

# Judging teaching excellence for teaching awards: theory, policy and practice

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## Abstract

Awards for teaching excellence are today made in most UK HE institutions where, a decade ago, hardly any such schemes operated. However, theoretically or empirically based conceptions of teaching excellence are rarely articulated in teaching award schemes. This paper reports the first stage of a study, funded by the Higher Education Academy, that has reviewed teaching award scheme documentation, and literature concerning teaching excellence, to identify twelve very different conceptions of teaching excellence underlying teaching award schemes. Ten institutional teaching award schemes have been selected to exemplify different (implicit) underlying conceptions of teaching excellence. In the next stage of the study three award panel members from each will be interviewed about how decisions were actually made in relation to individual examples of successful and unsuccessful applications, in a 'policy capture' process. The basis of decision-making will then be compared to the scheme rationale and to theoretical conceptions of excellence. The study has practical implications for the design and implementation of teaching award schemes. This paper focuses on the conceptions of teaching excellence themselves and on the kinds of evidence that is presented in teaching award cases that implies different conceptions of excellence.

## Background

Awards for teaching excellence are today made in most UK HE institutions (Gibbs et al 2000), where, a decade ago, hardly any such schemes operated. Accounts of how such schemes work, at an operational level, are already available (Ramsden et al, 1995; Gibbs and Habeshaw, 2002). However while models of excellence in teaching exist (e.g. Trigwell, 2001) there are rarely articulated conceptions of teaching excellence underlying these award schemes that relate to any theoretical model of teaching excellence or that are underpinned by empirical evidence concerning whether the rewarded forms of teaching are known to have any positive consequences for student learning outcomes. There has been widespread criticism of the way in which teaching awards are allocated in the UK (e.g. Macdonald, 1998) and the USA (Chism, 2006) and concerns about the practicality. If such schemes are to develop credibility and validity then there will need to be more explicit articulation of valid models of teaching excellence on which they are based, closer alignment of such models with criteria and the forms of evidence that are required to be presented to be judged, and closer alignment of the way judgements are actually made with criteria.

## Methodology

The 12 different conceptions of excellence summarised below were derived from:

- A previous study by the author of the way teaching is recognised and rewarded in English HE institutions (Gibbs and Habeshaw, 2002)
- Examination of about 100 teaching award scheme applications submitted in 2006

- Examination of the documentation associated with about 30 different institutional teaching award schemes operational in 2006
- Examination of literature that attempts to define or measure teaching excellence in higher education

10 institutions (eight in the UK and two in mainland Europe) have been selected for the second stage of the study, that will involve interviewing teaching award panel members about their personal justification of selected teaching award decisions, in a way designed to illustrate as wide a range of underlying conceptions of teaching as possible. Only the conceptual stage of the study is reported here.

### Conceptions of teaching excellence

- 1 **No conception.** Excellence is not defined by the scheme and is simply asserted by applicants

Here there is no even implicit conception of excellence in teaching. What 'good' or 'excellent' teaching consists of is considered either self-explanatory, beyond explication or irrelevant. Cases are based on assertion ("I have always been a good teacher"), testimonials ("I have the greatest respect for X as a teacher") or opinions asserted to be held in the local community (e.g. "Everybody knows X to be an outstanding teacher"). Teaching excellence may be characterised as being rare ("an unusually good teacher") or significantly better than others ("stands out even amongst her excellent fellow teachers"), without defining the characteristics that make it recognisable.

#### **What you might see in a teaching awards case:**

- unsubstantiated assertions of a very general nature.

2. **Exhibiting certain teaching behaviours in a skilful way.** Excellent teaching is characterised by certain observable teacher behaviours, primarily in the classroom, carried out with skill.

Here excellent teaching is what skilled teachers exhibit. Skills may be learned through practice and feedback, especially student feedback.

Most research on what aspects of teaching students can reasonably be expected to be able to judge has focussed on classroom practice and observable teaching behaviour and so teaching excellence has come to be characterised by what can be seen in class. This is often an 'atheoretical' conception in that it is based on psychometrics (to identify what teacher characteristics students can reliably judge) and empirical studies (to identify which of these characteristics correlate with any measurable outcomes) rather than on any theoretical model of teaching, learning or education.

Many student feedback questionnaires embody a series of assumptions about the form of teaching taking place (e.g. reasonably large class, formal, somewhat didactic) and would not suit other forms of teaching (e.g. an Oxford tutorial with two students and negotiated content, focussing on student essays; a problem-based learning small group with no didactic intent; a project based course with individual supervision). The definition of excellence based on research using such questionnaires may then not take into account pedagogic processes that are more prominent in other contexts – for example the importance of engagement in a community of practice, and learning to use the discourse of that community

(see Northedge, 2003). Some student feedback questionnaires focus exclusively on lecturing and ignore all other aspects of teaching or courses, and evidence presented by teaching award applicants can be equally narrowly focussed.

Some teacher focussed conceptions of excellent teaching may concentrate on just one or two sub-sets of the characteristics of teaching that students, or colleagues, can observe and judge. For example they may focus almost exclusively on the role of inspiration, derived from the teachers' enthusiasm, passion for the subject and personality characteristics that might be considered to motivate the student. Or excellence may be considered to derive largely from the teacher's ability to interact well with students and involve them in lively discussion. Both of these characteristics are well represented in sound student feedback questionnaires that have been shown to be highly reliable (e.g. Marsh, 1982) even in short versions (e.g. Coffey and Gibbs, 2001). Student ratings on such questionnaires have been found to correlate with measures of outcome, that validate them as important characteristics to pay attention to (Marsh, 1987). However the proportion of variance in outcomes explained by such single characteristics in any teaching situation is likely to be very small indeed, and usually well below 10%. Most student feedback questionnaires used in the UK are not supported by any evidence of their reliability let alone their validity, but this does not stop ratings from such questionnaires forming a major component of applications, or such evidence being given weight by teaching award judges.

Ratings of the teacher may be very high but qualitative feedback in response to open-ended questions may highlight issues outside the classroom not addressed by the questionnaire, that give quite a different picture, as in this example from a student feedback questionnaire accompanying a (successful) teaching award case:

*"Brilliant lectures – the best at my time at university - but the problem sheets were impossible and you couldn't even get started so no-one did any work from one week to the next and I learnt almost nothing".*

**What you might see in a teaching award case:**

- Student feedback data. The data itself is considered to demonstrate excellence rather than needing to be explained.
- Descriptions of the teachers' techniques, especially classroom methods.
- Testimonials that take the form "I have seen X teach and she displays..."

3. **Implementing a student-focus effectively.** Excellent teaching is characterised by the quality of its attention to student learning.

A distinction has been described in the educational literature, based on many interviews with teachers, between a 'teacher-focussed/ transmission' conception of teaching and a 'student-focussed/conceptual development' conception of teaching (Trigwell et al 1994). The distinction is not about teaching methods but about which aspect of what is going on is focussed upon by the teacher: the teaching or the learning. There is evidence that teachers who have a teacher focus are more likely to have students who take a surface approach to their studies and who only attempt to reproduce subject matter rather attempt to understand it in a personally meaningful way. A surface approach is very likely to lead to worse quality and shorter-lasting learning outcomes (see Richardson, 2005 for a summary). So this conceptual difference is not value free – a teacher-focus is demonstrably more effective in many contexts at achieving higher level

educational goals. Some of the attention paid to teacher behaviour in Conception 2 would, from this perspective, be considered inappropriate and not an indicator of high quality teaching.

Elements of this distinction are built into national professional standards for teaching in the UK by the Higher Education Academy. Extended programmes for new HE teachers have been demonstrated to be capable of changing teachers so that their teacher focus is reduced and their student focus increased (and to improve their student feedback ratings at the same time) in contrast to a control group where there was no programme (Gibbs and Coffey, 2002). This transformation is not necessarily easy or quick (Postareff et al 2004).

Models of what changes as HE teachers become more sophisticated as teachers highlight the same distinction (e.g. Kugel, 1993) sometimes based on longitudinal studies that have followed individual teachers over some years (e.g. Nyquist et al, 1999). Teachers' focus of attention appears to change in a relatively predictable way as they become more experienced and sophisticated as teachers, from focussing on themselves and how they are perceived (and whether students like them and colleagues respect them) to the subject matter (and whether they are 'on top of it' and can pass themselves off as an expert) to their teaching and to teaching methods (and whether they get good feedback on their methods), and finally to students, the way students go about learning as a consequence of the teaching, and what it is that students have actually learnt. It is this last phase of development that corresponds to a 'student-focused' conception of teaching. From this developmental perspective Conception 2, above, reveals an earlier, less sophisticated, conception of teaching excellence.

A student-focus is less common than a teacher focus (Trigwell and Prosser, 1999). However it is not so rare that it could be considered, on its own, a mark of excellence, and it is possible to implement a student-focussed approach either well or badly (Trigwell, 2001). Rather, evidence of a teacher-focus might be considered as invalidating or disqualifying a teaching award case. For example a case based largely on an explanation of the subject matter taught or on evidence about details of teaching methods or feedback on aspects of teaching methods, without reference to its consequences for student learning, might be considered immature and unsophisticated. It might be considered inappropriate to give a teaching award to someone who is demonstrably at an early stage in their own development as a teacher, regardless of their ratings.

**What you might see in a teaching award case:**

- evidence and discussion about how students go about learning and what aspects of teaching or assessment might have contributed to this (e.g. evidence that student study hours and engagement has increased following the introduction of some collaborative assignments)
- evidence about the quantity and quality of student performance and learning outcomes and of how this relates to the form of teaching (e.g. an external examiner commenting on the student's ability to tackle open-ended problems, linked back to the teachers' use of lectures to demonstrate ways to tackle open-ended problems 'live')

**4. Engaging in the 'scholarship of teaching'** Excellent teaching is characterised by rigorous thinking about teaching.

This conception focuses not on the teaching itself but on how teachers think about and develop explanations about their teaching, on the assumption that

better explanations are associated with better teaching. The 'scholarship of teaching' (Boyer, 1990) may take several forms of increasing formality and sophistication:

**4a Undertaking reflection**, often on individual aspects of teaching such as which forms of question or handouts work best. This may be associated with small scale informal 'action research' and 'trying things out'. Evidence is not presented as if it were self-explanatory, but is explained in a personal way e.g. "How I interpret this feedback is..." "I believe this happened because..." The importance of reflection in professional learning and development pervades much influential literature (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Boud et al 1985; Cowan, 1998). This conception of teaching excellence assumes that reflection is such an essential component of improvement that excellence could not exist without it, (so that evidence of reflection might be considered a pre-requisite of excellence) or even that reflection is itself an indicator of excellence.

**4b Having a personal philosophy of teaching.** Here the emphasis is on reflection that has, over time, led to the development of a personal philosophy of teaching of the kind that are evident in the accounts by prize-winning teachers (Ballantyne). Much use of 'teaching portfolios' as sources of evidence of excellence in teaching for tenure or promotion decisions, particularly in the US (Seldin) embodies the articulation of a 'teaching philosophy' that integrates accounts of teaching and evidence about teaching into a coherent and convincing rationale. Such philosophies go beyond description of practice or even the justification of the use of specific methods in specific circumstances, and may provide an over-arching way of seeing teaching that guides all teaching decisions. Advanced programmes for higher education teachers, such as the one at the University of Oxford (inset web address) may be designed specifically to develop 'teacher thinking' on the assumption that excellent teachers can think about teaching in more sophisticated ways and make better grounded judgments about what to do. Here what is considered important may be not so much that the teacher used a particular method or used it with skill, but that they had a sound reason for using the method.

Possessing such a philosophy of teaching may be considered evidence in itself of teaching excellence, regardless of the adequacy of the philosophy or the degree of its support from formal theory or empirical evidence. Applicants' ignorance of such theory or evidence may not be considered to matter. Advice on lecturing, given by a prize-winning teacher and based on the teacher's own award winning teaching, has been found to be flatly contradicted by large volumes of empirical evidence (Gibbs). While teaching award judges may be able to recognise if a teacher has a personal philosophy of teaching, they may not be in a position to judge whether it is nonsense or not.

**4c Making use of pedagogic literature**, either conceptual (for example the 'Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, Chickering and Gamson), or empirical (for example a meta analysis of evaluations of the use of problem-based learning, Dochy) to help guide choice of teaching methods or approaches. A personal approach to teaching is seen as requiring some substantiation, building on the body of existing literature. This conception of excellent teaching emphasises the importance of a phenomenon that underpins all disciplinary scholarship and research: 'standing on the shoulders of those that went before' and not ignoring what is already known in a field. In contrast to conceptions 4a and 4b the excellent teaching does not derive solely from reflection or the development of personal philosophy of teaching based on that

reflection, but from using published ideas and findings from others who have trodden similar paths already and asked and answered similar questions before. In practice this is such a rare phenomenon that it is rarely considered a pre-requisite for excellence but it may be considered almost sufficient evidence of excellence. The necessity of possessing such formal knowledge about teaching is undermined by the national teaching award winning teachers in Ballantyne (ibid), none of whom cite any literature whatsoever in their accounts of their teaching philosophies.

**4d Undertaking pedagogic research.** Here teachers' reflection and action research is expected to be formalised and meet standards associated with formal scholarship. This might involve small scale studies of one's own teaching, in the context of theory or bodies of empirical evidence, and using methodologies for collecting evidence drawn from that literature. The purpose may be to evaluate personal teaching decisions in rigorous ways, or to defend an innovation from more conventional colleagues by having better evidence and explanations than they do, rather than to contribute to the literature. It could also involve more formal pedagogic research undertaken and written up in such a way that it could be presented in a local or national disciplinary seminar on teaching, published in a disciplinary journal on teaching or even submitted to a refereed educational research journal. Here the emphasis is on achieving acceptable levels of scholarly rigour, open to peer review, as in one's substantive discipline, and using equivalent scholarly standards of argument and evidence. In some universities the corporate 'learning and teaching strategy' emphasises the importance of evidence based approaches to teaching and may even allocate funding in relation to pedagogic research performance indicators, as at the University of Sydney.

**What you might see in a teaching award case:**

- thoughtful text describing and explaining teaching and interpreting various kinds of formal or informal evidence in a relatively coherent way. The discourse might range from that of an informal musings to that of formal educational research.
- references to seminars given by the applicant about aspects of teaching, published pedagogic research by the applicant and even to pedagogic research grants held by the applicant.

- 5 **Strengthening the research-teaching nexus.** Excellent teaching is characterised by the benefits derived from the teacher's research

**5a Undertaking 'research-based' teaching.** The assumption that someone who is research-active and research-productive will inevitably be superior as a teacher to someone who is not, is consistently contradicted by a large body of empirical studies (Hattie and Marsh). The quality of teaching (as judged largely from a perspective characterised by conception 2 above) has been found to be evenly distributed amongst teachers of low, medium and high research productivity or excellence. This is now sufficiently widely known that a rather different assumption tends to be made: that teaching that is 'research informed' or 'research-based' is inherently better. This might involve several forms of teaching:

- teaching that is based on scholarship and on being up to date in the subject. Deep understanding of the discipline's key concepts and

approaches translates could be argued to translate into clear and profound explanations and insightful critique of limitations in students' understanding. The focus here is on the subject matter itself.

- teaching that involves students in undertaking research, or at least in 'enquiry-based' learning;
- teaching that involves the development of students' research skills.

**5b Undertaking the scholarship of integration** (Boyer). This might involve something as simple as reviewing a field in order to write an overview lecture for student or design a 'survey' course, but might also involve writing reviews or textbooks that help students to gain an overview or introduction and to situate knowledge in a context.

**5c Displaying** what has been termed '**pedagogic subject knowledge**' (Shulman). While this is based on a deep understanding of the subject which derives from scholarship it is also based in 'craft' knowledge derived from experience of explaining the subject to students. It may be evident in a repertoire of vivid cases, telling examples or effective demonstrations and also in knowledge of the ways in which students may misunderstand certain ideas and how to spot and remedy such misunderstandings.

**What you might see in a teaching award case:**

- an account of the way the applicant's research informs their teaching
- citing of curricula, books or other learning resources that demonstrate scholarship of integration, developed by the applicant for students.
- examples of special forms of explanation or demonstration, justified in relation to the difficulties students can have in relation to the specific topic.

**6 Developing students** Excellent teaching involves a focus on the personal and intellectual development of the individual student and of their identity

**6a Nurturing the development of individuals.** This conception of excellence might be placed in contrast to some other conceptions that focus on the subject matter or on teaching. Excellent teachers may be seen to provide personal support of various kinds to individual students or to develop generic intellectual characteristics (such as those described by Perry) of all students, and also develop their values and citizenship. The focus may be on the liberating or civilising nature of education, or on the utilitarian development of students' 'transferable skills', rather than on the discipline or specific subject content.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is evidence of a pastoral role, citing individual cases of students who had been helped, efforts to widen participation and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special needs, or provision of additional support for exceptional students. It could include use of 'personal development planning' with students. Where the focus is on effective learning environments (see 7) it could include curriculum development that emphasised progression over time in the development of students across courses.

**6b Inducting students into the (disciplinary or professional) community**  
Excellent teaching changes the identity of the student. Excellence in teaching may be seen to involve modelling the discourse of the discipline through teachers' talk and through feedback on students' talk and writing, and gradually

drawing the students into the disciplinary community of practice so that they resemble members of the community and can also use the discourse of the community (e.g. Northedge, 2003). This can also include involving students in activities the community engages in, such as research seminars and peer review. To be able to do this you have to be an active member of that community yourself and so this relates to notions of teaching that embody the 'scholarship of teaching'. A version of this conception of teaching excellence relates to the notion of 'stewardship of the discipline' – that the committed teacher is concerned with producing the next generation of mathematicians (or whatever) and that the way to do this is to embody 'being a mathematician' rather than simply 'teaching mathematics'. Successful teaching would be that which produces new members of the community.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is evidence of involving students in the community in various ways, the success of which would be demonstrated in the rate of student progression to study for a PhD or to an academic career. Inducting students into a profession might be evident in accounts of providing work experience, simulation of professional situations and dilemmas, bringing professionals into the classroom (or studio) and discussion of professional practices, values and ethics or the use of assignments that professional tasks rather than essays. The success of this would be demonstrated in the rate of student transfer into, and progress within, the profession.

- 7 Creating effective learning environments** Excellent teaching is characterised by a focus on students' overall experience of their course or entire programme, rather than on one component such as a classroom or a teacher.

**7a Creating effective courses or programmes.** Here it is assumed that courses and programmes operate as complex systems in which classroom teaching is only one component and that excellence in teaching therefore involves the design and implementation of programmes that work effectively, almost regardless of the excellence of classroom teaching. There may be a focus on the way assessment supports student learning, on student access to learning resources, on mechanisms to monitor student progress and so on, all as part of an effective package of provision rather than as excellent in themselves.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is evidence of programme review and development, possibly over an extended period. Success might be evident in students' overall degree performance, Course Experience Questionnaire (Ramsden, 1991) data (rather than student feedback on teachers or teaching), National Student Survey data or other 'exit poll' feedback data, rates of employability or progression to higher levels of study, or evidence from an external examiner or external reviewer about the entire programme. Such a focus might require the application to come from a course team rather than an individual (see 7b).

**7b Collaborating in teaching teams.** Excellence in teaching is characterised by collaboration between teachers to a common purpose (rather than individualism and competition). Leadership of course teams and outstanding contribution to such teaching teams is valued more than individualism, and if the focus is one effective learning environments then this nearly always involves a number of teachers, whether they behave as a team or not.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is an application from a team who have collaborated on developing a course or new initiative.



## 8 **Good citizenship in relation to teaching**

Here what is valued is the time and effort, and sometimes the leadership, that helps to create the educational context within which effective education is possible. This might involve effort to improve the quality of student intake through imaginative chairing the Admissions Committee for many years, effective organisation of doctoral education through being a very active Director of Graduate Studies, successfully raising funds that enabled a new teaching facility to be built that allowed different teaching methods to be used, or introducing a new and more rigorous approach to marking student work through three successive terms of office as Examinations Secretary. It may be widely believed that such good citizenship is vital, and insufficiently recognised.

**What you might see in a teaching award application** is a list of academic administration roles undertaken over the years, with descriptive accounts of what was achieved, with evidence of the improvements that may have taken place in students' overall education. For example students' prior educational qualifications may have improved, cases of disagreement in marking may have become more rare and there may be a larger number of doctoral students than in the past. However there may be no evidence of improved student learning, performance, quality of educational experience or learning outcomes. There may be no evidence at all about the applicant's own teaching. Excellent teachers may be seen as contributing in many ways to the overall student experience, outside of the classroom and often out of sight of students and of students' ability to 'rate' these contributions. This is sometimes described as 'service' and could include chairing the teaching committee, serving on the examination board, organising the admissions system or any one of a myriad of academic administrative functions. Such service may act as the glue that holds university departments together, even though it may be perceived as trivial and ignored in promotion or pay decisions. Some individuals may perform more than their fair share of such roles, and to a very high standard, over a long period of time, and are motivated by a sense of duty to the department and to the students.

## 9 **Innovation in teaching, learning and assessment**

Excellence may be defined simply as change. Here the underlying assumption is that good teaching is achieved by a constant process of improvement and so evidence of innovation is of itself evidence of good teaching. This may overlap with Conception 4 (in which teaching excellence is seen to involve reflection or more developed forms of scholarship of teaching) where the innovation is reflected upon, evaluated or documented in a scholarly way. Involvement in 'action research' may be considered inherently valuable. The change might be quite modest and local, even within a single class or topic within one course.

In contexts where a good deal of small scale innovation is the norm rather than the exception, the stakes may be raised, and what counts as 'excellent innovation' is determined by the size of the innovation project or the size of the grant that was acquired to mount the innovation project. A substantial proportion of national teaching award winners (through the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme) have a track record of acquiring institutional or national teaching development grants of one kind or another, and evidence of such income earning may be considered as an indicator of teaching excellence. The national reputation that may follow from leadership of such large scale innovation projects

may also be considered an indicator of teaching excellence. Many large scale teaching innovation initiatives have been accompanied by no evidence that they had a beneficial impact, of the kind intended or otherwise.

This conception may also relate to conception 10, where the institution is attempting to bring about specific kinds of educational change and teachers are considered excellent if they contribute to these efforts.

**What you might see in a teaching award case:**

- examples of small scale teaching innovations carried out by the applicant;
- examples of funded larger scale teaching innovations;
- evidence of dissemination of 'good practice'.

**10 Developing the teaching of others.** This conception is at heart about 'leadership of teaching' rather than about teaching per se. This might involve dissemination in the form of giving seminars or workshops to other teachers about some aspect of teaching practice, either within the university or perhaps within the discipline nationally. It could involve writing up case studies of one's own teaching or more formal published accounts of teaching, for a 'Teaching Newsletter' or a national disciplinary association. This would be distinguished from 'scholarship of teaching' by its focus on descriptions of practice and the intention to change others' practice, rather than on scholarship, use of the literature or robust evidence of effectiveness. It could involve local efforts to support new teaching colleagues through mentoring of some kind, or to support graduate teaching assistants.

There may be two assumptions underlying this conception. First, that to be able to perform such functions one must first be excellent (or at least knowledgeable) about teaching: that performing them is a priori evidence of excellence. The second is that this is a form of service that has direct impacts on the quality of teaching, and this is worthy of reward. There may or may not be evidence provided that such efforts to develop the teaching of others actually succeeds.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is accounts of efforts to develop the teaching of others or the way teaching is conducted, locally or more widely.

**11 Corporate definitions of excellence**

Here there may be a mission statement or corporate goal (for example improving student employability or retention) and the intention is that teaching is re-oriented towards achieving this goal. Teaching awards are perceived as part of the leverage to achieve such re-orientation, as a tool of organisational change. What excellence means is defined by the goal.

In some contexts a learning and teaching strategy goes further than specifying the goal and specifies the means to achieve it: for example through the use of e-learning. Teaching excellence is then defined in terms of use of the specified means: for example the implementation of e-learning on a course by the applicant.

Occasionally there is a definition of teaching excellence embodied in an institutional learning and teaching strategy that is about teaching process rather than only about institutional goals, for example 'student-focussed learning' or

'guided independent learning', in which case other forms of teaching or learning, however effective, might not be considered excellent or worthy of reward.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is an account of teaching efforts that have been re-oriented towards a corporate goal, perhaps with evidence that the goal has been achieved (for example improved employability or better retention).

**12 Collegial definitions of excellence.** Here what excellence in teaching consists of is defined and judged by peers (as it is in research) usually without being explicitly defined. If colleagues say that someone is an excellent teacher that is considered enough. This conception of teaching may overlap with Conception 1 in that what others may believe to be excellent is not defined.

**What you might see in a teaching award case** is testimonials from peers that demonstrate recognition. This might include external recognition (e.g. by the discipline nationally). In some teaching award schemes such peer recognition is considered a pre-requisite and if a case does not contain sufficient evidence of peer support then private soundings are taken to ensure that no award could be given against the grain of local judgement.

### **Combinations of underlying conceptions of teaching excellence within individual teaching award schemes**

It is likely that no award scheme will have a simple single conception of teaching underlying it – most involve combinations, but some combinations are much more likely than others. Some have such multi-faceted criteria that they are likely to be categorised in many ways, without it being clear which are more important, and allow applications of almost any form. In some cases conceptions of excellence held by teaching award panel members may be both idiosyncratic and tacit and different from the stated criteria. For example the importance of peer esteem (12) may not be made explicit in stated criteria. Some of these conceptions are illogical to put together: for example a teacher focus (1) and either a student focus (2) or a focus on learning environments (7). Some of these conceptions can be considered as mutually supportive: for example developing students (6) and being a good citizen (8). Some can be implemented in ways that embody others: for example strengthening the research-teaching nexus (5) can be undertaken in a teacher-focussed way (lecturing up-to-date subject matter) or a student-focussed way (involving students in research-like learning processes). Some involve specific educational goals, such as developing students (6). These goals could be pursued in ways embodied in other conceptions, for example with a focus on the individual teacher (2) or on the learning environment (7). Some conceptions (such as 9, 10 and 11) may be involved independently from any of the other conceptions: for example innovation may be considered essential or irrelevant, whether or not teaching is teacher-focussed, student focussed or research-based.

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