

Raising Teaching Status in Universities

– PROMOTION, PERCEPTIONS PRACTICE AND POLICIES

The UK Higher Education system produces highly employable graduates throughout the bioscience disciplines and is held in high esteem worldwide. However, during this period of RAE reflection and REF planning it is important to remain mindful of the promotion of the status of teaching in order to avoid possible misconceptions about the professional contributions by teaching practitioners. Is there a rise in the teaching practitioner's perceptions which have led to a belief that their contributions to their institution are not similarly rewarded as those in primarily research roles? A highly perceived value of excellence in teaching has not always sat at the heart of all university academic career profiles and paths. The government white paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (2003) (www.dcsf.gov.uk/hegateway/strategy/hestrategy/pdfs/DfES-HigherEducation.pdf) recognised the need to balance reward and recognition between research and teaching activities. Undoubtedly, whilst the creation of the Higher Education Academy in 2004 has also raised the status of university teaching nationally, local initiatives are also paramount. It is encouraging that in recent years the definition of academic career families has in some universities led to the formalisation of a Teaching and Scholarship job family (for example at Exeter University) which gives clear indications of the expectations and responsibilities of staff at all levels allowing individuals to plan career progression and support progression within teaching. There may now be a need for debate about the relative academic worth of pedagogic vs scientific research influenced by RAE reflections.

Interestingly, informal discussions at the UK Centre for Bioscience 2008 Reps Forum revealed that many academics involved in teaching still consider there is a bias towards progression in research orientated careers compared to teaching centred jobs. Is this really the case? The Higher Education Academy has provided a well adopted mechanism for recognition at a national level through the National Teaching Fellowships. It is also interesting that the UK Centre for

Bioscience's web site lists individuals who have been awarded for teaching excellence by their institution. However, there appears to be no UK wide standardisation of criteria for these teaching awards, but is there a case for this?

The 2009 Higher Education Academy and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning interim report on 'Reward and Recognition of Teaching in Higher Education' (www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/rewardandrecog/) highlights a number of areas for consideration e.g. "Promotion to senior academic positions is still weighted in favour of academics who focus on research over teaching activities, according to Parker (2008)." The interim report's main conclusions indicate differences in staff perceptions on awarding and rewarding teaching exist.

The UK needs highly qualified and well trained bioscientists in order to maintain a worldwide leadership. The rapidly changing technologies and demographic needs of the country require a modern workforce with excellent training. Moreover, the future for UK Higher Education is set in a global marketplace. In this competitive world should it not be essential that excellence in bioscience teaching is appropriately rewarded and celebrated nationally? Is there a belief at all levels of teaching and academic management that there are robust systems to ensure this is successful locally? Are teaching practitioners suitably aware and responsive to their opportunities for reward and recognition? The practical measures and policies of UK Higher Education Institutions which recognise and reward teaching and their methods of implementation will be summarised in the awaited GENIE and Higher Education Academy's final report. This may enable practitioners at all levels and senior academics to assess the efficacy of the translation of university policy into practice. Thus discussion of the importance of promotion for good teaching remains crucial if the status of teaching is to be raised in all universities.

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