian, and New Zealand universities now encourage academics, or require them as part of a probationary agreement, to undertake a course of initial professional development to prepare them to teach in higher education. Such courses are intended to bring participants up to a minimum level of competence to safeguard quality standards and may therefore be considered as a precondition of excellence. Courses focused mainly on teaching and learning (e.g. PGCert Teaching and Learning[3], PGCHE[4]) tend to follow a curriculum design which includes some initial familiarity with theories of student learning and engagement, teaching methods (including digital pedagogies), approaches to assessment, course and module design, reflective practice and issues related to inclusivity and equality. Courses which address academic practice (e.g. PGCAP[5]) tend also to include aspects of researcher development, postgraduate supervision and aspects of leadership. Some universities provide a more basic introduction learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) course[6] for postgraduate and postdoctoral students who teach, or teaching fellows or research associates. In the US it is common to include the LTA course element as part of the broader professional skills development of a PhD programme.

1.2. Proficiency level

- *Rewarding individual practitioners or teams*

The majority of initiatives identified tend to focus on the notion of the excellent teache*r* (as opposed to what might constitute excellent teach*ing*) and hence what is recognised in such schemes is likely to focus on an individual's or team's practice or performance that has been rated

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[2] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/TELR_final_acknowledgements.pdf

[3] http://www.liv.ac.uk/eddev/supporting-teaching/pgcert/

[4] http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/teaching/teaching/pgche/index.aspx

[5] https://www.dur.ac.uk/education/cap/pgcap/

[6] https://www.dur.ac.uk/graduate.school/staff/dulta/

as exceptional by a range of relevant stakeholders. Examples of such initiatives would be for example, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme[7] offered by the HEA, or the Best Team in Support of Student Learning Award at the University of Bath[8].

- *Rewarding excellent programmes*

To encourage wider involvement across a faculty or institution, and to reward excellent teach*ing* as opposed to teach*ers*, there is increasing recognition of the excellence of programmes. The Australian Awards for University Teaching (AAUT), now operated through the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) recognize 'Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning (APEL)'[9]. These awards recognise learning and teaching support programmes and services that make an outstanding contribution to the quality of student learning and the quality of the student experience of higher education. Up to 12 awards, are offered with a prize value of AUS $25,000 each[10]. The President's Awards for Teaching Excellence[11] at the National University of Ireland Galway similarly recognise excellent programmes on an annual basis.

- *Rewarding the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)*

Alternatively a scheme may prefer to place emphasis on the extent to which teaching practice or performance is not only considered exemplary in performance but is informed by a principled, coherent, critically reflective and scholarly rationale. The scheme will typically require a theoretical justification for the particular professional practice and approach that have been adopted. The scheme currently operated as the Pedagogical Academy[12] in the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University in Sweden would be one such example (Olsson and Roxå 2008).

- *Student-led awards*

The student unions of universities are becoming increasingly engaged in quality enhancement activities and some unions organise their own teaching excellence awards. Well established schemes can be found at Oxford University Student Union[13], the University of Bristol[14] and the University of Strathclyde[15]. The latter has three nomination categories: Passion for the Subject, Most Supportive, and Best Overall.

- *Rewarding collaboration*

Institutions or higher education sectors that wish to foster collaborative activity may signal this through schemes of teaching excellence. The Universities Grants Committee of Hong Kong (UGC HK) has recently authorised an injection of HK$7 million to its Teaching Development Grants to support worthwhile collaborative projects on teaching and learning. The Alan Blizzard Awards managed through the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) in Canada have a similar intent.

- *Rewarding internationalisation*

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[7] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/awards/national-teaching-fellowship-scheme-ntfs
[8] http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/progressing-your-career/teaching-awards/best-team-supporting-student-learning-award/index.html
[9] http://www.olt.gov.au/awards/nominations
[10] http://www.uq.edu.au/teaching-learning/australian-awards-for-university-teaching
[11] http://www.nuigalway.ie/celt/presidentsaward/presidents_award.html
[12] http://ben.upc.es/butlleti/sefi/pdf/OUTLINES/43.SEFI-2004_pedagogical.pdf
[13] http://teachingawards.ousu.org/
[14] http://www.bristol.ac.uk/esu/bristolteachingawards/studentled/
[15] http://www.strath.ac.uk/eee/news/archives/2012/teachingexcellenceawards/

Internationalisation is a further dimension that may be signalled through teaching excellence strategies that seek to 'steer at a distance'. The Canadian Bureau for International Education Awards would be a case in point.

- *Rewarding excellence in online teaching*

The Wharton-QS Stars Awards include e-learning and blended learning in the scope of their awards. Other teaching excellence initiatives are explicitly focused upon digital pedagogies. The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Awards (formerly Sloan-C Awards for Excellence in Online Teaching and Learning) are one such case.

- *Rewarding and recognising disciplinary teaching excellence*

Various commentators (e.g. Shulman 1986) have pointed to the difficulty of defining teaching excellence outwith the disciplinary context in which such teaching takes place. It is argued that any account of teaching excellence cannot be undertaken without taking into account the disciplinary modes of reasoning and explanation, and the ways of thinking and practising that characterise that discipline. As a result development projects have been established such as the TRANSArk initiative to encourage excellence in the teaching of architects at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) at Trondheim. TRANSark aims "to investigate the transformative aspects of the learning experience of students who are exposed to an extreme complexity of aesthetical, ethical, technical, economical and functional challenges as they become architects."(TRANSark website)[16] Innovative pedagogical modes ('making is thinking', live studios, threshold concepts) are adopted

> … for a rethink in architectural education. Climatic change, economic crises and large-scale environmental crises in different areas of the globe must force us to seek out solutions beyond the paradigm that has created these problems. The situation calls for the development of a new level of pedagogical practice which requires dual-role professionals, that is, professionals who are as skilled in their discipline as they are with academic teaching abilities.
>
> (Shulman 1986)

The AMEE-Patil Awards recognise excellence in healthcare education. The Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE) is a:

> worldwide organisation with members in 90 countries on five continents. Members include teachers, educators, researchers, administrators, curriculum developers, deans, assessors, students and trainees in medicine and the healthcare professions. AMEE promotes international excellence in education in the healthcare professions across the continuum of undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education.
>
> (AMEE website[17])

AMEE supports teachers and institutions in the development of "new approaches to curriculum planning, teaching and learning methods, assessment techniques and educational management, in response to advances in medicine, changes in healthcare delivery and patient demands and new educational thinking and techniques". AMEE promotes excellence in medical and healthcare education internationally through the following means:

- promoting the sharing of information through networking, conferences, publications and online activities;

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[16] http://www.ntnu.edu/transark
[17] http://www.amee.org/what-is-amee

- identifying improvements in traditional approaches and supporting innovation in curriculum planning, teaching and learning, assessment and education management;
- encouraging research in the field of healthcare professions education;
- promoting the use of evidence-informed education;
- setting standards for excellence in healthcare professions education;
- acknowledging achievement both at an individual and an institutional level;
- recognising the global nature of healthcare professions education;
- influencing the continuing development of healthcare professions education through collaboration with relevant national, regional and international bodies.

The Royal Society of Chemistry Higher Education Teaching Award, the Canadian Mathematical Society Awards and Prizes (Canada), and the Royal Society of Canada Bancroft Award for research and instruction in the science of geology similarly seek to reward and recognise progressive pedagogical approaches within their disciplinary communities.

- *Rewarding and recognising inter-disciplinary teaching excellence*

Conversely initiatives such as the Provost's Inter-disciplinary Teaching Award at Ryerson University in Toronto, the Peyton Richter Award at Boston University Massachusetts and the Eugene V. Arden Inter-disciplinary Research/Teaching Award at the University of Michigan-Dearborn all recognize recipients for their excellence in inter-disciplinary teaching. As an example of an institutional excellence initiative, the Centre for Inter-disciplinary Science at the University of Leicester was established in 2004 with external funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Institute of Physics to deliver an inter-disciplinary undergraduate degree, which as a pedagogical innovation is taught by research.

1.3. Advanced proficiency level

- *Rewarding innovation*

Whereas many schemes are content to reward scholarly high quality teaching and learning practice that may draw on established and well-tried pedagogical models, other approaches specifically seek to celebrate innovative practice at classroom, programme, or institutional policy level. Cases in point would be the Chancellor's Awards[18] at the University of Edinburgh; the Santander/THE awards;[19] the institutional initiatives at the University of Bath[20]; Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Awards;[21] the Keele University Teaching Innovation Projects Scheme (TIPS);[22] and the Newcastle ULTSEC Innovation Fund Awards.[23]

- *Citations for outstanding contributions to student learning* (COCSL)

The AAUT also operates the COCSL scheme,[24] which is intended to widen the number of recipients of excellence awards, as well as broadening the constituency of those who might be eligible. These citations recognise and reward the diverse contributions made by individuals and teams to the quality of student learning. Citations are awarded to those who have made a significant contribution to the quality of student learning in a specific area of responsibility over a sustained period, whether they are academic staff, general staff, sessional staff or institutional

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[18] http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.106874!/fileManager/ChancellorsAwards2013.rtf
[19] http://www.the-awards.co.uk/
[20] http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/progressing-your-career/teaching-awards/best-team-supporting-student-learning-award/index.html
[21] http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/cap/procedures-schemes/teaching-awards/teaching-innovation-awards/
[22] http://www.keele.ac.uk/lpdc/learningteaching/teachinginnovationprojectsscheme/
[23] http://www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/resources/excellence/innovationfund.htm
[24] http://www.olt.gov.au/awards/citations

associates. Citations provide an opportunity for distinctive institutional missions, values, and priorities in learning and teaching to be recognised. Citations are awarded for a range of contributions to student learning, both direct and indirect. In 2015 up to 150 citations, including the Early Career category, with prize value of $10,000 each, are available.

- *Rewarding leadership*

The recognition of leadership capacity in developing or promoting teaching and learning initiatives is becoming more widespread. The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities operates a 'Leadership in Faculty Teaching Award'.[25] Such recognition may be linked to promotion criteria within institutions.

- *Professional standards frameworks*

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF),[26] managed by the Higher Education Academy can be seen to incorporate dimensions of competence, proficiency and advanced proficiency (leadership) within its levels of accreditation. It acts at a national level to accredit continuing professional development (CPD) schemes within institutions.

At the time of writing, the UK PSF would seem to remain the pioneer, or outlier perhaps, in terms of this direction of travel. There are currently ongoing discussions within the National Forum in Ireland about the establishing of a PSF that would be appropriate for the Irish context.

Similarly in Germany the *Charta guter Lehre*[27] (Charter of Good Teaching) is one among a range of measures seeking to promote excellence in university teaching across German HE institutions and is operating to some extent as a *de facto* Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), though this was not its intended original purpose (Courtney 2014). It includes awards and fellowships for innovation in higher education. Another measure is the German Universities *Exzellenzinitiative*[28], the success of which, to date, seems still to be in question. A Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) Berlin Social Science Centre report[29] indicates that the programme has made negligible difference and is probably not sustainable. A Goethe Institut article by Himmelrath (2008)[30] identifies a problem in that "competition up to now has focused exclusively on the research rather than the teaching at universities", that it perhaps favours West German universities over their Eastern counterparts, and that the funding of this multi-billion dollar programme may still be inadequate if the goal is to produce "globally competitive universities." (Himmelrath 2008)

The Australian AAUT awards may also contain the kernel of a TEF, but perhaps national context is the ruling factor in this respect in the sense that the Australian scene and traditions differ from those of Germany. National approaches sit more readily in some countries. The US is an obvious example where federal influence on teaching excellence in higher education would not be the tradition. Where a government, or agencies, have been active for a while, the direction of travel is likely to be gap-filling or freshening the debate or focus. The UK and Australia both currently have governments prepared to be interventionist, if not dirigiste. An Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework[31] has been established on a pilot basis in 2014 and a report

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[25] http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/facultyawards/facultyEligible.html

[26] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf

[27] http://www.stifterverband.info/wissenschaft_und_hochschule/lehre/charta_guter_lehre/

[28] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Universities_Excellence_Initiative

[29] http://chronicle.com/article/Multibillion-Dollar-Program/133103/

[30] http://mucz-lbv-001.goethe.de/wis/fut/uhs/en3664072.htm

[31] http://uniteachingcriteria.edu.au/

produced by five participating Western Australian universities[32] (Chalmers *et al.* 2014). The US, Canada, Germany, and Scandinavian countries seem less willing to give such strong steers and are perhaps still more trustful of their institutions to take responsibility for promoting teaching excellence. That said the recent report of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2013) would seem to be serious in its intention to establish a form of TEF or PSF for universities in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) within the coming decade. However, the recent report of the European Commission's IBAR[33] Project (Kohoutek *et al.* 2014; Land and Rattray 2014), which examined barriers to teaching quality standards in the EHEA, shows how much diversity can persist on the ground across the sectors of the EHEA.

1.4. Expertise/high recognition level

- *Rewarding impact*

More recently, perhaps as a consequence of the use of impact as a means of gauging the quality of research outputs, some teaching excellence initiatives have required the demonstration of impact upon, for example, the outcomes of student learning, course evaluation data, or the testimony of alumni as they enter professional careers. In Ireland, the National Forum's Learning Impact Awards in Higher Education are one such example.[34] The Pedagogical Academy at Lund goes so far as to suggest that teaching excellence should make an observable impact on the dominant research-driven culture with which it has to contend (Olsson and Roxå 2008).

- *Rewarding great teaching ideas*

New and ambitious global initiatives are emerging which seek to have a powerful transformative effect on the nature of teaching and learning in higher education. They aim to address the perceived social and economic challenges of the 21st century and prepare graduates capable of thriving among such challenges. 'The Wharton-QS Stars Awards 2014 – Reimagine Education'[35] (known as the 'Oscars of Innovation in Higher Education') are a competition sponsored jointly by QS Quacquarelli Symonds, publisher of the QS World University Rankings, and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. The competition offers "an opportunity to celebrate innovative teaching ideas in higher education around the world, spanning e-learning, blended and classroom-based learning. All higher education institutions are eligible to enter, regardless of location, institution type, ethos and structure." Professor Jerry Wind of the Wharton School argues that this is the perfect time to highlight new teaching ideas in higher education: "With the dramatic changes in behavioural patterns of empowered, sceptical young people, combined with innovative technologies in e-learning, we have to ask if the traditional models of teaching are still applicable."(Media Room press release 2014). He adds:

> The time has come to re-imagine higher education and to reinvent pedagogical approaches. The purpose of our collaboration with QS, the world's leading university rankings organization, is to leverage the wisdom of informed experts in education – to identify innovation in e-learning and blended learning to enhance the experiences of students around the world and to help produce future leaders in every field of study.
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> (Media Room press release 2014[36]).

- *Creating new institutions of excellence*

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[32] http://uniteachingcriteria.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Draft-SP12-2335-Project-Final-Report-21-July-2014.pdf

[33] http://www.ibar-llp.eu/assets/files/Results/Final_synthesis_report.pdf

[34] http://teachingandlearning.ie/priority-themes/learning-impact-awards

[35] http://reimagine-education.com/

[36] http://qs.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=18705&item=137223

The creation of a new institution may also be regarded, in specific cases, as a form of public funding for teaching excellence. Aalto University[37] in Finland was created as a merger of three higher education institutions with ambitious aims in relation to the excellent research and teaching of a new inter-disciplinary combination of Art and Design with Business and Technology. The intentionality in this instance was the generation of 21st-century skills for the Finnish economy. Karlsruhe Institute of Technology emerged from the recent German *Exzellenzinitiative* as a strategic merger between the University and the Research Centre of Karlsruhe to foster excellence in both teaching and research. In Austria, similarly, the Institute of Science and Technology received roughly €1 billion from the federal government over a period of ten years to create a new 'institution of excellence' *outside* the existing university system (Pruvot and Estermann 2014, p. 6).

- *Rewarding lifetime achievement*

Excellence may be recognised as a consistent high quality teaching performance across an entire career, as in the AAUT Career Achievement Award,[38] or the Christopher Knapper Award which is organised through STLHE in Canada.[39]

- *National Teaching Fellowship schemes*

In a number of countries teaching excellence awards now operate at a national level. The UK HEA's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) is a prominent example, as is the 3M National Teaching Fellowships in Canada and the AAUT (formerly the Carrick Awards). The newly-formed Irish National Forum has just introduced a Teaching Heroes[40] of Ireland initiative.

- *Prime Minister's award*

As a means of raising the profile of teaching in higher education the AAUT organises the 'Prime Minister's Award for the Australian University Teacher of the Year'. This award is made to an academic with an exceptional record of advancing student learning, educational leadership and scholarly contribution to teaching and learning. One award of $50,000 is made annually to a recipient of an AAUT Award for Teaching Excellence (ATE).

- *Partnership awards*

Interaction with other sources of funding is also relevant when considering the creation of excellence schemes. Such initiatives draw on additional, albeit often temporary, funds that are meant to give a boost to the institutions' existing schemes (Pruvot and Estermann 2014, p. 8). Illustrative examples of partnership awards would include the 3M/STLHE awards in Canada,[41] the Times Higher Education/Santander awards in the UK,[42] the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)/Wharton Awards[43] at Pennsylvania University, and the AMEE/Patil Awards[44] for medical education mentioned above.

There are two types of modality which do not sit neatly within this categorisation of levels.

- *Targeted or themed awards*

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[37] http://www.aalto.fi/en/

[38] http://www.uq.edu.au/teaching-learning/australian-awards-for-university-teaching

[39] http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/chris-knapper-award/

[40] http://teachingandlearning.ie/priority-themes/student-led-teaching-awards-2014

[41] http://www.mcmaster.ca/3Mteachingfellowships/

[42] http://www.the-awards.co.uk/

[43] http://reimagine-education.com/

[44] http://www.amee.org/awards-prizes/patil-awards

The AAUT[45] is an example of a themed or targeted set of awards in which an institution can use a themed suite of awards to signal priorities or encourage specific activities or forms of practice. These awards may spread across several of the excellence levels discussed above. The AAUT scheme, for example, operates five awards programmes: The Prime Minister's Award for the Australian University Teacher of the Year; Awards for Teaching Excellence (ATE); Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning (APEL); Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning (COCSL) and the Career Achievement Award. The University of Bath, in a similar vein, offers six awards: Innovation in Learning and Teaching; John Willis (dedication to the academic and personal lives of students); Mary Tasker (evidence of creative and effective approaches to teaching); Leadership in Learning and Teaching; Best Team in Support of Student Learning and Excellence in Doctoral Supervision.

- *Rewarding excellent institutions*

Though there are occasional examples of prizes being awarded, often by educational newspapers or magazines such as the UK *Times Higher Education* under 'University of the Year' type competitions, there does not seem to be as yet a fully operative ranking table for universities predicated specifically on teaching excellence, as there are for the now well established and influential research excellence rankings. This is an important disparity and the possibility of such teaching excellence rankings coming into play is discussed further in section 3.1 below.

A 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' (*Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre*)[46] was organised in Germany by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany' (*Kultusministerkonferenz* or KMK), and the Business Community's Innovation Agency for the German Science System (*Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft or Stifterverband*). Universities and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) could take part in the competition. Unlike the 'Excellence Initiative' in research, mentioned above, which was designed to create top institutions and a stratification system, the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' was designed from the outset to raise the quality for the entire system. The competition ran from 2010 to 2012, initially intended to be a single run. In this period €10 million were invested, of which up to €1 million could be awarded to a single institution. (*Kultusministerkonferenz* 2008 ; *Stifterverband* and KMK 2008). The competition seems to have come about through a recognition that the earlier '*Exzellenzinitiative*' had paid insufficient attention to teaching quality, which was becoming an issue of student unrest. Rather than instigate a student fees system, as in the UK, the federal Ministry opted for a competition for additional funding. Brockenhoff, in her (2013) analysis of this competition, found that:

> the competition clearly moves away from an individual perspective on teaching excellence where the performance of an individual teacher is in focus, rather it emphasizes the importance of the teaching and learning environment. Therefore the purpose of the competition appears to change the understanding of excellence in teaching. While often teaching excellence is seen as a private task, due to the competition, teaching excellence is in [*sic*] responsibility of the organization.
>
> (Brockenhoff 2013, p. 70)

She detected a decided emphasis in the competition on the importance of the institution's central leadership for improvements in teaching, noting:

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[45] http://www.uq.edu.au/teaching-learning/australian-awards-for-university-teaching
[46] http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2008/2008_03_06-Wettbewerb-exzellente-Lehre.pdf

> Whereas standardization is fostered by the necessity of the organizational approach, institutional diversity is ensured by the many possible paths towards this approach. This is especially discernible because of the high variation in strategies proposed by the honored applications.
>
> (Brockenhoff 2013, p. 70)

This is an example of what will be termed in section 2.3 below a 'low fidelity' approach. Since the *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* competition other initiatives have emerged including the programme 'Quality Pact Teaching' (*Qualitätspakt Lehre*) for which all institutions which were successful in the original 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' have also been selected.

2. Operational factors

These different modalities of excellence initiative give rise to a range of operational issues. Policy makers or funding agencies contemplating the introduction of similar schemes may wish to consider the following factors.

2.1. Scale, connectivity and intentionality

Many examples of teaching excellence are highly localised, often being driven by needs perceived by an individual teacher. They are also frequently subject or issue specific. Both features can justly be described as strengths. However, when broader overviews are taken in relation to spread and impact – be it by institutions, funding, or other external bodies or commentators – then attention may understandably turn to issues of *scale, connectivity* and *intentionality*. If these concerns are perceived as imposing inappropriate interference in professional and individual decisions then tensions, if not outright conflict, may ensue. Conversely, quality reports repeatedly urge dissemination of successful innovations and evidence of links to enhancement strategies. Hence scale, connectivity and intentionality are pertinent matters if teaching quality is to avoid the 'behind the classroom door' dilemma.

2.2. Criteria, evidence, and standards

The modalities discussed above all raise complex issues of how *criteria*, *evidence*, and *standards* are handled. Olsson and Roxå (2008) point to the need to establish criteria related to reward systems on three levels:

> *Assessment criteria* are used to evaluate candidates for rewards, in our case focusing on the student learning process and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. *Internal criteria* are used to discuss the structural features of a reward system intended to identify and reward excellent teaching. *Systemic criteria* are used to evaluate possible impact by a reward system on the culture of the institution being considered.
>
> (Olsson and Roxå 2008, p. 261; our emphasis)

Magin (1999) distinguishes between criteria and evidence that show on the one hand *demonstrated proficiency*, such as those operating in many of the student-led awards discussed earlier, or those on the other hand which require *documented achievement* which reflects, for example, the capacity to analyse and *reflect* on teaching practices with reference to scholarship and pedagogic literature at NUI Galway, or, further, to use the latter to inform the deconstruction of one's own academic practice for future enhancement, as at the Pedagogic Academy in Lund, or the OpenPAD[47] institutional Professional and Academic Development scheme at the Open University in the UK.

Clearly there is a broad range of variability in what assessment criteria may require, as variable perhaps as the original available definitions of teaching excellence. Nonetheless, whatever the degree of rigour expected, it is generally agreed in earlier studies that the selection procedure should be fully transparent, with detailed criteria known by all parties and with all members of assessing panels clearly instructed as to the hierarchy of criteria used to evaluate submissions.

It would therefore be deemed advisable for selection and awarding processes to include appropriate *checks* and *balances*, as well as a modicum of *flexibility* for further improvements. Flexibility is necessary to ensure fair and equitable treatment for candidates working within

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[47] http://www.open.ac.uk/iet/main/academic-professional-development/open-professional-academic-development-openpad.

different academic disciplines, discourses, evidence paradigms, and writing conventions. Differing work cultures and practices may need to be taken into account in the assessment and selection of submissions.

As well as on *what basis*, a further important dimension is *who* decides and who applies the criteria and monitors the standards. Students and disciples are probably, in practice, deemed the most trusted and acceptable. This goes with the currently popular grain of student engagement and co-production, though students and disciples are probably not always in the best position to judge currency of teacher knowledge, or documented pedagogical achievement or critical reflective capacity. In the UK context, the Higher Education Academy is not strictly regarded as a professional body in the matters, but it does function, *de facto*, as a kind of surrogate. Any involvement which might be open to claims of managerial whim is most suspected.

2.3. Low and high fidelity approaches

The nature of supporting evidence will need to be clearly determined and communicated. This may take a *low fidelity* approach, which allows candidates considerable freedom and variability in terms of how they choose to argue and present their case as in the 'portfolios' model currently in operation at NUI Galway. It may, on the other hand, constitute a high fidelity model in which it is expected that all criteria will be consistently and fully met by all submitting candidates as is the case in the UK Higher Education Academy's Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF) which in most of its categories of accreditation requires documented achievement of five specified areas of academic activity, six area of core knowledge and four professional values. "High fidelity", according to Saunders (2009), refers to the degree of prescription and conformity to the requirements of a specific policy or strategy. "Low fidelity", on the other hand, refers to the extent of openness that can be tolerated in the latter, as institutions seek to express "their own institutional culture and systems" (2009, p. 94). As Land and Gordon (2013) point out:

> The prescriptive nature of a high fidelity approach means that such an approach is largely externally shaped and determined by the need to comply with the requirements of a stated policy or strategy, either at sectoral level or at institutional level. The approach typically expects an evidence-based response that can demonstrate fulfilment of, and alignment with, a set of declared objectives, outputs or standards. The informing notions of a high fidelity approach are likely to be those of convergence, alignment and consistency.
>
> (Land and Gordon 2013, p. 264)

The intended gains of this approach include reassurance to user groups and other stakeholders regarding the coherence, consistency and reliability of provision and practice. The potential risks or weaknesses in the approach are that too great a concern with prescription might dampen down innovation. A high fidelity approach tends to be insufficiently context-sensitive, somewhat static, with a fairly strong aversion to risk-taking. Unintended consequences of such an approach may be the possibility of tokenistic responses, mere compliance, or even judicious subversion quietly executed, in Goffman's parlance, "backstage" (Goffman 1959). There is a distinct possibility, also, that a high degree of fidelity may be illusory, with colleagues at various levels within an organisation engaging in 'impression management' behaviours.

The informing notion of a low fidelity approach is the importance of *context* and the need for both recognition and tolerance of the *variability* that arises within and between contexts. The potential gains of this approach are that it can tap into the grain of situated change and can have substantial impact. It can foster engagement and reach down to the point of action, or street level (Lipsky 1980). Saunders found that "the lower the policy is on fidelity, the better it travels and is reconstructed or translated on the ground … and is capable of being adapted" (2009, p. 94).

A potential drawback of this approach is that innovative enhancement activity may well remain restricted to the specific pockets or enclaves within departments or faculties in receipt of targeted or categorical funding to encourage change. Saunders (2009) draws attention to the problem of moving forward from this position:

> how is the wider context influenced? In effect we have a weak theory of change because this connection is rarely addressed beyond exhortations to disseminate. This of course begs the question concerning how wider practices might be enhanced on the basis of an embodiment in an interesting case.
>
> (Saunders 2009, p. 96)

This is compounded by the further possibility that practice may well become diffuse or fragmented. A low fidelity approach has to acknowledge that control will have to be relinquished to a certain extent. For this reason it is likely to be troublesome for policy makers wishing to impose some form of standardisation over practice or a system-wide shift. It requires a degree of low-level trust at practitioner level and a tolerance of variation and heterogeneity in solutions and approaches. This, however, brings us back to the issue of scale discussed above. A recurrent concern in this regard is how to scale an initiative upward without corroding the trust that was necessary to its original development.

2.4. Funding, reward and obligation

'Reward in excellence' initiatives manifest themselves in various ways. Not all rewards are financial. NUI Galway and Auckland University NZ bestow medals on winners of excellence awards. The Chancellors' Award at Edinburgh University presents an artwork to recipients, as does the national Teaching Heroes ceremony in the Republic of Ireland. Teaching excellence schemes may be linked to academic promotion. Others, such as the UK PSF confers accredited status (Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow, and Principal Fellow). The Australian Prime Minister's Award confers high prestige. But though symbolic recognition is valued Olsson and Torgny (2008, p. 268) found that "a reward system, as well as any part of the policy landscape within a faculty, has a much stronger impact on the culture if it has substantial effects in terms of money for both individuals and for departments." Moreover their survey of rewarded Swedish teachers found that "they consider the raise in salary to be important because it proved to them that the faculty was serious. If no link had existed to funding and salary it would have shown that the reward was only cosmetic" (Olsson and Torgny 2008, p. 268).

2.5. Impact

A common mechanism to stimulate enhancement that reflects a low fidelity approach is to target resource allocation towards specific policies or initiatives. Such a resource dependency model is often referred to as 'categorical funding'. However, as mentioned, this can have the unintended consequence of creating *enclaved enhancement*. It also has the obvious shortcoming of being unable to sustain innovative activity and commitment once the funding is exhausted. A further consideration is that in institutional funding models where a zero-sum game of funding is in operation resources allocated to one department or faculty may incur denial of resources to others. An issue then arising is how to ensure wider institutional or sectoral impact that will reach beyond the funded enclave. The NTFS in the UK, and the AAUT in Australia, which both carry high prestige, are generally recognised as leading examples and use broad criteria which do not only require evidence of individual practitioner excellence but also plans to demonstrate impact, leadership, collaborative partnership, and ongoing professional development (HEA 2008; Skelton 2004). Without requirements to consider impact, the question inevitably arises as to what extent teachers who receive excellence awards are in a position to affect the enhancement of teaching and learning beyond their own practice or practice context (Halse *et al.* 2007). As Olsson and

Roxå (2008, p. 261) emphasise, systemic criteria are needed to evaluate the possible impact of a teaching excellence initiative on the culture of the institution being considered. If they are to be influential in a true sense, they argue, such excellence reward systems need to have an impact on the dominating (often research-driven) culture of the department, faculty or institution.

The matter may be complicated, however, by the orientation, scope, opportunity and reach of the practitioners involved, depending on whether their practice is predominantly at a local level of departmental teaching and discussion with colleagues and students, or at global level involving publication in recognised journals and presentations at national and international conferences. Roxå *et al.* (2007) refer to this distinction (which in practice is never clear cut) as "Trajectory 1" and "Trajectory 2" respectively, whereas Gouldner (1979) had earlier employed the terms "locals" and "cosmopolitans". Informed evaluative judgments are required of adjudicating panels in this regard. Olsson and Roxå (2008, p. 266) characterise the choice between rewarding individuals or seeking to effect change on a culture as one between "morality" and "strategy".

The moral aspects refer to the need to reward good teachers who devote themselves to teaching instead of seeking a career based on research. As a result these teachers may suffer lower status, lower salary, and deteriorating careers. If a reward system is constructed on such considerations, however, it may end up reifying the differences in status between researchers and teachers even further, creating a situation where individuals can choose to engage in one or the other career. But, those choosing teaching as a career would still suffer the risk that the representatives of the dominating value-system, the researchers, at any time can remove the rewards in order to secure their own dominance.

One 'strategic' attempt to effect change in the predominant research culture has been the Teaching Fellows scheme in successful operation at Edinburgh Napier University since the mid-1990s. In this model Fellows, upon successful submission of a scholarly portfolio of evidence, received one (rather modest) annual increment to their salary (in addition to the prestigious title of Teaching Fellow) in return for an *obligation* of a small proportion of their time to engage in local pedagogical activities within their disciplinary or research 'tribes' (Becher and Trowler 2001). Over two decades this generated a sizeable cadre of excellence award holders operating as goodwill ambassadors for pedagogical enhancement in all disciplinary communities of the institution at minimal cost. Ironically the advent of the national UK Professional Standards Framework with its own fellowship status has lessened the distinctive prestige of the original Napier appellation, while the now probationary requirement at Napier to gain HEA Fellowship status in the PSF has rendered the original scheme too expensive and led to its imminent significant reduction.

Most of the issues covered in this section are, of course, likely to be ameliorated by the *systematic evaluation* of excellence reward schemes at timely points in their implementation. However the recent study undertaken by Pruvot and Estermann (2014) for the European University Association found, somewhat disconcertingly, that "in the field of excellence schemes, evaluation is an exception rather than the rule" and that this constituted "a worrying finding which needs to be addressed" (pp. 9–10).

2.6. Sunk costs

As is often the case with mainstream competitive funding exercises, teaching excellence schemes inevitably incur their own specific preparation and operational costs, which usually have to be covered from sources outwith the excellence award. As Pruvot and Estermann (2014) emphasise:

> Costs at the level of the participating institutions include the use of significant resources in the preparation of the applications. This may involve organising a pre-

Once the project is under way its continued management generates further costs, particularly in relation to reporting and dissemination requirements. There is frequently little awareness of the full costs of participation in excellence initiatives, Pruvot and Estermann found, with sunken costs "often underestimated and unaccounted for" (p. 8). A clear inference here is for all administrative and operational procedures to be kept as straightforward and streamlined as possible with reporting and dissemination requirements kept to what is necessary and sufficient for the stated goals of the scheme.

2.7. Integration with other academic development measures

As Elton's early analysis (1998) emphasised, the enhancement of teaching and learning is multi-dimensional and comprises a range of interrelated provision. Teaching excellence awards have been found to operate most effectively when initiated in concert not only with a coherent and integrated institutional policies but also with: professional development programmes which approach teaching and learning within a scholarly framework; consultative dialogues and evaluations provided for all levels of staff; educational research and development projects exploring innovative and effective *practice* in teaching learning and assessment; annual institutional teaching and learning conferences, for which contributions are peer-reviewed and documented in proceedings. The co-ordinated academic development provision to be found, for example, at the Pedagogical Academy in Lund; the Educational Development Division of the University of Liverpool; or the far-reaching, cross-institutional educational and professional development programmes at Finland's Aalto University are testament to the benefits of such integrated academic development measures.

2.8. Compounding factors

A number of potentially complicating, or constraining, factors should also be acknowledged when introducing awards. When these factors arise they call for delicate judgements. One is that sensitivities about Teaching Excellence awards still persist. Those submitted for consideration and subsequently not chosen may be unable to consider submission itself as a positive, in the manner of an Oscar nomination, and may experience a sense of rejection. Candidates who have invested considerable time, effort, and thought in the detailed documenting of their achievement may feel disappointed at best – demotivated and angry at worst – if the effort does not yield the desired outcome. A similar disillusionment may also be experienced by those who have given generously of their time and expertise in advising these candidates. That said, we would also stress that successful awardees very much appreciate the recognition of their efforts, especially where the adjudication has been peer-driven.

Careful judgement is also called for in the somewhat tricky business of awarding excellence for innovation. Innovators can often be exceptions, outliers as it were, in their department, discipline, or community. Innovation can have disruptive effects and may lead to awkward consequences in the contexts of its use.

Finally, it is important to recognise that excellence is an inevitably imprecise concept, and as a complex 'signified' in semiotic terms, is always compounded by particular ideas or assumptions and by other 'signifieds'. A patent example would be that of freedom of choice – about what and how to teach. In certain systems of higher education such freedoms may be curtailed. Such constraint

occurs not only where government interferes, but also through the influence of religion and culture, and, significantly, when an institution commits to a particular 'teaching philosophy'. Of course, excellence could still be defined in all these contexts, but it should be recognised that the standards would be determined in a particular way.

3. Future excellence

3.1. Challenges to be addressed

In conclusion, there are a number of challenges we would wish to air. Firstly, the 'elephant in the room', certainly in the UK, and most probably in many other higher education sectors, is the financial disparity between research excellence and teaching excellence. It is difficult to believe that such a pronounced disparity has no influence on academic decisions and subsequent behaviour.

Operationally there may be a challenge in recognising and rewarding continuous improvement in teaching as against episodic innovation (yet the recent high achievement within British Olympic cycling performance is testimony to excellence by small, targeted improvements).

A further challenge is to achieve a degree of balance between individual and programme teaching excellence. As we have seen in section 1.2 (above), there are examples of the latter, but it could be argued that more attention should be paid to the programme level. This raises the further challenge of defining and recognising excellent institutional performance. Again, examples exist, but mostly of the 'University of the Year' variety. National student surveys offer a partial answer, but they can muddy service satisfaction with teaching excellence, and draw perhaps too heavily on the logic of student as consumer. Indeed a remaining challenge is to allow some diversity of definition of 'teaching excellence' without the concept becoming altogether too diffuse, and hence no longer operationalisable.

It is perhaps worth querying whether the National Student Survey needs a degree of adjustment, to focus more precisely on teaching excellence, leaving broader satisfaction dimensions to be handled in a separate section. It would be tempting to use the National Student Survey in this manner, since it already exists, but the question arises as to whether it would be fit for that additional purpose, rather than as a means of opening up instructional reflections and discussions.

With regard to ranking tables, the key challenge is how this could be done without burdensome administrative costs and/or major dissent from academics and senior managers. Any debate on national rankings would vitally hinge on the issues of criteria and adjudication. Yet, if research excellence continues to feature prominently in such tables and teaching excellence does not, this would, regardless, carry a powerful message. Either way, one cannot neglect to communicate the standing of the latter.

More needs to be done by funding agencies both to showcase examples of teaching excellence and refresh the debate on this topic at various levels. This kind of activity does occur, of course, through institutional teaching days, annual learning and teaching conferences and funding council events but this rarely equates to the level of input by research councils and related institutional activities that have research as their focus.

3.2. Questions for the sector: a framing tool for teaching excellence initiatives

These issues pose challenges for the mid to longer term. Within a more immediate time frame, the following sets of operational questions might be a means of framing issues for consideration at sectoral, institutional, and faculty/departmental levels.

3.2.1. At sectoral level

Table 2: A framing tool for teaching excellence initiatives: sectoral level
What measures are currently in operation to raise the status and reward for teaching excellence as against those for excellence in research?
What would be the consequences of public comparison of institutional teaching excellence through ranking in national league tables? Is this feasible in terms of administrative cost? How might dissent have to be handled?
What would be the indicators and weightings used to produce effective league tables?
How might excellence in teaching and learning be benchmarked cross-sectorally and inter-sectorally?
Is it feasible for a national student survey to be adapted to act as a measure of institutional teaching excellence?
How would the adjudication process for teaching excellence be managed at sectoral level?
What kinds of public–private partnerships might be acceptable or feasible for rewarding and recognising teaching excellence at sectoral level?
What would be the nature of rewards for teaching excellence demonstrated at institutional level?
How do funding agencies showcase examples of teaching excellence and refresh the debate on this topic at various levels?

3.2.2. At institutional level

Table 3: A framing tool for teaching excellence initiatives: institutional level
Does the institution currently have a strategic plan that links teaching excellence awards with the enhancement of teaching and learning?
Which modalities and intentionalities can be identified as informing the framework of teaching excellence which the institution currently employs?
Does the institutional funding model operate a zero-sum game of resource allocation whereby resources allocated to one department or faculty may incur denial of resources to others? What are the (un)intended effects of this?
Does teaching excellence feature in the institution's key policies? (Are specific resources applied to these and if so by what criteria?)
Does the institution's career promotion structure take excellence in teaching and learning awards into account? If so, in what ways?
Have there been any specific events or awareness-raising initiatives to draw attention to teaching excellence?
What are the patterns of reward or recognition for demonstrating teaching excellence?
Has there been any redesign of programme, module or semester structures as a result of excellence initiatives?
What performance indicators or other criteria are used to measure teaching excellence?
Is there any use of institutional targets to foster teaching and learning excellence, for example, number of staff holding FHEA or awarded NTFs?
Have there been any initiatives to benchmark excellence in teaching and learning development, either across or outwith the institution?

What support mechanisms or facilities are in place at institutional level to assist colleagues wishing to make a case for teaching excellence?

3.2.3. At faculty/departmental level

Table 4: A framing tool for teaching excellence initiatives: faculty/departmental level
How are institutional policy decisions articulated with faculty policy formulation? How effective are these articulations in the promotion of teaching excellence?
How would innovative work relating to teaching excellence be reported to the main university committees?
What mechanisms are in place to monitor the development and progress of teaching excellence at faculty/departmental level?
How are faculty/departmental strategies for teaching excellence aligned with strategies for research excellence?
How is teaching excellence visible in strategic documents and implementation plans for the faculty or individual schools and departments?
In what ways has research into teaching been supported within the faculty/department in the last five years?
Are there any systematic ways of modelling expert/excellent practice within modules and courses?
How are course teams helped to develop and embed excellent practice within a new programme?
How is teaching excellence monitored and evaluated within undergraduate and postgraduate teaching within the faculty/department?
What methods of dissemination and what resources have been used to raise staff awareness of teaching excellence within the faculty/departments?
Are teaching and learning courses integrated into doctoral programmes?
What might be the incentives or disincentives faculty/department level for pursuing teaching excellence?
Are professional development planning (PDP) or academic staff review (ASR) schemes used in any way to foster teaching excellence?

3.3. Contexts of excellence

Higher education institutions, in many sectors internationally, face complicated policy decisions regarding the manner in which they will attempt to foster excellence in their teaching provision; how they will signal their intentions both internally and externally; and how they will seek to mobilise the support of their staff in this endeavour.

We suggest that four principal contexts for teaching excellence are likely to prevail in the immediate future, and present questions for policy-makers. These contexts, drawing on Land and Gordon's (2013) model of *contexts of enhancement*, are:

a) high fidelity;
b) low fidelity;
c) managerial;
d) consumerist.

High and low fidelity approaches have been discussed earlier. The extent to which a higher education institution effectively handles high fidelity or low fidelity behaviour can be seen as a matter of management. Good management is dependent in the last resort on effective learning taking place, and a managerial approach will be informed primarily by notions of effective resource deployment and the pursuit of greater co-ordination and alignment. The gains of such an approach, when it succeeds, are likely to be a better alignment of activities across an institution or sector, greater efficiencies in the use of resourcing, and firmer control of policy direction. There is generally a better matching of resources to institutional strategies for teaching and learning. Insensitive, poorly communicated or poorly timed managerial interventions, on the other hand, can provoke adverse effects. These can take the form of open resistance or conflict, giving rise to general unhelpful noise within the system.

The last two decades have also witnessed a concerted shift towards the establishment of a consumer market at a global level, which in turn stimulates competition inwardly within national domestic sectors. This has manifested itself in recent decades in the burgeoning of rankings tables. A consumerist approach to teaching excellence is driven by both the priorities and the vagaries of the market. It has as its imperatives the notion of market competitiveness and the need for effective institutional positioning to achieve distinctiveness, or a unique selling point (USP), within this market. The notions of quality that inform such an approach can include those of fitness for purpose and value for money as well as the excellence associated with 'elite' status (however defined and measured). A significant gain of the consumerist approach, it might be argued, is a more student-centred provision and the pursuit of consumer satisfaction. The approach also signals that 'one size does not fit all' and opens up opportunities for new forms of offering to innovative institutions (distance learning organisations, online courses, private universities, collaborative international partnerships). Inevitable risks also accompany the advent of a consumerist tendency. In an age of powerful media communications the need for universities to market their excellence effectively in both domestic and international markets becomes paramount.

A significant tool of enhancement recruited to this purpose has increasingly been that of the student survey. The National Student Survey (NSS)[48] in the UK, the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)[49] in Australia, the National Student Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)[50] in the US, and its UK equivalent the United Kingdom Engagement Survey (UKES),[51] have all proved influential. It should be noted however that such surveys are predicated on quite different premises. Whereas the NSS primarily seeks to elicit student satisfaction with the provision they are currently experiencing, NSSE and UKES, on the other hand, seek less to elicit student opinion than to assess the nature, quality and extent of their engagement, which includes the extent of the student's personal involvement and effort as well as aspects of institutional provision. The latter, it might be argued, provide better opportunities for cross-sectoral and inter-sectoral benchmarking through providing data on course and demographic factors that enables a more targeted approach for enhancement activity.

We might represent these differing contexts diagrammatically as follows:

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[48] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/nss/
[49] http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/research/start/agsoverview/ctags/ceqo/
[50] http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm
[51] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/consultancy-services/surveys/ukes

Table 5: Contexts of enhancement					
Context of excellence	Informing priorities	Notions of excellence	Gains	Risks	Dimensions of trust
High fidelity	convergence, alignment, documented evidence, wariness of risk	consistency, conformity to standard	coherence, consistency and reliability	stifles innovation, insufficiently context-sensitive, tokenism, compliance	low trust of variation
Low fidelity	importance of context, tolerance of variation and risk	engagement, innovation, variation, game-changing	taps into grain of local cultures, impact on practitioners, fosters motivation, sense of ownership, relevance	restricted to specific enclaves, practice fragmented, low control	high trust of local practice
Managerial	effective resource deployment, 'joined-upness', control	transformed practice aligned to strategic direction	better matching of resources to strategies, greater efficiencies, high control	resistance, conflict, 'noise', compliance, non-compliance, judicious subversion	low trust of local practice
Consumerist	market competition, institutional positioning, strong brand, USPs	fitness for purpose, value for money, high rankings, consumer satisfaction	student-centred provision, consumer satisfaction, improvement of student learning	distortion by the market, stifling of innovation, reputational damage	high trust of the market and the consumer

One can see in this model a strong interplay of internal and external dynamics. We would contend that any choice of teaching excellence initiative or decision about its implementation will inevitably be subject to these competing pressures and obliged to take them into consideration. These competing dynamics render the operation of an excellence scheme something akin to the playing of a game, requiring subtle moves and shrewd evaluative judgement in terms of anticipating possible effects and outcomes. It is, of course, entirely possible for more than one approach or context to be operating at sectoral level, institutional level, or even within a single department, at any given time. A further compounding factor will be that successful implementation of teaching excellence schemes is rarely straightforward or linear. Reynolds and Saunders (1985, p. 200) characterise policy operation as an "implementation staircase" at the various levels of which the original policy purposes undergo treatment – modification or differing degrees of transformation – at the hands of different interested parties. Trowler (2002) describes how implementation usually encounters local "resistance and reconstruction", as a result of signs being read in different ways and hence readings becoming difficult to predict. Ball (2006, p. 75) suggests that "most policies are

ramshackle, compromise, hit-and-miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced, and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and ultimately recreation in contexts of practice." Intentions and practices can change in this mutually adaptive process, and usually at the local level where the street-level bureaucrats can exercise discretionary power – yet also have the risk devolved to them (Lipsky 1980). Bamber *et al.* (2009) offer the caveat that:

> Each level of the staircase will have multiple, but different, issues, changes and agendas, not just one initiative aimed at enhancement. So the enhancement 'ball' bounces up and down the staircase in sometimes unpredicted ways as it meets and is reshaped by these different realities. Any idea that the enhancement policy will look the same at the bottom of the staircase as it looked at the top would be naive.
>
> (Bamber *et al.* 2009, p. 12)

It goes without saying that those seeking to operate effective, acceptable and sustainable systems of teaching excellence will need to keep their eye on the ball.

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