Chapter 15: Excellence for all: inclusive teaching with a passion

A Teaching Excellence Recognition Scheme

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Introduction

This chapter discusses an innovative scheme for recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching called TERS (Teaching Excellence Recognition Scheme). This scheme has been applied in an Australian business school since 2015. The chapter provides in some detail the motivation for the scheme, focussing on the lack of existing incentives for academics to invest their time on teaching relative to research. The chapter then provides some context in terms of types of recognition schemes including potential issues with such schemes, before going on to discuss the particular elements of the TERS scheme and the feedback received from academic staff so far.

Perceptions of the importance of teaching relative to research

A commitment to quality education lies at the heart of every academic institution. It shapes the student learning experience and occupies a significant proportion of academics' time and attention. It is best supported by excellent teaching. Yet the prestige of teaching continues to lag behind that of research in universities. It seems that teaching and learning are perennially undervalued activities within the tertiary sector. For more than 30 years there has been a growing and widely expressed concern that the efforts of teachers are not sufficiently rewarded and recognized in universities, particularly in comparison to those of researchers (Chalmers, 2011).

A wide range of papers and reports (Andrews, 2011; Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004; Aitken & Tatebe 2014) have confirmed that teaching and learning are undervalued as institutional activities when compared to research and that this situation has existed across an extended period of time (Ramsden, 2009; Salmi 2015). In their study of 290 academic economists in Australia, Guest and Duhs (2002) found a strong response to the differential incentives for research and teaching performance. Similarly, from her survey of 152 academics across Australian universities, Taylor (2001, p.53) found that ‘most of the participants admitted to a shift from teaching towards research because of the rewards attached’. Furthermore this situation seems to be universally represented across universities globally.

The reasons for this are varied and have been known for a long time. As far back as the Dearing Report (1997) from the UK, three reasons for the lower status of teaching relative to research were identified: (i) funding for teaching and development projects was often significantly less than other mainstream areas of research and this leads to a perception that there are more opportunities and that research is more greatly valued; (ii) there were few national policy directions on the quality of teaching to guide universities (see also Gosling, 2004, cited in Chalmers, 2011) including the lack of an agreed and common definition or description of teaching excellence; (iii) promotion and career progression was often linked to research outputs rather than based on teaching accomplishments. The Report also identified that an institution’s prestige and status is often more closely aligned to the level of its research outputs than to its teaching outputs, with top tier universities across the world demonstrating a strong tendency to be more research focused, or ‘research intensive’, than teaching focused. (Chalmers, 2011).

These themes remain in play and have been echoed in subsequent studies. Guest and Duhs (2003) argue that a university's marginal income is virtually unrelated to teaching quality unlike research where research income, publications and higher degree completions are linked directly to funding. This provides no incentive for universities to allocate marginal resources to improving teaching quality relative to research. Instead universities adopt token rewards for teaching quality such as 'distinguished teacher' awards which are of the winner-take-all variety. As cited in Andrews (2011), Evans (2005) suggests that the number of awards provided for excellence in teaching are often far too few when compared to the number of potential recipients and staff. In his institution for example, where one "outstanding teacher award" is provided each year, he suggests that the number of staff who demonstrate high levels of teaching performance (perhaps 25%) verses the number of awards available (one award) means that a high performing member of faculty within a pool of a 100 academic staff might have to typically wait up to 25 years to be formally recognised and rewarded for their achievements. In contrast the access and availability for research grants is much higher.

Similarly in Australia strategies to improve teaching quality typically take the form of schemes that reward relatively few elite staff (Beckmann, 2016). Beckmann argues that this can lead other staff to 'disconnect' from the reward system and see the 'outstanding examples of teaching practice' as perhaps unobtainable and perhaps even unrealistic for their context and their particular students. Indeed 'individual teachers of excellence' rewards schemes might inadvertently be robbing higher education in Australia of a

broader focus on quality and lead to the reward of an elite few at the expense of the many. (Crook, 2014)

Survey based research by Fairweather (2005) found that the time spent teaching was actually negatively reflected in salary outcomes, while time engaged in research was reflected in a higher salary and a greater range of employment options within the labour market. ‘Across the world all types of higher education institutions use similar ‘research-oriented’ criteria when hiring and in rewarding existing staff’ (Fairweather, 1997, p. 43). Andrews (2011) identified that only 5% of staff were promoted to senior levels on the basis of their teaching, while the remainder received their promotion based on their research efforts.

Changing workplace practices in universities are another factor, with both Fairweather (2005) and Chalmers (2011) commenting that the increased use of part-time and non-tenured staff in universities and their role in undertaking a significant, and growing, part of the teaching workload as also contributing to the cultural perception that teaching is a more ‘generalist capability’ and a less-valued career role than research. Their research suggests that this has contributed to a culture in universities where teaching and learning is seen as the focus of early career academics, while research is seen as the domain of mid and later career academics where skills and capabilities in research, as well as a well-defined track record in publications, is needed for career progression. Hence to pursue a long term academic career a focus on effective research skills and capabilities is seen as essential while teaching performance is recognised as a foundational ‘given’.

This perception is also culturally supported across academic institutions through the language of their workload policy documents and guidelines, which often reinforce and highlight a role separation between research and teaching time allocations. Such documents often suggest that universities ‘free up’ the time of researchers by allocating more teaching to the ‘non-research intensive staff’ (Chalmers, 2011). This is confirmed by the work of Hardre and Cox (2008) who found that academic staff identified as being insufficiently research productive were often assigned increased teaching loads, while those who were sufficiently productive were ‘spared’ increased teaching loads (p. 19). The very clear and consistent message that such practices send the message that successful academics do research and less successful academics carry the bulk of the teaching load.

Teaching recognition and reward schemes

A review of reward and recognition schemes reveals that there are typically three types or categories of recognition schemes described in the literature which have been tried at tertiary institutions to improve the recognition and quality of teaching and learning.

Institutional recognition schemes which are typically built into an institution’s leadership or ‘reward and recognition framework’. Ramsden and Martin (1996) loosely refer to these as ‘managerial schemes’. These require candidates to apply for recognition or be nominated by others. Typically this is an annual process. Applications are usually judged by a panel and a ‘winner’ in each of a couple of categories determined. These are sometimes referred to as ‘winner takes all schemes’ as non-winning candidates are not typically recognised (except perhaps with a commendation

or encouragement certificate). Rather they are usually prompted to try again in the following year.

Peer recognition schemes are usually judged against a set of predetermined criteria by a team of ‘peers’. These are often initiated and managed by professional associations.

Beckman (2016) also describes how tertiary institutions can establish and then manage these processes. Such schemes require participants to write against an established set of criteria. If the applicant is judged to have met the criteria then they are recognised (typically with a fellowship). This type of scheme allows a much broader number of candidates to achieve recognition and success than the institutional recognition schemes which typically only recognise one winning candidate per year.

The third category is a hybrid of these and could be described as a behavioural approach or *Rewards based approach*. It asks candidates to demonstrate a range of behaviours which are recognised as contributing to ‘teaching and learning leadership’ or ‘teaching and learning excellence’. Each candidate maps their performance against the described behaviours. The more that they can demonstrate to the review panel, the greater their recognition or reward (typically drawn from a defined funding pool). Those candidates with ‘more behaviours’ demonstrated receive a larger slice of the available funds. The TERS (Teaching Excellence Recognition Scheme) falls into this class of scheme. It sets out indicators of excellence in teaching which reflect desired behaviours according to the strategic learning and teaching objectives of the institution, and provides rewards in proportion to achievement against the indicators.

The most predominate type of scheme is that of ‘professional or peer recognition’. Under such a scheme, such as that supported by HEA (Higher Education Authority, UK), academic staff write against a set of common and well developed professional academic standards to describe and demonstrate their suitability to join the HEA as a fellow, senior fellow or principal fellow of HEA. Applications are peer reviewed and academics are admitted at several levels depending upon the depth of professional experience and practice in the areas of learning and teaching and the degree of leadership that they are able to demonstrate in learning and teaching. This scheme is becoming well recognised and Beckmann (1996) describes how the ANU (Australian National University), through an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the HEA, has now entered into an agreement to undertake this on at an Australian level, enabling more Australian educators to become recognised for their teaching excellence.

This type of scheme can contribute to the overall ‘culture of excellence’ and recognition by promoting both an aspirational target for academics (shorter term and longer term at the higher levels) as well as by promoting professional discussion and dialog about what constitutes ‘sustained excellence’ in teaching through the peer review process.

Furthermore it could be argued that many academics could potentially achieve this award over time (compared to the ‘few elite’ that are often rewarded through the institution reward or recognition schemes) if they apply their mind towards continuous achievement and the long-term documenting of their improvements in teaching and learning).

However, this scheme does have some drawbacks. While it might work well for some of the more developed and expert teaching staff at a university it is less likely to

stimulate interest from earlier career academics who may have to wait several years to document and gather the evidence necessary to support their claims of excellence.

Hence, unlike the rewards for research, which are directly linked to outputs that occur regularly and often come with monetary compensation or workload allowances, ‘professional recognition schemes’ take considerably longer to achieve, requiring academics to take a very long term view of their teaching practice and development. Typically such reward schemes can take years of consistent practice to gather the necessary data and experience to achieve effective professional recognition. The HEA scheme is also an organisational and administrative challenge. Not only because it requires the potential awardee to commit significant organisational time to the gathering and generating of enough supporting evidence to submit a viable application, it requires a high number of quality professional reviewers to support the peer review process and ensure that it is undertaken with sufficient quality and in a timely way.

A more systematic recognition and reward scheme

The Griffith Business School (GBS) in Griffith University, Australia, introduced the Teaching Excellence Recognition Scheme (TERS) in pilot form in 2014, applying to one of six academic Departments, and then across the whole School in 2015 covering approximately 220 academic staff.

Aims of the scheme

The TERS recognises and rewards teaching excellence. Both of these elements are important. Recognition is important in order to showcase excellence in learning and teaching (hereafter L&T). This helps to promote exemplar teachers who may become

the future leaders and mentors in L&T, and potential future recipients of L&T awards and grants. It also provides academics with a recognised evidence-base for their academic performance assessment and their promotion applications. The monetary reward element of the scheme is important too. It provides staff with financial resources to help build their capacity as an academic. For this purpose, the use of the funds is not restricted to L&T activities. Academics may, for example, have invested a lot of time in their teaching and may need to ‘back-fill’ by buying some research time from a research assistant. The indicators of excellence serve as key strategic signals about the fields of L&T activity and achievement that are valued most highly by the GBS. The intention is that these signals will steer the investment of time and energy into the fields of L&T endeavour that are strategically important.

Operation of the scheme

Academics report against a range of indicators of teaching excellence (table below) on a two year rolling average¹. The indicators are as follows (see Table in Appendix for further detail on the indicators and the points attached to teach):

1. Student evaluation of teaching (SET). Here students are asked to evaluate only the teaching of the course, not any aspects of course design.
2. Student evaluation of course (SEC). Here students comment on course design including knowledge and skills objectives, types of assessment, but not the teaching per se.

¹ In the first year the evaluation would be based on only that one year of data.

3. Participation in Peer Evaluation of Teaching. Here points are awarded to both the observer or person being observed/evaluated. Points are simply awarded here for participation, not the outcome of the evaluation.
4. Evidence of successful active learning methods and/or evidence of innovation in active learning. Determining the number of points here requires subjective judgement. This indicator is included in order to recognise that active learning is a key priority of this business school.
5. Teaching awards or grants.
6. Scholarship of learning and teaching.
7. Professional development activities
8. Early career teacher bonus points

There are two categories. Category A is for non-session² GBS academic staff and Category B is for sessional staff. Points are awarded against each indicator up to the specified maximum.

i. Funding quantum and formula

Funding is allocated at a \$ per point rate for all points above a threshold. The rate and threshold level is determined once all applications have been received and the total funding pool is known. The choice of threshold is a judgement call that affects both the number of recipients of funding and the average amount of funding. A higher threshold reduces the number who receive funding but gives them a higher amount on average. If the aim is to spread the dollars more widely albeit at a lower level then the threshold would be lower. If the aim is to have a more elite scheme with fewer ‘winners’ the threshold would be set higher.

² Sessional staff are staff who are on casual appointments which are very short term and remunerated on an hourly basis. Non-sessional staff includes continuing part-time and fixed term full time staff.

The formula for allocating funding to a staff member is:

$$\text{\$ per academic} = \left(\frac{\text{points earned by academic above threshold}}{\text{Total points above threshold earned by all GBS academics}} \right) \times (\text{total funding pool})$$

Example:

Suppose an academic earns 20 points; the threshold is 15 points; the total points above the threshold by all GBS academics is 200 points; the total funding pool for the relevant scheme Category is \$50k. Then the points earned by this academic is

$$\frac{5}{200} \times \$50,000 = \$1,250$$

ii. Application and assessment process

A call for applications is announced early in the academic year, with the data applying to the previous two years. Academics enter data through the online tool, which is currently [SogoSurvey](#). The survey tool organises the data in a spreadsheet. An administrative support officer verifies the data where possible. The Dean (L&T) then makes any necessary judgements regarding points. A preliminary list of staff and their number of points is then sent to the respective Heads of Department for information for a ‘reality check’ to identify any obvious anomalies.

In 2016, a budget of \$70k was allocated to the scheme and it was distributed over approximately 30 staff out of a total of 220 eligible staff (although most did not apply). Amounts awarded ranged from \$700 to \$3500, depending on the number of points.

Other comments on the scheme

A number of aspects of the TERS scheme are worth highlighting. The TERS is unlike the ‘institutional’ ‘winner-take-all’ award schemes or even Fellowship schemes, in that it recognises a larger number of staff with differential monetary rewards depending on their relative performance. The scheme does not preclude staff from seeking further professional recognition, through schemes at university, national and international level. The scheme is based on a clearly articulated and understood set of metrics or criteria. These criteria and the whole process are open to staff scrutiny, feedback and annual review. The two year rolling average of achievements recognises that performance is often uneven over time due to any number of personal and professional factors. Finally, there is no predetermined number of recipients – it depends on the number of academics who apply and their relative performance. That said, the minimum threshold number of points can be set to either increase or decrease the number of likely recipients.

Staff feedback and comment on the TERS scheme

Feedback was sought from a range of professional, academic and administrative staff during 2016. This has led to a few changes and modifications to the scope of the program. For example the points allocation for specific tasks was modified and the scheme was extended to casual academic teaching staff. The online submission platform is also being reviewed and will probably shift to Qualtrics.

Through these changes it is hoped to ensure that the scheme is fair, balanced and accessible to a broad range of staff while continuing to support those staff who invest the most time and effort into refining their teaching and learning performance.

While the scheme is still in the early development stage of implementation, being less than two years old, it can be seen that the staff are overwhelmingly positive about the importance and value of the scheme. While the scheme is currently only open to academic and teaching staff, the possibility exists to potentially extend the scheme, through a new set of metrics, to include other support staff who have a semi-direct role in supporting the teaching and learning process. Such a group could include instructional designers, curriculum consultant, blended learning advisers, etc. Such an extension would also need an additional and separate funding pool.

Administratively speaking the program is relatively easy to manage with applicant staff using an online application process which generates a summary and score for each staff member. Using a spreadsheet these can be sorted and the scores and rewards relatively easily calculated. This information is then communicated back to the applicants via a congratulatory email from the Dean (Learning and Teaching), which includes the amount of funds provided and some feedback to applicants. Most applicants tend to use the money to support their professional learning development and teaching and learning processes.

The initial view from some staff is that it is simply a rewards and recognition scheme.

“TERS is an excellent way of recognizing instructor efforts aimed at better learning experience and outcomes for students.”

From senior business school academic

And that it helps to re-balance the rewards that are often seen as being attached to research.

“The GBS TERS gives formal recognition to excellence in teaching in a similar fashion to ‘Research and Conference Scheme’ for recognising research performance. Hence, it signals to academics the importance of teaching in the Business School by rewarding them for good teaching.”

From experienced academic leader in the business school

Others started to look towards the longer term impacts of the scheme in terms of its ability to shift the conversation towards teaching and cultural change.

I believe the scheme has the potential to change both attitudes and behaviour regarding the importance of teaching. It may motivate academics to become more involved in professional development and they will be pleased to receive recognition for their efforts.

From experienced academic leader in the business school

Other staff built on this idea of professional recognition and longer term staff behavioural change as an overall way to create the cultural shift and motivation needed to deliver long term results and corporate goals.

...it is critical to ensure that the design aligns with our priorities, which I think is already the case now. However, as priorities in the teaching and learning area change, the design of the scheme will need to be continuously reviewed to ensure that we are rewarding the behaviours we effectively want to encourage. Having said that, it seems to me that TERS does a good job in generally promoting a culture of innovation in teaching.

From Head of Department within the business school

The importance of rewarding both professional development as well as teaching innovation was recognised:

TERS succeeds in promoting teaching excellence by not only rewarding excellent teachers per se, but also recognising those teachers committed to continuous professional development as well as those innovative teachers willing to trial new methods to engage and motivate their students. By providing such recognition the potential breadth of teaching excellence within GBS is maximised and the importance of teaching as a profession celebrated.

From Senior Lecturer within the business school

A small minority of staff had negative feedback which did, nevertheless, make some important points to address in future:

... one individual who was awarded almost the highest amount of money in the scheme is NOT considered an excellent teacher and was not present for a large portion of the year. Others who won multiple awards with national recognition received half the amount. This will backfire if a common sense approach to who should be recognised is not achieved. Formulas and maths don't always do that.

From leading academic and administrator within the business school

The above comment highlights the point formula-based reward schemes can give a false sense of heightened precision and accuracy. Indeed there is a view that, because our

methods of identifying good teaching are imperfect, and to rely too strictly on them would result in some good teaching going unrewarded, some poor teaching being rewarded and, crucially, some satisfactory teaching being deemed unsatisfactory with serious consequences for individuals. This is clearly articulated by Elton (2000), who claims that teaching quality cannot be properly measured and that attempts to do so lead to unintended consequences. Obviously for example using student achievement scores with no attempt at measuring value added through the teaching process would provide an incentive for grade inflation. However the alternative view is that we end up with a paralysis in that we know what good teaching is but we have not been able to find ways to systematically reward teachers according to the quality of their teaching. Our view is that it is better to acknowledge that schemes such as the TERS are imperfect and that it is important to improve them over time.

Summary and conclusion

The TERS (Teaching Excellence Recognition Scheme) has advantages over the more traditional reward and recognition schemes, although it can and does coexist with such schemes. The TERS rewards a broad number of individuals each year rather than recognising and rewarding only a few outstanding individuals and asking the rest to try again next year. It actively seeks to promote a common and clearly identified set of criteria while still allowing individuals who are only demonstrating some of the criteria to potentially be recognised (depending upon the size of the funding pool). Furthermore it does not require individuals to build a long term teaching portfolio in order to be recognised or require an overly cumbersome administrative process (like peer reviewed processes may). The annual nature of the program also means that it can (and has) been modified and refined over time based on feedback. From the original pilot, through the

first and second iterations, multiple refinements to the funding structure and criteria have been implemented. Such a program can therefore respond to both staff feedback as well as the reshaping of the organisations key goals and values.

Overall the success and general acceptance of the scheme to date could be based upon the fact that staff see excellence as 'progressive and developmental journey' rather than a 'final destination' and that the majority of academic staff can locate themselves as being on this journey.

Appendix
Indicators of teaching excellence and points allocated under the TERS

Indicators	Max. points
1. Student evaluation of teaching (SET) Applies to SET scores that are above the 75 th percentile cut-off, according to the formula: Points = (SET score – 75P) x 40, where 75P is the 75 th percentile cut-off score above which the mean score falls into the 4 th quartile band. This adjustment allows for known systematic variations in SETs for different types of courses. Example: SET score = 4.5, 75P=4.3, therefore points = (4.5-4.3) x 40=8	10
2. Student evaluation of course (SEC)³ Applies only to the convenor ⁴ of the course, since the convenor is usually responsible for the design, management and course oversight. This category applies to SECs on the overall satisfaction question above 4.0, according to the formula: Points = (SEC score – 75P) x 20 Or for OUA courses (using the 4 point scale): Points = (Overall sat score – 3.0) x 5	5
3. Participation in Peer Evaluation of Teaching Participation in formal peer evaluation as either an observer or subject. The evaluation must be conducted through the GU Pro-Teaching program, the PACES program, or a mentoring arrangement approved by, and reporting to, the HOD and/or Dean (L&T). Full points are awarded where the observation sheet and related documentation have been completed and submitted.	5
4. Evidence of successful active learning methods and/or evidence of innovation in active learning Building a culture of active learning is a key strategic priority of the GBS to achieve high quality learning. Evidence of successful active learning methods and/or evidence of innovation in active learning for recognition in the TERS scheme will consist of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive student comment(s) about active learning methods in the course, expressed in SET and/or SEC reports and/or other forms of written student feedback; • innovations in terms of new learning activities or assessment where evidence is provided that the innovations are new to the course i.e. not present in earlier deliveries of the course; • participation in the GBS innovation group, in which academics 	5

³ Sessional staff are not eligible for points on this category since they have little or no control over course design.

⁴ The convenor is usually the principal lecturer and has authority over course design. At this business school a convenor cannot be a sessional (casual) staff member.

<p>introduce new innovative ways or delivering a course; the additional criterion for recognition in the TERS scheme is that the innovation must involve active learning methods.</p> <p>In order to reduce subjectivity in assessing returns against this category, any clear evidence of at least one of the above indicators will earn the full 5 points.</p>	
<p>5. Teaching awards or grants</p> <p>Applies equally to all listed team members on an award or grant.</p> <p>Group Learning and Teaching Citation 3 points</p> <p>Griffith Grant for Learning and Teaching 5 points</p> <p>Griffith Award for Excellence in Teaching:</p> <p>Commendation 3 points</p> <p>Award 5 points</p> <p>OLT award or grant 5 points</p>	5
<p>6. Scholarship of learning and teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Author of text book publication (co-authored or sole-authored)</i> <p>Each sole-authored textbook 5 points</p> <p>Each publication with one co-author 4 points</p> <p>Each publication with two or more co-authors 3 points</p> <p>Conditions for recognition are that a reputable publisher produces the book. The points are awarded in the year of publication. Second and subsequent editions accrue 2 points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning and teaching publications</i> <p>Each sole-authored publication (reputable outlet) 4 points</p> <p>Each publication with one co-author 3 points</p> <p>Each publication with two or more co-authors 2 points</p> • <i>Learning and teaching presentations</i> <p>E.g. conference papers and invited internal presentations 2 points</p> • <i>Editorial board of business education journal</i> 2 points 	5
<p>7. Professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Completing a T&L academic qualification</i> 5 points <p>E.g. Grad Cert in Higher Ed. Each course in the Grad Cert accrues 1 point, plus a bonus point on completion of the fourth course.</p> • <i>Capacity building activities</i> 1 point <p>The point applies to participation in each activity/event</p> <p>Activities here consist of: department seminars/retreats on L & T, Learning Futures events, external events/conferences on L & T, GBS TCOP meetings, teaching innovation projects organised through the (Dean L&T).</p>	5
<p>8. Early career teacher</p> <p>Early career teachers (first 5 years of university teaching in any capacity) will receive 4 bonus points. This recognises that they have not had the opportunity to build capacity that would allow scholarship or teaching awards, nor the sort of teaching experience</p>	4

that is likely be reflected in higher SETs or SECs.	
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