# Questioning the Impact of Teaching Fellowships on Excellent Teachers

## Abstract

This paper contains the results of a study into the assumed relationship between teaching fellowships and excellent teaching. Twenty-six recipients of National Teaching Fellowships and University Teaching Fellowships, both awarded for demonstrating teaching excellence, were interviewed to determine the nature and extent of the impact of receiving an award on them, their managers, their colleagues, and their students. Fellows reported that the most significant impact was ‘affirmation’: an acknowledgement that their work was excellent, giving them ‘permission’ to continue. Noting how awards are retrospective, Fellows did not change their practice after receiving their Fellowship as they were already excellent. Most Fellows noted that within a year the Fellowship was reduced to post-nominal letters. Although the impact on Fellows’ managers was occasionally positive, some managers were uninterested. Many managers used Fellowships for improving the profile of the university through institutional statistics, as a form of Corporate Excellence. While some Fellow’s colleagues were warm, supportive, and collegiate, others engaged in bullying behaviour. Students were mainly unaware of excellent teaching awards. Fellows were reluctant to engage in self-promotion of their Fellowship, preferring to demonstrate their excellence through their practice. These findings challenge the widely held conception that Teaching Fellowships enhance teaching excellence.

**Keywords:** teaching excellence, teaching fellowships, university teaching fellowships, National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, reward and recognition, impact and evaluation, affirmation, postdigital

## Introduction

Reward and recognition of teaching excellence is a central element in the discourse of Higher Education (HE). Various initiatives and policies have been introduced over the last few decades to enhance teaching excellence, particularly following the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997). The introduction of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) (Office for Students 2019), and the rise in teaching-only / teaching-focused promotion pathways, have heightened the pressure for teaching excellence to gain parity of esteem with research excellence (Skelton 2003).

Teaching excellence, however, is an abstract concept that has proven resistant to a definitive description. The literature is replete with competing definitions, some of which contain lists of attributes that characterise teaching excellence (Warnes 2019a).

Reward and recognition can take many forms. Collins and Palmer, for example, suggest the following:

**Financial:** Money, pay scale/increments, one-off payments.

**Recognition:** Titles/fellowships, promotion, nice office for a year, guaranteed parking space.

**Opportunities:** Secondments to industry/consultancy, time for research/sabbaticals, going to a conference, staff development. (Collins and Palmer 2004: 6)

Fellowship schemes, such as those listed under Recognition, are administered by The Staff and Educational Developers Association (SEDA) and Advance HE:

* **SEDA**
  + Associate Fellow, Fellow, and Senior Fellow (Staff and Educational Developers Association 2019)
* **Advance HE**
  + Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships (i.e. Associate, Fellow, Senior, and Principal) (Advance HE 2019a)
  + National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) (Advance HE 2019b)
  + Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) (Advance HE 2019c).

In addition to the NTFS, most universities offer internal fellowships to lecturers who demonstrate evidence of teaching excellence, often named University Teaching Fellowships (UTFs) or something similar (Gunn and Fisk 2013). Other universities, however, offer one-off prizes for teaching excellence (cf. Nottingham Trent University 2019; University of Warwick 2019). Nevertheless, it is National Teaching Fellowships (NTFs) and UTFs that formed the basis of this project.

The creation of reward and recognition schemes, as a form of performance management to highlight excellent individuals and their practice, is an inevitable outcome of the extensive marketisation of HE (Olssen and Peters 2005). Potential students (and their parents) base decisions about which university to attend on a range of factors encapsulated within the various league tables, and other information providers (Pollard et al. 2013). The ability of institutions to attract students (and their fees) in a highly competitive market rests on their ability to distinguish themselves as ‘better than the competition’ (Rostan and Vaira 2011). Student/consumers, in a market-driven HE sector, conduct a value for money study and choose to award their fees to the institution that provides the greatest return on investment, and excellent teaching results in enhanced employability (Coiffait 2018).

In a postdigital HE environment, where ‘“old” and “new” media are now “cohabiting artefacts” that enmesh with our economy, politics and culture… [and] when quality is measured via excellence frameworks for teaching and research, policy must... be subject to scrutiny’ (Hayes and Jandrić 2018: 138). Indeed, Hayes (2019) describes how policy is constructed from buzz phrases which pervade the sector, such as Technology Enhanced Learning, Student Engagement, and Employability, which employ language standardised to such an extent that the end products are McPolicies. Thus ‘teaching excellence’ is a buzz phrase in which ‘enormous amounts of data on performance are generated, but much of the language of “excellence” has little real content’ (Hayes 2019: 24), and the TEF is a McPolicy. Under this McPolicy, ‘Universities have quality procedures that require those who teach to be qualified, to monitor and respond to their student feedback and continue their professional development and reflection. Students are required to complete surveys on the quality of their taught experience’ (Hayes 2019: 55) which, ‘[i]n the McUniversity [comprise] hidden forms of labour’ (Hayes 2019: 96).

A considerable amount of time, effort, and money is invested in administering Teaching Fellowship schemes, with the expectation that they will have a positive influence on teaching and learning. This project investigates the level of impact of Teaching Fellowships on the recipients, their managers, their colleagues, their institutions, and the sector.

## Literature Review

Engagement with the various processes of reward and recognition of teaching excellence is widespread across the UK HE sector at an institutional level, although not necessarily at the level of individual lecturers. Much of the discourse of teaching excellence is shrouded in the desire to raise teaching to the same level as research. Thus, according the Universities UK (UUK), ‘[t]he TEF… addressed an imbalance in government incentives placed on universities that favoured research over teaching’ (2019: 5). In the next sentence, however, UUK also noted that ‘the TEF also helped to reassure the treasury to allow an uprating of the tuition fee cap in line with inflation’ (2019: 5), underlining the increasing cost of an excellent education to students, although only for institutions which achieved Gold or Silver awards, with Bronze institutions forced to maintain the cap.

Teaching-based promotion pathways are another example of the discourse involving parity between research and teaching (Cashmore, Cane & Cane 2011). The HEA recognise, for example, the changes in the relationship between research and teaching and ‘in the formal mechanisms for rewarding and recognising these activities and in the responses of individuals, including the “hidden” time spent on one or the other’ (2016: 5). Furthermore, they explain that ‘that what counts as academic work is changing, with the enhancement of “the student experience”, pedagogical innovation, knowledge exchange, research impact and policy development as emerging priorities’ (HEA 2016: 5).

Institutions, therefore, have little alternative but to engage with the measurement of teaching excellence if they want to compete against each other in the HE market, and one of the ways in which they do this is through reward and recognition schemes. Institutions offer their own schemes and encourage their teachers to compete in national schemes. Indeed, awarding NTFs to excellent teachers is regarded very highly by the sector (Austen et al. 2018).

While some opposition to the discourse of teaching excellence exists (cf. Evans 2000; Archer 2008; Saunders and Ramirez 2016), it remains on the periphery. Nevertheless HE is, according to Fairfield, constrained by the ‘hegemony of the metanarrative’ (1994: 58), in which the ascension of teaching excellence exists as a central tenet within a neoliberal discourse of performance management.

### Reward and Recognition

The process of reward and recognition operates as a form of internal surveillance (Deem and Brehony 2005). Internal surveillance effectively began with the introduction of New Managerialism into the HE sector by John Major’s Conservative government. The discourse surrounding HE was redefined using standard neoliberal mechanisms. Accordingly, the HE sector was described as wasteful and inefficient, particularly ‘Britain’s “old” universities, whose much-cherished autonomous self-government, in the name of academic freedom, protected these institutions since the Renaissance’ (Morley 1997: 235). This paved the way for the introduction of pseudo-internal markets with ‘a regulatory policy framework which is based on the notion that competition between higher education institutions for limited resources will produce a more effective, efficient and equitable higher education system’ (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005: 270). The introduction of new managerialism was described as a

new departure because it entails interrelated organisational, managerial and cultural changes leading to a tightly integrated regime of managerial discipline and control which is radically different from bureau-professionalism. Professionals are subjected to a rigorous regime of external accountability in which continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality are dominant (Deem 2000: 6-7).

Trowler and Cooper (2002) note how ‘the discourse associated with “new higher education” uses discursive repertoires associated with finance and commerce: delivery of learning outcomes; franchising of courses; audit of skills; customer-focus and so on’ (2002: 19), with Clegg and McAuley (2005) adding that ‘[n]ot least of these pernicious ideologies is that of quality and audit’ (2005: 332). Deem and Brehony considered the means by which the discourse of new managerialism pervaded the UK HE sector, suggesting that:

The apparent sources of new managerial ideology in UK higher education seem to include: government policies on higher education (loosely summed up as less public money and more regulation) and the policies and funding mechanisms of the higher education funding bodies, including the use of quantitative indicators of performance in research. (Deem and Brehony 2005: 227)

Clegg and McAuley (2005) go further, noting that ‘[n]umerous writers have described the seemingly malign influence of managerialist practices (e.g. Deem and Brehony 2005; Clegg and McAuley 2005) and consumerism (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005) in undermining the traditional autonomy and respect accorded to academics as intellectuals and professionals’ (2005: 332).

The replacement of the openly neoliberal Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major with Blair’s ‘New’ Labour in 1997 had no impact on the prevailing discourse regarding HE. Over the last two decades since then, new managerialist discourse has become increasingly embedded in HE. Archer (2008), for example, found that ‘[a]s people who had grown up and engaged in processes of ‘becoming’ academics within the context of neoliberalism, it was unsurprising to find that all the younger academics had, to some extent, taken up the language of neoliberalism and audit within their constructions of selfhood and academic identity’ (2008: 272). Indeed, Davies and Peterson refer to ‘the insidious production by neoliberalism of active subordination to its terms, a subordination that is experienced, at least in part, as voluntary and as desirable’ (2005: 35).

Mandatory institutional observations include, for example, peer/teaching reviews (Cosh 1998) and/or appraisals (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2005). In addition, entities such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and newspaper league tables act as external pressures on the institution (Pollard et al. 2013) and are frequently used by senior managers to develop strategies to improve performance (Hazelkorn 2007), including removing under-performing modules.

The opposites of over- and under-performance act as extrinsic motivators (Deem 2000). On the one hand, over-performance brings reward and recognition, yet on the other hand, under-performance could result in capability proceedings (Frey 1997). The former should, in theory, encourage teaching staff to excel, while the latter should act as a deterrent against poor performance.

A somewhat perverse outcome of some Teaching Fellowships is that awardees are expected to use any financial component to buy themselves out of teaching to conduct a pedagogic research project (cf. Bournemouth University 2019; University of Leicester 2019). Given that one of the purposes of recognising teaching excellence is to achieve parity with research excellence, making research a fundamental part of the reward for excellent teaching is something of an oxymoron.

### Teaching Excellence

The most significant challenge in recognising and rewarding teaching excellence, however, is defining it in the first place. Teaching excellence is an abstract concept, analogous to truth, beauty, and love: everyone knows what it is, but no-one can define it. Despite the extensive literature that exists on the definition of teaching excellence (cf. Chism 2006; Dunkin and Precians 1992; Gibbs and Coffey 2002; Skelton 2004), no single, unambiguous definition has been suggested.

Consequently, all extant definitions of teaching excellence are, partial, at best. This includes those definitions of teaching excellence that are used as the criteria for teaching excellence awards. Other topics in the HE context that depend on definitions of teaching excellence include the TEF (Office for Students 2019), and teaching-only promotion pathways. Despite the absence of an uncontested definition, many policies and initiatives have been introduced over the last three decades aimed at improving teaching excellence.

Teaching excellence means different things to different stakeholders, each of whom has a partial perspective based on their own vested interests (Crano 1983). Lecturers, for example, see themselves as the consummate professional, students are particularly invested in their personal relationship with the university as embodied by the staff, and the university is focused on the management and organisation of teaching and learning (Warnes 2019b).

The HEA (2018) awards NTFs based on three criteria of teaching excellence: Individual excellence; Raising the profile of excellence; and Developing excellence. Points are awarded against a range of six-point spectrum of excellence for Overall excellence. Points are also awarded separately for each of the three criteria, for both ‘evidence of having enhanced both student outcomes and the teaching profession’, and demonstrating ‘having a transformative impact on students and teaching’ (for Satisfactory and below, this is ‘and/or’). The evidence criteria listed are ‘Outstanding’, ‘Very good’, ‘Good’, ‘Satisfactory’, ‘Limited’, and ‘Poor/no’, and these are widely used across the sector for awarding UTFs, in one form or another (Austen et al. 2018).

A sector-wide definition of teaching excellence, complete with measures, would be highly beneficial. Several schemes and initiatives, such as fellowships, teaching-only promotion pathways, and the TEF, rely on the concept of teaching excellence, but the lack of consistency only serves to complicate matters and reduce confidence.

## Methodology

Being an abstract concept with no single, uncontested definition, teaching excellence is a social construct (Creswell 2003). Consequently, the conceptual framework (Trafford 2008) for this project is social constructionism (Burr 2015). The project aims to gather the Fellows’ opinions and observations about the impact of receiving a teaching fellowship, so a qualitative approach was adopted, and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the preferred method of data collection (Best 2012).

An invitation to participate was distributed via the NTFS e-mailing list, which resulted in five responses. In addition to the NTFs, UTFs from three institutions were also interviewed. The decision to approach three universities addressed potential bias and satisfied the need to demonstrate data triangulation (Denzin 2012).

Having obtained ethical clearance and gatekeeper agreements (O’Connell Davidson and Layder 1994), interviews were conducted with five NTFs and 21 UTFs from three participating institutions (anonymised as UNIA, UNIB, and UNIC). Despite the relatively small sample size, data saturation was encountered during the analysis (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). The interviews included four main questions about impact, and one subsidiary, follow-up question:

* Please tell me what impact receiving the award had on you.
  + Please tell me if you have changed your behaviour as a consequence of receiving the award.
* Please tell me what impact receiving the award had on your departmental colleagues.
* Please tell me what impact receiving the award had on your managers.
* Please tell me what impact receiving the award had on your students.

Fellows were extremely forthcoming in their responses as they recognised the researcher as a fellow academic. A trusting rapport was quickly established (Bell, Fahmy and Gordon 2016), and Fellows felt comfortable discussing their experiences and recollections (Unluer 2012). Use of semi-structured interviews kept a focus on the point of the exercise, but the tone was kept as informal as to allow the interview to proceed as a focused conversation (Fylan 2005).

The interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark 2006). Transcription and analysis were carried out using NVivo 12 (QSR 2019). Transcription of the interviews, along with reading and re-reading the transcripts, formed the first step of Thematic Analysis, and helped to form initial ideas for coding (Sutton and Austin 2015). Codes and themes were generated systematically through a line-by-line inspection of the transcripts. Responses from the four participant groups were compared for similarities and differences.

## Findings and Analysis

Project findings focus on the impact of teaching fellowships on recipients, their managers, their colleagues, and their students. During the interviews, however, it became clear that another entity is affected by the impact of fellowships: the university.

### Technology-enhanced learning and teaching

Conspicuous by its absence from Fellows’ responses was the subject of technology-enhanced learning and teaching (TELT). One possible explanation for this is that Fellows consider that excellent teaching exists independently of the technological means by which it is delivered. In the past this would have included traditional *analogue* technology such as black boards, marker boards, overhead projectors, libraries, text books, journals, and so on. Although, as Hayes (2019) points out, ‘education is not inherently digital’ (2019: 89), the word ‘technology’ now implies reference solely to *digital* technology. Thus, PowerPoint has become the default technology by which content is delivered. Indeed, limited mention of PowerPoint was made by Fellows, but primarily in a negative way i.e. ‘Death by PowerPoint’ (Urban Dictionary 2019). In postdigital HE, distance learning no longer relies solely on the mail but is delivered online, and entire libraries of text books and academic journals are undergoing digitisation so that eventually all human knowledge will be available digitally (Rikowski 2008).

The primary question, however, remains whether or not the replacement of analogue technologies with digital technologies, actually does *enhance* learning (Bayne 2014), or does it simply expand the breadth of knowledge available and increase the speed of access to it. As Goodchild and Speed note, ‘the idea that technology *enhances* learning is an accepted orthodoxy, a common sense view of teaching and learning, and to resist this view seems to fly in the face of rationality (Goodchild and Speed 2018: 950) (emphasis in the original). However, not all technology enhances learning and teaching. The use of virtual worlds such as *Second Life* has practically vanished (Veix 2018), and the much-lauded Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) has diminished as a *force majeure*. Students view the ubiquitous Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) as ‘primitive’ in design (CoSector 2016) and frequently as information repositories only. Containing lectures notes (and PowerPoint presentations) and (occasionally) recorded lectures (Hayes 2019), VLEs are not used to their fullest potential. Nevertheless, classroom-based response systems such as Poll Everywhere and formative assessment apps such as Kahoot have continued to be widely used, probably because of their ease of use (Compton and Allen 2018).

With the possible exception of Twitter, students see social media platforms as *social* spaces rather than educational spaces, and prefer not to share these spaces with their teachers (Madge et al. 2009). And while Wikipedia may still be regarded by lecturers as somewhat untrustworthy, primarily due to its user-generated content, it is frequently the first port of call for many students researching for an assignment.

In the postdigital world, effective use of TELT, seamlessly integrated into teaching, both online and offline, renders it invisible as a ‘ready-to-hand’ tool (Heidegger 1927) that suits the pedagogy rather than a pedagogy in itself. As Matthews explains, ‘[a] critical approach to pedagogy is in line with much postdigital thinking which looks to reject technological determinism and to achieve greater agency for learners and those involved in teaching and supporting teaching (Matthews 2019: 415). Thus, ‘technologies are being used by students but not [for] transforming or enhancing learning. Technology is being used to be able to access resources, submit work online and communicate with others’ (Matthews 2019: 416).

The ubiquity of smartphones places learning firmly in the control of students who can access content as and when they choose, and, in addition, students can create and distribute their own content. Nevertheless, some academics have yet to embrace TELT in its entirety. For example, only two awardees mentioned flipped teaching, and only one mentioned Team-Based Learning, while another referred to augmented reality. UNIA7, for example, notes that ‘technology can be enormously helpful. No question. I’ve never been a technophobe at all. But… I don’t forget the fact that at the heart of this is a relationship, [and] teaching’s that relationship’. Yet UNIA7 laments how, ‘when someone’s gone away to training… they come away with some… piece of technology, and they come back with a… quasi-religious zeal to introduce it over everything’. This view, as Matthews points out,

encapsulates the postdigital choice: the right tool for the right job and not defaulting to the latest digital device without evaluation. Postdigital is in no way a rejection of the digital but a move towards a mature, evolutionary approach to everyday practices including a rejection of the use of digital in some ways to mean better or improved (Matthews 2019: 414)

### Impact on Awardees

At some universities, Fellowships are bestowed at learning and teaching conferences, while at others they form part of the student graduation ceremony. Awardees reflected on the feelings they experienced when receiving their Fellowships and noted the positive emotional reactions they felt (UNIB9: ‘I had to go on stage… [to] collect my own reward, nice big round of applause’). Fellows who received their awards in front of their students noted the additional rush of emotion from the applause from those students who had nominated them (UNIB3: ‘they started doing these awards at the graduation ceremony. And I went to the graduation ceremony, but when they got to the end, and they said “and the teaching excellence award…” I got a standing ovation in the ceremony from the students… It was very satisfying’). Some Fellows at institutions where awards were conferred at learning and teaching conferences, noted the absence of their managers and colleagues (UNIA6: ‘there’s no one in the department who attended the conference’). Virtually all Fellows noted the transience (Singh 2016) of the initial emotional sensations (UNIB9: ‘then it seems to be gone very quickly... it doesn’t leave any lasting impression’), with some noting that within a year the awards had been reduced to post-nominal letters on their email signatures (UNIA1: ‘I’ve got University Teaching Fellow on my signature’).

The most significant impact on recipients was, in fact, Affirmation. Fellows reported a sense of confirmation that their practice was good, and felt that they had permission to continue doing what they were doing (UNIB5: ‘[the] Fellowship… was a huge affirmation of what I’ve been doing, and therefore, it was a spur to carry on’). Some Fellows, particularly those from a non-traditional HE backgrounds, were experiencing Imposter Syndrome (Parkman 2016), where despite external evidence to the contrary, they were still waiting to be exposed as frauds (UNIC3: ‘a non-traditional lecturer, someone who has come in from a working-class community… I felt better about myself. Getting that bit of validation. So that was nice’).

Some recipients decried their ‘excellent’ status, claiming instead that they were simply ‘lucky’ (UNIB2: ‘I don’t think I’m particularly excellent, just that I happen to be lucky’), suggesting that they were experiencing the Dunning-Kruger effect, where highly intelligent and accomplished people believe that they are average and no better than anyone else (Kruger and Dunning 2009). Others referred to other colleagues as being ‘better than I am’, indicating that they were unfavourably comparing themselves with their peers (Keyes and Harvey 2019).

In all cases, interviewees reported that they did not change their teaching practice because of being awarded a teaching fellowship (UNIA6: ‘If you tell how to be more excellent, I will learn it and become more excellent’). This finding reflects the retrospective nature of the awards: they are only awarded *after* a lecturer has become an excellent teacher (Robinson et al. 2018). Some Fellows made amusing, self-deprecating comments, saying that they no longer need to try as hard (e.g. NTFS1: ‘Oh yeah, I’ve become really big-headed and cocky! Yeah I’ve got the tee-shirt, [and I’m] walking around saying I’m better than you!’).

A few lecturers did not apply for fellowships for fear of being identified as a learning and teaching expert, which leads to another perverse outcome. Recognition as a learning and teaching experts means that excellent teachers are frequently taken out of the classroom and placed on committees and/or expected to deliver Continuous Professional Development (CPD). As UNIA7 recalled,

I have led some CPD, and again that that’s, that’s great to do… I’m always a little bit wary about leading CPD because almost by definition, if you are leading a workshop, it suggests that you are an expert, or even worse, you regard yourself as an expert. And that again, is not an entirely comfortable position, because in many ways, I’m sort of simply giving some thoughts and my own experience and seeing if they if they fit other people’s agendas or not.

Some Fellows had been able to use their award as evidence to support internal promotion (UNI5: ‘Once I had the UTF, I applied… for Senior Fellowship of the HEA and I got that too... And the two together resulted in eventually to promotion to professorship. So, career progression? Absolutely’). Others, however, had a different experience (UNIA6: ‘Career progression: absolutely nothing, nothing whatsoever’).

Fellows noted that some staff whose performance lies around the central tendency of the spectrum of excellence, produce what may be called a ‘typical’, or ‘average’, or ‘adequate’ level of performance, choose not to apply for promotion. Those on the Senior Lecturer grade, for instance, may perceive themselves as having achieved a satisfactory return on investment: an acceptable level of income based on an acceptable level of professional effort (Wexley and Yukl 1977). They may have conducted a cost-benefit analysis on promotion, and decided that the increase in responsibility and changes in work practice are not satisfactorily rewarded by the increase in salary. UNIA1, for example, noted that ‘promotion only happens for academic staff at two points; when they go from lecturer to senior lecturer, which is semi-automatic, provided you’ve got your PGCert. And then you’ve got the big jump from level six to level seven, and the majority of staff opt not to make that jump’. Supposing that their continued employment is relatively safe (apart from periodic budget adjustments), reward and recognition schemes offer little in the way of incentive to exceed their level of performance.

All Fellows were intrinsically motivated to be excellent (Ramlall 2004), albeit for different reasons (i.e. duty (UNIB2: ‘Well, it’s what you have to do, isn’t it?’), altruism (UNIA5: ‘it’s a fairly altruistic motive, because you want them to succeed, so you do anything you could to help them’), sharing knowledge (NTFS4: ‘I’m keen to impart a knowledge of my subject’)). Primarily, however, Fellows were motivated to help students to achieve their full potential (NTFS1: ‘I think ultimately what I do is making a difference to students’).

Importantly, none of the Fellows were motivated to develop excellence by the existence of Fellowships (Frey 1997). Half of the Fellows stated quite clearly that were not a ‘Trophy Hunter’ (NTFS3: ‘I’ve never been a gong chaser… I do my job to the best of my ability and those come as a consequence’). The financial reward associated with some fellowships has also had only limited motivational power (UNIA4: ‘Money doesn’t motivate me in any way shape or form’), as can be implied by the fact that the money associated with the NTFS has been decreased from £50,000 to zero with no significant decrease in applications (Rolfe 2018). One possible explanation for this is enhancement of Personal Reputation.

Nevertheless, the topic of personal reputation was conspicuous by its absence in participant replies. Although a UTF’s personal reputation is arguably restricted to their own institution, possession of a Fellowship increases the awardee’s status as a potential employee, compared with an equally qualified candidate without a fellowship. For NTFs, however, enhancement of personal reputation is at national level at least. It is possible that the NTFs who participated in this study had nothing to gain from enhanced reputation as some were well-established professors with a proven track record of publications, while others were approaching retirement. Other NTFs, however, may have a different opinion. Yet it is possible that Fellows continue to relate scholarly reputation more closely with research output than teaching prowess (cf. Nicholas 2017; Herman and Nicholas 2019).

### Impact on Managers

Around a quarter of the recipients reported that their managers celebrated the award of a fellowship. Some managers, for example, sent a congratulatory email (UNIB1: ‘the Director of the campus circulated an email, and I had, it was one of those round robin emails, and I had colleagues congratulating me. It was really nice… really, really lovely’).

Others were much less demonstrative, with half of Fellows’ managers barely acknowledging the award at all (UNIB8: ‘I have never received a word of recognition from the Dean of the school about any of these awards. Or from my Head of Department’). As noted above, some did not even attend the award ceremony. This lack of interest was as equally true for NTFs as it was for UTFs (NTFS3: ‘The fact that I’m somebody with a NTF is to a large extent irrelevant’).

In some cases, this was because of the pervasive attitude that teaching is somehow subordinate to research (Oxford 2008). However, some managers may have been experiencing Subordinate Threat (Yu et al. 2018), where they felt their position was threatened by a high achieving junior colleague (Fuller et al. 2005).

### Impact on Colleagues

Some Fellows reported receiving congratulatory messages from some colleagues, but this was relatively unusual (NTFS1: ‘I’ve experienced something that’s felt really quite lovely, and supportive, and magnanimous, and celebratory’). The majority of colleagues, however, were uninterested (UNIC3: ‘I don’t think anyone took any notice of anyone getting a University Teaching Fellowship’), with many considering awards that are, in the main, self- or student-nominated (i.e. either narcissistic or based on a popularity contest) to have little or no value (UNIA6: ‘because it’s self-driven, they discount it’). In some cases it was clear that colleagues were unaware of the application process and the need to provide evidence of excellence, or assumed that awards were given to all applicants (UNIA6: ‘they’re assuming that everyone that applies gets it, they don’t see that actually people don’t, people are told sorry, you’re not suitable they’re given feedback that can improve’).

Other colleagues felt that they should not need to self-nominate as their teaching excellence should be recognised through appraisal and/or peer observation (UNIA6: ‘they’d prefer if there’s peer recognition; that your work is recognised without you having to put yourself forward’). Yet more were simply put off by the lengthy and complicated application process (UNIA5: ‘it’s a very detailed, difficult exercise to put an application together… I think there’s an awful lot of very, very good teachers, better than me, who don’t apply’).

Some Fellows spoke of colleagues who maintained a form of passive resistance to the mantra of excellence by simply accepting a reasonable salary (i.e. Senior Lecturer) and rejecting the additional workload and stress that is attached to promotion to the next grade. Around a quarter of awardees noted hostile behaviour directed towards them from their colleagues (Frame, Johnson and Rosie 2006), who engaged in playground bullying (e.g. UNIB3: ‘it’s that playground bullying… that they going to ignore you’).

Only UNIA3 noted that a colleague had applied for a UTF after they had received theirs and posited that there may have been a causal motivational relationship between the two. In all other cases, however, awarding a teaching fellowship to one member of staff did not motivate their peers to apply.

Some awardees’ colleagues opted not to apply for teaching fellowships as association with teaching excellence might hamper their promotion on the basis of research (Cashmore, Cane and Cane 2011) (NTFS4: ‘I’ve certainly had a couple of potential nominees here who have said to me “I don’t want to be nominated by the institution [for an NTF] because I don’t want to be recognised as a teacher: It’ll hinder my career”‘). The ongoing development of teaching-only promotion pathways may raise teaching to the same level of esteem as research (D’andrea and Gosling 2001).

### Impact on Students

The fact that a lecturer receives a teaching excellence award has no impact on students. In those institutions where awards are either wholly or in part student-nominated, and awarded at student graduation ceremonies, the nominating students know that their lecturers have received an excellent teaching award (UNIB2: ‘the only students who knew about it were those graduating’). The subsequent student intake, however, are unaware (Robinson et al. 2018). In institutions where awards are self-nominated and awarded at learning and teaching conferences, students have no way of knowing that their teachers are excellent (UNIA6: ‘I don’t think they are aware that the university has such awards, and that people who are considered to be good are recognised’).

Fellows noted that they included the award as post-nominal letters on their email signatures (UNIA1: ‘I have UTF on my email signature’), for example, but doubted that students knew what the letters meant (UNIA5: ‘whether the students actually ever twig what that is... nobody’s ever asked me’). Others included details of their awards elsewhere, such as their LinkedIn profile (UNIB5: ‘if students look at my LinkedIn profile, they will see it’), but again, felt it was unlikely that students would visit them or understand the implications of the award (UNIC1: ‘But I don’t’ think they really know what it means’).

Fellows stated quite clearly that receiving an award was not something that they would announce in class (NTFS2: ‘Well I haven’t told them. How would you? It’s a bit weird. *By the way I’m fabulous*. That would be a little strange’). This reluctance to engage with active self-promotion is understandable as it is analogous to bragging, a trait that is generally regarded as socially unpalatable ‘since people who brag may be perceived as conceited or arrogant’ (Sezer, Gino and Norton 2017). Indeed, some Fellows downplayed their awards and pointed out that the only to demonstrate excellent teaching was to continue to practice it (NTFS3: ‘it doesn’t matter what awards I’ve got and what I’ve done last year, if I don’t do a good job this year then it doesn’t matter one jot’).

Perhaps the most important consideration of teaching excellence award schemes is whether they have any impact on the student experience. However the student experience was not affected by the award at all. Despite the Office for Students (2019) assertion that the TEF ‘assesses excellence in teaching at universities and colleges, and how well they ensure excellent outcomes for their students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study’ (2019: online), the evidence that the student experience is enhanced by teaching excellent does not exist.

### Impact on the University

The most direct impact of teaching fellowships is on the status of the Fellows’ institutions, which add the awards to their institutional statistics as a form of Corporate Excellence (Little et al. 2007). Fellows reported that their managers used their awards to impress students and their parents on open days, and they were put on display on important occasions (NTFS5: ‘I was wheeled out at every occasion, when we had [Quality Assurance Agency] visits’). In this sense, the impact on the individual is unimportant, and the power of the award is appropriated by the university for marketing purposes (UNIB2: ‘I remember the Head of Department mentioning it because it was a good thing to plug for applicants coming in: “Oh, a teaching award!” And it’s just one of those things you can use for advertising’).

Institutional statistics are a central aspect of university marketing, particularly for post-92, recruiting universities, who compete to attract students (Douglas et al. 2014). Statistics concerning teaching excellence are included in the plethora of external data (e.g. NSS, Key Information Set (KIS), TEF, and league tables) available to help students, and their parents, make informed decisions about which university to attend. Much of these statistics are collected via ‘Students [who] provide financially unrewarded labour yielding rich information by completing surveys and providing opinions, thus acting as ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer 2015) manipulated by neoliberalism in HE’ (Hayes and Jandrić 2018: 130). Consequently, institutions develop Corporate Strategies and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies to address those areas that fall below acceptable levels in the statistics (Gibbs 2008). However, the result of this is that ‘experience is delivered to students by universities, as a product that their fees have purchased... Yet this package deal then diminishes the realities of individual student experiences… [and] ‘the student experience’ cannot simply be applied to students in equal measures’ (Hayes and Jandrić 2018: 139).

Inclusion on the staff roster of an NTF, preferably several, makes a university more attractive than its competitors. Information on qualified teaching staff is collected by Higher Education Statistics Agency (2019), for example, who record, amongst other things, institutional numbers of staff with a NTFS or different levels of fellowship of the HEA (2019).

## Discussion

One of the main purposes of reward and recognition schemes in any sphere of employment is to encourage staff to work harder. However, all the participants in this study were intrinsically motivated and the existence of teaching fellowships was not a motivating factor. Those lecturers who achieved a fellowship were high achievers in every aspect of their lives. In addition, with only a single exception, colleagues of awardees were not motivated to replicate their performance. Fellows spoke of a number of ways in which their colleagues resisted external pressure to demonstrate teaching excellence, by simply not applying, for instance. While fellowships may enhance personal reputation, this was not mentioned by any of the Fellows in this study. Furthermore, fellowships resulting in improved promotion prospects was only mentioned by four Fellows. Some of the Fellows’ colleagues chose to focus on research excellence to further their career.

The primary impact of teaching fellowships on Fellows is a sense of affirmation. The awards themselves have little or no impact on Fellows’ learning and teaching practice, and a fellowship is largely ornamental. One way in which teaching fellowships could have an impact on learning and teaching practice is through dissemination. To be effective, examples of excellence need to be disseminated as widely as possible to encourage reflection and the adoption of new techniques across the sector. While some UTFs may be required to disseminate their findings (cf. Anglia Learning & Teaching 2019; Oxford Brookes University 2019), the NTFS does not currently require a publication of awardees’ evidence for excellence. Without publication of excellent practice by Fellows, the NTFS is sterile. While not always directly applicable across the sector, examples of individual excellence would act as exemplars, offering considerable interest and impact on colleagues.

The issue of TELT was not raised by lecturers who continue to use both analogue and digital technologies as applicable (i.e. marker boards as well as PowerPoint) without distinguishing which, if either, enhance their teaching or their students’ learning. In the postdigital era, Fellows consider excellent teaching to exist independently of technology, digital or otherwise. Analogously, the administration of teaching excellence involves teachers providing evidence of their excellence by completing application forms, designed on computers using word-processing software, which are transmitted between institution and applicant via e-mail. Decisions are made by a committee and applicants are advised of the outcome by email. Awards may include hard copy certificates and/or a pin badge, which are distributed at ceremonies. Finally, applicants amend their email signatures and LinkedIn accounts (among others) with their new post-nominal letters. This postdigital process, however, is not considered to be Technology Enhanced Work.

Fellows’ colleagues were largely unaffected and/or unimpressed, with a significant minority resorting to unsupportive, even hostile, behaviour. However, as Reay explains,

academia relies upon desire, greed, ambition, pride, envy, fear, betrayal and inequality within an increasingly privatised, competitive market. Unsurprising then that there is so little real as opposed to contrived collegiality when collegiality requires emotional capacities such as empathy, intuition, trust, patience and care. (Reay 2004: 35)

Since Fellows do not change their practice as a result of receiving a fellowship, the student experience is unaffected. Similarly, Fellows maintain that teaching excellence can only be demonstrated by continued excellent practice. Students are not benefitting from the expensive and time-consuming performance review processes designed to recognise and reward teaching excellence. Simply counting the number of awardees provides nothing more than a little additional information for students to add to the morass of statistics already available.

Awards for NTFS, and other levels of fellowship of the HEA, are recorded on institutional databases, and collected remotely by Higher Education Statistics Agency. Institutions then transform these data into marketing materials. However, these data ‘can be understood, not only just as providing new ways of measuring and viewing educational institutions through data, but also as instruments which have significant influence on educational practice’ (Knox 2019: 364). As the TEF, for example, is based on poor proxies for teaching excellence, these data are used to inform university rankings. Consequently, institutions have engaged in ‘attempts to drive up rankings by focusing specifically on the narrow measures constitutive of the ranking score’ (Knox 2019: 364). As Hayes (2019) points out, ‘[t]he larger project of rationalisation of HE is therefore furthered via reasoned measures of performativity, played out… through [Personal Development Reviews], promotion processes, forms of accreditation, responses to REF and TEF, which are partly constituted by actions and partly by words’ (2019: 52).

## Conclusion

Almost two decades ago, D’andrea and Gosling (2001) wondered ‘whether these [teaching fellowships] have a generalized impact on the overall learning experience of students’ (2001: 74). The findings from this study clearly illustrate that they do not.

The current teaching excellence policies of the Office for Students, the TEF, and reward and recognition schemes, particularly teaching fellowships, both national and institutional, are not currently fit for purpose. The assumptions upon which they are based are rooted in neoliberal ‘carrot and stick’ performance review policies aimed at improving the skill level of the workforce and/or rooting out underperformers. These over-simplified expectations are subsumed in a postdigital melange of propaganda media which aims to create a hegemonic sectoral discourse. Nevertheless, the primary discourse fails the students it promises to benefit, and is resisted by the staff it is designed to motivate.

Despite the de rigueur discourse surrounding TELT, specific examples of its use were absent from Fellows’ responses. This absence of digital technology is commensurate with the disappearance of the word digital from the phrase ‘digital technology’, indicating the internalisation of the concept of digital as we enter the postdigital era.

The only stakeholder to benefit from fellowship schemes are universities which misappropriate the awards to bolster corporate excellence statistics for marketing purposes. Thus, the personal value of individual excellence is converted via performance management into impersonal institutional excellence.

As fellowships are awarded retrospectively, Fellows are already providing an excellent student experience, and students are largely unaware of their lecturers’ fellowships. Consequently, given that fellowships are awarded retrospectively to staff who have already achieved excellence, funds should be directed away from reward and recognition and towards providing opportunities for developmental CPD for early- to mid-career staff to help them develop teaching excellence.

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