

# Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Creating and Contributing to Scholarly Conversations  
across a Range of Genres

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## CHAPTER 22

### **APPLYING, REFLECTING, AND EVIDENCING**

#### *Teaching Awards, Fellowships, and Promotions*

*The NTF [National Teaching Fellowship] changed my life—enabling me to gain a Professorship . . . and focus on educational development. (Peter Hartley quoted in *Association of National Teaching Fellows, 2018*).*

As a scholar interested in writing about your teaching, you are likely to be faced at various stages of your career with applying for a teaching award, a teaching fellowship, or a promotion based, at least in part, on the excellence of your teaching (i.e., evidence of your impact of enhancing student outcomes), support of learning (i.e., evidence of supporting colleagues and influencing support for student learning) and leadership (i.e., evidence of effective leadership of learning and teaching). Success in these applications can have a significant impact on your career, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates. Core to these applications is evidencing the impact of your teaching on student learning and supporting colleagues. For senior awards, fellowships, and promotions, evidence of leadership of learning and teaching beyond your department and institution is often critical. Similar issues arise if you, like many colleagues around the world, apply for an HEA Fellowship under the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Your publications about learning and teaching are a key source of evidence of experience and impact in these applications.

In this chapter, we unpack the nature of these forms of writing, present a flexible guide to the organization and composition of these applications, and discuss what to look out for to enhance your chances of success. As in previous chapters, we conceptualize these genres as engaging in conversations, in this case with assessors. These conversations are, however, different from those in the other chapters in this part of the book as these applications are private between you and the assessors, whereas the other chapters discuss engaging in public conversations. Nevertheless, in all the genres examined you are in a process of exchange regarding learning and teaching. We begin the chapter by putting the discussion of applying for teaching awards, fellowships, and promotions in the context of the debate over the status of teaching and the standing of research on learning and teaching within higher education.

### **What Is the Status of Teaching and Research into Learning and Teaching?**

In the last twenty-five years there has been much discussion of the lower status of teaching, and research into learning and teaching, compared with discipline-based research, in Australasia, North America, and the UK (Bennett, Roberts, and Ananthram 2017; Cashmore, Cane, and Cane 2013; Chalmers 2011; Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone 2011; Macfarlane 2011; Vardi and Quin 2011)—unless you happen to be in the field of education. As Locke (2014, 24) notes, “It is clear that to progress to the most senior positions, a research record is usually needed, and that pedagogical research is not valued as highly as other disciplinary research.” While significant progress has been made in correcting the imbalance, more success has, at least until recently, been achieved in the area of recognition (e.g., fellowships) than in the area of reward (e.g., promotion and tenure). However, funds to support national teaching award and fellowship schemes as well as research into learning and teaching have fallen in the last decade, and some programs have closed (e.g., Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) in the US; initiatives funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England; and

the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows scheme) or been cut back in terms of the reward given to recipients (e.g., UK National Teaching Fellowship Scheme). In contrast, at the institutional level, we have seen growth in the number of scholars being promoted, at least in part, on the basis of their excellence in teaching and in their support of and leadership in learning.

With the growth in many countries of positions focused on educational support, career pathways have been developed, often up to full professorship. Evidence of excellence in teaching may be a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion for promotion and tenure, particularly at higher levels. If you are making a case for teaching excellence, some universities expect evidence of engagement with research into learning and teaching (Locke 2014). For example, a criterion for promotion of teaching-focused staff at level C and above at The University of Queensland since 2007 is “the dissemination of their work on the scholarship of teaching and learning including publication in high quality peer-reviewed outlets and other mechanisms appropriate for the discipline and target audience” (University of Queensland 2019). To promote the rewarding of educators and education leaders in research-intensive universities, Dilly Fung and Claire Gordon (2016, 6) argue for a “strength-based promotions strategy” in which “the criteria and the format of applications should enable an individual’s claim for promotion to be considered holistically, on the basis of the strength of the overall contribution made in their context, rather than through a standardised ‘tick box’ approach.” In a few disciplines, such as chemistry and medicine, specific posts as lecturers and professors in higher education are reasonably common, but they are rare in most subject areas.

As with the status of teaching versus research, there is concern that scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and pedagogic research do not have the same standing as discipline-based research in national research assessment exercises (Cotton, Miller, and Kneale 2017; Fanghanel et al. 2016; *see also chapter 2*). For several years in Hong Kong this concern was addressed by allowing participants to submit work to their research assessment exercise under any of Ernest Boyer’s (1990)

scholarships—discovery, integration, application, and teaching—thus extending what counted beyond just discovery research. They used the same criteria, as developed by Charles Glassick, Mary Huber, and Gene Maeroff (1997), to evaluate the submissions for all four scholarships with the addition of threshold, advanced, and exemplary levels (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2006):

1. Goals of the project
2. Preparation for scholar's work
3. Methods used to conduct work
4. Evidence gathered to demonstrate impact of work
5. Reflection on work
6. Communication of results to others

Dilly Fung and Claire Gordon (2016, 7) argue that where education-focused scholarship “is undertaken and where it makes a genuine impact on student education and on the practices of other educators, it should be recognised in promotion criteria alongside other markers of effectiveness and impact.” Kathleen McKinney (2007, 97-99) provides some useful advice on documenting SoTL work for the reward system.

### **What Are Teaching Awards and Fellowships?**

Though the nomenclature varies, teaching awards are usually made for past achievements, while many fellowships, though recognizing previous experience, also have expectations as to future activities by those appointed. Awards occur at institutional, national, and international levels. Thus, for example, at the University of New South Wales, Australia, you can apply to become a **Scientia Education Fellow**; at the University of Nebraska Omaha, US, you can be nominated for an **outstanding teaching award**; while at the University of Liverpool, UK, you can apply for a **learning and teaching fellowship**. Several countries have national teaching awards and fellowships, such as **3M Fellows** in Canada, **Ako Aotearoa national tertiary teaching awards** in New Zealand, and the **National Teaching Fellowships (NTFs)** in the UK. There are also a few international-level programs, including **HEA Fellowships**, which, though based in the UK, have been adopted by

an increasing number of higher education institutions globally; and the **ISSOTL Fellows Program**, which is open to the international membership of the society.

Most teaching awards and fellowships are interdisciplinary, but some are discipline-specific, for example, the **Taylor & Francis Award** for sustained contributions to teaching and learning of geography in higher education, **Chemistry Educator of the Year** in Australia, and the **Law Teacher of the Year** in the UK. The POD Network, in the US, has several awards, including the **POD Innovation Award**, which recognizes creative ideas for educational development, and the **Robert J. Menges Award for Outstanding Research in Educational Development**.

### **How to Write Your Application for a Teaching Award, Fellowship, or Promotion**

Given the wide range of different types of teaching awards, fellowships, and promotions, it is difficult to generalize about writing your application. Perhaps the most important advice is to ensure that you address all the application questions and criteria as fully as you are able within the constraints of the structure and the word limit requirements of the application.

Some applications, particularly those for promotions, are largely based around the kind of material that appears in a curriculum vitae (CV) and involve completing a tightly structured application form. Others explicitly say not to include lists, instead emphasizing critical reflection and discussion of the evidence of impact of a *selection* of activities and experiences structured under a few broad headings, sometimes in the form of a portfolio. There are several useful guides to developing teaching portfolios (e.g., MacPherson Institute 2019; University of Hong Kong 2019; Weston and Timmermans 2007). Engaging in writing a reflective teaching portfolio can contribute to the development of a scholarly teaching community (Pelger and Larsson 2018).

Examination of numerous examples of applications points to a set of topic areas and questions that appear frequently; we list these

below in “Guiding Questions for Planning, Revising, and Refining an Application for a Teaching Award, Fellowship, or Promotion,” also [available for download in the online resources](#). The weighting given to different aspects depends, of course, on the context of the specific application, with some applications placing the emphasis on evidence of excellence in teaching practice and others emphasizing evidencing the positive impact of your educational leadership. Some of the topic areas in the Guiding Questions may not be explicitly asked for in the application form, but if an interview or a dialogue is part of the application process, then that may be the place to cover them.

## **Guiding Questions for Writing an Application for a Teaching Award, Fellowship, or Promotion\***

### **A. Your philosophy and context**

1. What is your teaching and learning philosophy and your philosophy of educational leadership? What principles and values underlie your teaching, support of learning, and leadership practice?
2. If you are applying outside your institution, how has the context of your institutional role and your discipline affected the opportunities you have had to develop your excellence? What is the status of and level of recognition for learning and teaching, and research into it, in your discipline and at your institution—and how has this affected you?

### **B. Your story**

3. How did you become passionate about teaching, supporting, and leading learning and, where appropriate, engaging in research into learning and teaching?
4. What is your story and how might it best be illustrated with a selection of examples? What critical incidents in your development as an excellent teacher, supporter, and leader of learning have you faced in your career? How did you respond, and what impact did those responses have on the quality of student learning or the teaching profession?



**C. Your impact on students**

5. What are your reflections on the key innovations you have developed as a teacher, supporter, and leader of learning? What rationale or theoretical frameworks underpinned them? What evidence do you have that they have had a beneficial impact on student learning and the teaching profession?
6. How have you incorporated research, scholarship, and evaluation into your professional practice? What impact has your research into learning and teaching had on influencing and enhancing student learning?

**D. Your impact on colleagues**

7. How have you supported and influenced your immediate colleagues to enhance their practice as teachers, supporters and leaders of learning, and their engagement in pedagogic research? What evidence do you have that your efforts, through supporting colleagues, have enhanced student learning or the teaching profession?
8. What impact have you had on colleagues beyond your department at institutional, regional, national, and international levels?

**E. Your continuing professional development (CPD), its impact, and your future plans**

9. How do you ensure that you continually develop as an excellent teacher, supporter, and leader of learning and as a pedagogic research practitioner? What difference has your CPD made to you, your students, and your colleagues?
10. What is next? What are your plans for future projects and initiatives? How would this award/fellowship/promotion help your development and affect your students and colleagues?

*\*As with other sets of guidance questions in this book, select those questions that are relevant to your context, add others as appropriate, and decide the order in which you will address them to communicate effectively with your audience.*

Preparing an application for a teaching award, fellowship, or promotion is a highly personal process that makes our identities as learning and teaching scholars explicit. Writing about our teaching, particularly in a critically reflective manner, does not come naturally to

many and can be quite an emotional experience. Not being successful with such an application can be more upsetting than having our submissions in other writing genres rejected (see [chapter 28](#)). Though it is not common, we have all known colleagues who have been psychologically damaged by the experience. In Reflection 22.1 a colleague reflects on the experience of applying for an NTF, but not being successful until the second attempt. For other reflections on people's experiences of being NTFs, see [Association of National Teaching Fellows \(2018\)](#) and Advance HE "National Teaching Fellowship Scheme 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary."

### *Reflection 22.1*

#### **The experience of writing a National Teaching Fellowship application**

Writing a claim for a National Teaching Fellowship was the hardest piece of writing I have ever done. Using clear evidence, I had to claim that I was an excellent lecturer and that I had helped others to be excellent. There's one word for someone who proclaims their own excellence and that is "arrogant." I despised having to write in this way, but I had a clear goal. My teaching incorporated sustainability into the English curriculum at a time (2008) when it was very rare to consider the continuing ability of the Earth to support life within the walls of an English classroom. I wanted to share with others that it is possible to do so, and that it can be done successfully, both in terms of developing students' awareness of issues of great importance to their future and in terms of developing their subject-specific academic ability. The NTF claim was an intensely personal account of teaching philosophy and experience, and writing it helped me to reflect on what I was doing, why I was doing it, and how I could do it better. But I was unsuccessful in my application the first time and it hit me hard—it was such a personal account that my claim to excellence being rejected felt like I had been rejected as a professional and a person. But I

understood what I had to do to improve, and I was successful the second time round.

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There are several useful guides to completing particular parts of applications, such as writing your philosophy of teaching and learning and your educational leadership philosophy (Berenson and Kenny 2016; Chism 1998; Kenny, Jeffs, and Berenson 2015; Schönwetter et al. 2002). The sponsors of teaching awards and fellowships often provide guidance of their own, though advice from others may also be available. For an example on applying for an NTF, see the [relevant page of the Advance HE website](#), but also look at the advice given by people who have supported successful applicants (e.g., Healey and Healey 2019). For some reflections on excellence and scholarship in teaching see Healey (2011). Advice on applying for an HEA Fellowship follows.

### **Applying for a HEA Fellowship: Meeting the Requirements of the UKPSF**

Although HEA Fellows originated in the UK, there is an increasing number of them around the world: at the end of 2019 there were over 125,000 HEA Fellows, 6,500 of them outside the UK. Being awarded a fellowship is a clear indication that you value professional development in your higher education career, and it demonstrates your commitment to teaching, learning, and the student experience through engagement in a practical process that encourages research, reflection, and development. You can apply directly to Advance HE, or you can apply through an institutionally based program, if your institution has been accredited.

The [UK Professional Standards Framework](#) is core to the process. It provides a comprehensive set of professional standards and guidelines for those involved in teaching and supporting learning in higher education, which can be applied to personal development programs at the individual or institutional level to improve teaching quality.

The framework identifies the diverse range of teaching and support roles and environments. These are reflected and are expressed in the Dimensions of Professional Practice, with higher education teaching and learning support defined as:

- areas of activity undertaken by teachers and those that support learning
- core knowledge needed to carry out those activities at the appropriate level
- professional values that individuals performing these activities should exemplify.

There are **four fellowship descriptors**, each of which has its own criteria and application process—Associate Fellowship, Fellowship, Senior Fellowship, and Principal Fellowship. There is a **self-assessment tool** to help you select the most appropriate category based on your recent experiences of teaching, supporting learning, and leadership. The categories are not sequential, and it may be very appropriate for someone providing learning support to retire with an Associate Fellowship and a head of department to finish their career with a Senior Fellowship. Most people apply for fellowship in writing, although some obtain Associate Fellowship or Fellowship through successfully passing part or all of an accredited postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning. Some institutions integrate dialogue as part of their accredited application process, usually as an option and based on a presentation and some documentation (Pilkington 2017; Smart et al. 2019).

In addition to the resources available on the Advance HE website, John Lea and Nigel Purcell provide a useful overview of applying for an HEA Fellowship (Lea and Purcell 2015; Purcell and Lea 2015), while the collection of chapters edited by Jackie Potter and Rebecca Turner gives a helpful discussion of how to become recognized as an experienced professional teacher (i.e., Senior Fellow) (Potter and Turner 2018). Among the points they emphasize is the importance of choosing a limited selection of examples of your practices and strategies to discuss how your experiences meet the dimensions and descriptor criteria; the need to go beyond description to reflect on

and evidence the impact you have had on students and colleagues by answering the “so what?” and “then what?” questions; and, where appropriate, putting your practices and strategies in the context of the scholarly literature (Brown 2018). A [series of podcasts](#) on making a successful application for Principal Fellow is also available. Purcell and Lea (2015) provide some sound advice on how to make your application personal, individual, reflective, scholarly, evidence-based, aligned (with the UKPSF), current, and sufficient. Peter Scales (2017) maps the activities, knowledge, and values of the UKPSF in each chapter of his book, *An Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*.

### **Preparing Your Application**

Preparation for a teaching award, fellowship, or promotion can begin several years before you apply (Healey and Healey 2019; Pritchard, Wisker, and Potter 2018; Winter et al. 2018). So, you should begin assembling evidence and materials along the way and look for opportunities that will enhance your applications as part of your CPD and publication plans ([see chapter 29](#)). As Ruth Healey (personal communication, July 2, 2019) notes, there are “several different ways you may demonstrate ‘excellence’ without arrogance (e.g., collecting a ‘happy’ file of quotes from people about your work, student course evaluations, and grade improvements).” There are also recommendations for institutions as to how they can support the preparation of applicants (Healey and Healey 2019), ensure that their promotion practices take full account of education-focused scholarship (Fung and Gordon 2016), and consider how they can contribute to a culture of teaching enhancement beyond the recognition of individual practice (Seppala and Smith 2019).

### **Over to You**

In this chapter we have explored writing an application for a teaching award, fellowship, or promotion based, at least in part, on your excellence as a teacher, supporter, and leader of learning. Success in these applications can be a turning point in the development of

your career as our opening quote illustrates, and as Mick has also experienced (Healey 2019). Questions to address about teaching award, fellowship, and promotion applications include:

- In the next three years, which teaching award, fellowship, and promotion opportunities will you consider putting in an application for?
- What can you do to develop experiences and evidence that will support your applications for these and other opportunities as they arise?
- Which of the four dimensions of the Professional Standards Framework provide the best fit for your experiences of teaching, supporting learning, and leadership in learning?