



Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Inc

Engaging Communities

Proceedings of the

31st HERDSA Annual Conference

1-4 July 2008

Rotorua, New Zealand

Olsson, T. & Roxå, T. (2008) Evaluating rewards for excellent teaching – a cultural approach, in *Engaging Communities, Proceedings of the 31st HERDSA Annual Conference, Rotorua, 1-4 July 2008: pp 261-272.*

Published 2008 by the
Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Inc
PO Box 27, Milperra, NSW 2214, Australia
www.herdsa.org.au

ISSN: 1441 001X
ISBN: 0 908557 73 6

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Evaluating rewards for excellent teaching – a cultural approach

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In this paper we examine how reward systems can contribute to the development of teaching and learning in higher education. We do this in relation to a reward system developed at the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University in Sweden, where the overall strategy for academic development is to influence and modify the local culture towards a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. Consequently, an important feature of a successful reward system is its capacity to bring about cultural changes.

We discuss criteria, related to reward systems, on three levels. *Assessment criteria* are used to evaluate candidates for rewards, in our case focusing on the student learning process and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. *Internal criteria* are used to discuss the structural features of a reward system intended to identify and reward excellent teaching. *Systemic criteria* are used to evaluate possible impact by a reward system on the culture of the institution being considered.

Our findings point towards a significant impact on the local culture and preliminary investigations indicate that we do reward good teaching.

Keywords: rewarding excellent teaching, criteria, academic culture

Introduction – rewarding excellent teaching

In this paper we aim for a deeper understanding of how reward systems can contribute to development of teaching and learning in higher education. We relate our arguments to issues described in the literature and we especially consider criteria at various levels – individual assessment criteria, internal structure criteria, and criteria concerning impact at systemic level. The study is related to a specific reward system, the Pedagogical Academy, at the Faculty of Engineering (LTH) at Lund University in Sweden.

A number of reward systems for recognising excellent teaching exist in today's higher education. The dissimilarity among different systems is large – on the border to chaotic – but important aspects appear to take account of how criteria, evidence, and standards are handled.

Ramsden and Martin (1996) investigate reward systems within 32 universities in Australia. They emphasise the need for formal reward processes, with clear criteria defining what is meant by good teaching. Such processes, which also include promotions, are considered as very important among staff at the studied universities. The authors are strongly in support of reward systems taking existing academic cultures associated with research as a starting point. Peer review and portfolios are preferred, research-based approaches in contrast to “unskilful administrative uses of student ratings.”

However, the investigation shows that only 47 % of the universities use any assessment criteria at all and more than half rely on student feedback as the only source of evidence. Research and scholarship are used as a criterion only within 25 % of the investigated universities. The study also reports considerable discrepancies between what universities declare about the importance of teaching and what they actually do within this area, and discrepancies between the value teachers would like to give teaching and the value they actually experience is given to teaching by the universities. Ramsden and Martin (1996) summarise their study with strategies for change pointing at the importance to narrow the gap between university policies and teachers perceptions, to use criteria and valid assessment methods, to prepare award or promotion committees properly, and to use procedures embedded in recognized academic cultures.

Ten years later, Chism (2006) presents a thorough investigation of 144 teaching awards within 85 institutions located in 33 states of the United States. The study focuses on four main questions: the criteria on which the awards are based, evidence to show that the criteria are met, standards to judge the evidence, and investigations of the match between criteria and evidence. The similarities between the results of this investigation and the study by Ramsden and Martin in Australia a decade earlier are notable. Less than half of the investigated awards programmes use specific assessment criteria and when criteria exist they focus on communication skills, organisation, high standards, etc. Only 15 % use scholarship of teaching as a criterion, a fact that demonstrates the low level of importance placed on scholarly aspects of teaching and learning. Nomination letters are by far the most commonly used evidence (92 % of the programmes). Even more remarkable is that 32 % of the programmes use letters as the only source of information about candidates. In the majority of programmes nothing is stated about the nature of evidence expected. Chism (2006) reports only two programmes that specifically match criteria and evidence. Nothing is stated about standards and she comments on this: “How judges were to assess relative or absolute performance on the indicators is uniformly opaque. The issue of standards is a perplexing one, given that no program articulates standards that would be used”. The study is summarised with recommendations to be clear about criteria, to link criteria and evidence, and to be explicit about standards – important aspects also stressed by many other researchers (McAlpine and Harris 2002; Gibbs 1995; Kember and Kwan 2000; Thompson et al, 1998; Casey et al, 1997).

Magin (1999) discusses two perspectives on what could be considered good teaching and how good teaching could be assessed. According to the first perspective, teaching is regarded as “demonstrated proficiency” and is typically assessed using student evaluations and peer observations of teaching. The second perspective regards teaching as “documented achievement” with teaching portfolios at the focal point of the

assessment process. The author argues that “documented achievement” represents a much broader perspective on what constitutes good teaching and that “demonstrated proficiency” is incorporated within this perspective. He also points out that there is a division among staff around these perspectives and that teachers must widen their perspectives and recognize that good teaching involves more aspects in addition to “demonstrated proficiency”.

Elton (1998) examines the multidimensionality of teaching excellence. He argues that individual teaching excellence must be complemented with excellence at the departmental and institutional levels if student learning is to be supported in the best possible way. Moreover, he considers the importance of criteria relating to learning objectives, the complicated problem of standards, the use of teaching portfolios for collecting evidence, the need to match staff development with criteria for teaching excellence, and the need for training of promotion committees. He clearly underlines that the excellence of teachers has many dimensions besides competence and he mentions scholarship as one indication of excellence.

Two highly distinguished award systems at national level are the National Teaching Fellowships in the UK (The National Teaching Fellowship 2008) and the Carrick Fellowships in Australia (Carrick Fellowships 2008). Both award systems are using very broad criteria covering individual excellence, impact and leadership, partnership and collaboration, and professional development. An important question is to what extent awarded teachers actively contribute to the development and improvement of teaching and learning (Skelton 2004; Halse et al, 2007).

LTH's Pedagogical Academy

In this section we describe LTH's Pedagogical Academy (LTH is a large research-intensive faculty with 7000 students and 1400 employees). In a subsequent section of the paper we will discuss and examine tentative criteria usable for assessing reward systems' potential to support development of teaching and learning in a higher education context.

LTH's Pedagogical Academy rewards scholarly teachers by a raise in salary and additional funding to their departments. The monetary incentives equal what is awarded to individuals and departments when someone earns the title of *Docent* (senior researcher). The rewarded teachers are also given the title *Excellent Teaching Practitioner* (ETP). Applicants are rewarded on the basis of a teaching portfolio, an interview, and a letter of recommendation from the head of the department. Applicants have to show that they “over a period of time, consciously and systematically, endeavoured to develop means of enhancing students' learning in their discipline, and how they have made their own experience in teaching available to others in the academic community”. We fully acknowledge the “documented achievement” perspective on what is to be considered as excellent teaching (Magin 1999). Finally applicants must be able to analyse and reflect on their teaching practices with the aid of pedagogic literature (Lund University – Faculty of Engineering 2005).

LTH's Pedagogical Academy has developed over a period of seven years into its present form. It evolved from an idea formulated by the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering in 1998, an idea mainly focusing on symbolic incentives rewarding good teachers who despite lack of encouragement had devoted themselves to teaching within a research-intensive environment. In 2001 a first version was launched based around the same monetary incentives as the current version, also using portfolios, interviews and recommendations by the heads of department. In 2003, after three years, the first version was researched. The research project focused on the assessment process. It included analyses of all relevant documents and a video-documentation of the entire procedure where 17 applicants were assessed. The main findings indicated needs to improve the assessment criteria, the competence of the assessors, the theoretical framework for assessing pedagogical merits (Antman & Olsson 2007), and the need to place the Pedagogical Academy more firmly within the organisation (Ramsden & Martin 1996; Magin 1999; Elton 1998). All these requirements were met before an improved version was launched in May 2005 (Lund University – Faculty of Engineering 2005).

The teaching portfolio

The teaching portfolio is essential if we regard teaching excellence as “documented achievement” (Magin 1999) and it allows for the applicant to link evidence with criteria (Ramsden & Martin 1998; Chism 2006). The portfolio consists of a personal document and examples from the applicant's teaching practice. The document should provide insights into how the applicant sees the relation between teaching and learning in the context of the teaching he or she carries out, and it should reflect the applicant's personal teaching philosophy. The applicant should choose relevant examples from practical teaching experience in order to illustrate the issues he or she considers to be important according to his or her own teaching philosophy. The applicant must also include testimonials confirming that he or she has had discussions around the content of the teaching portfolio with at least two teachers who have already been awarded the distinction of ETP. Furthermore, all examples of teaching practices are to be supported by references or other documentation. The same applies to other claims made in the portfolio (Lund University – Faculty of Engineering 2005).

Assessment

The applicant's qualifications are evaluated, using a peer review process (Cavanagh 1996; Ramsden & Martin 1996; Elton 1998), by a group of teachers (the assessors) who have already been awarded the distinction of ETP, and who have undergone specific instruction in the assessment process. A pedagogical expert is also affiliated to the group.

The applicant is given the opportunity to clarify or explain parts of the portfolio, or add more information, during an interview. The assessors then recommend to the ETP – committee, chaired by the Assistant Dean, whether the applicant should be accepted or not.

Criteria for assessment

In their teaching portfolio and during the interview, applicants shall be able to describe, analyse, discuss and present information relevant to the following (Lund University – Faculty of Engineering 2005):

1. Focus on the students' learning process
 - The applicant's teaching practices based on the learning perspective
 - The applicant's teaching and learning philosophy and teaching activities as an integrated whole
 - The applicant's practical teaching in relation to the students
1. Clear development over time
 - The applicant's efforts in his or her teaching, to consciously and systematically develop students' learning, and their ability to learn how to learn
 - The applicant's ideas and plans for continued development as a teacher
2. A scholarly approach
 - The applicant's reflections on his or her teaching activities using higher educational theory and knowledge of didactics relevant to his or her discipline
 - The applicant's search for and creation of knowledge concerning the students' learning process in his or her own teaching
 - The applicant's collaboration with others, the sharing of knowledge and experience in teaching and student learning through discussions, participation in conferences, publications, etc.

These assessment criteria focus on the student learning process and especially on a scholarly approach to teaching and learning and they go far beyond the undemanding criteria of many reward systems described in the investigations by Ramsden and Martin (1996) and Chism (2006).

The model for assessing reflective practice

Based on the discussions above we argue that the core of excellent teaching is the ability to teach in a way that actively supports student learning. An excellent teacher should be able to use the expertise in his or her discipline within a pedagogical practice, and base this practice on relevant pedagogical competence with student learning in focus. The teacher should be able to observe the teaching and its effects and, based on his or her pedagogical understanding, analyse, draw conclusions, and plan for continuous development.

Pedagogical understanding includes the teacher's perspectives on teaching and learning where theoretical pedagogical competence is of vital importance. Excellent teaching is supported by a pedagogical understanding where theoretical knowledge and experiences of teaching practice jointly creates potential for further development. We have developed a model that links the theoretical pedagogical competence with the impact on teaching practice (Antman & Olsson 2007; Kreber 2002). With the help of this model we are able to compare the complexity of pedagogical reasoning and understanding with the degree of reflective, scholarly practice.

The model is used as an important qualitative tool in the assessment process and it defines overall standards for what we mean by excellent teaching – with high quality student learning and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning in focus. It is therefore congruent with what is recommended in literature (McAlpine & Harris 2002; Ramsden & Martin 1996; Chism 2006; Elton 1998; Trigwell 2001).

Impact on culture or rewarding individuals

The overall strategy for academic development at LTH aims for a cultural shift. In summary it strives for the introduction of a scholarly approach to teaching (Roxå, Olsson et al, in press). Therefore, to be considered as successful, the reward system described in this paper, when evaluated, must show a relation to the cultural characteristics within the faculty.

Two specific issues deserve to be discussed before we tentatively suggest criteria for evaluation of the reward system: firstly, the relation between rewarding individuals and seeking an impact on the culture; secondly, the orientation among those rewarded. We will start by discussing the latter. It refers to whether the teachers engage mostly in local discussions within the faculty, or if they mostly engage globally at national and international conferences or by publishing in journals. Elsewhere we have described the latter as *Trajectory 1* and the former as *Trajectory 2* (Roxå, Olsson et al, 2007; Roxå, Olsson et al, in press). Even though these two alternatives in reality are never clear cut, the division between Trajectory 1 and 2 may support an analysis of a reward system aiming for cultural development. Trajectory 1, as we have argued, might have a more limited impact on the local culture than would Trajectory 2. It is acknowledged that in the long run both alternatives are necessary. What is the issue to consider is the proportion between the two and therefore what the essential aspects to reward are: national and international recognition or local engagement, or both (Ashwin & Trigwell 2004).

The first issue about rewarding individuals or seeking an impact on the culture might, in the short perspective, resemble a choice between moral and strategy. The moral aspects refer to the need to reward good teachers who devote themselves to teaching instead of seeking a career based on research. As a result these teachers may suffer lower status, lower salary, and deteriorating careers. If a reward system is constructed on such considerations, however, it may end up reifying the differences in status between researchers and teachers even further, creating a situation where individuals can choose to engage in one or the other career. But, those choosing teaching as a career would still suffer the risk that the representatives of the dominating value-system, the researchers, at any time can remove the rewards in order to secure their own dominance.

A strategy, in this simplified and hypothetical intellectual experiment, could instead focus change in the dominating culture. The dominating culture would of course differ in different contexts. The reward system discussed in this text is placed in a research-intensive culture, and a research culture is therefore considered as the dominating value system. In order to be influential in a true sense, the reward system therefore must have an impact on the research culture, that is attracting researchers' interest by, for example, the virtues of the intellectual challenges of teaching and learning. At the same time, the

reward system must, in order to be morally credible, allow individuals engaged mainly in teaching to be rewarded as well.

Tentative criteria for evaluating a teaching reward system – a preliminary discussion

The criteria discussed so far in this paper are *assessment criteria*, used to evaluate candidates for rewards (in our case focusing on the student learning process and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning) and *internal criteria*, used to discuss the structural features of a reward system intended to identify and reward excellent teaching. Internal criteria focus on the structure and the reliability of a reward system and include important aspects about the assessors and the formal decision making, procedural aspects, evidence and standards, involvement of departmental and faculty leadership, monetary incentives, a research based foundation of the system, and alignment with basic academic values. In this section we develop tentative *systemic criteria* that could be used to evaluate possible cultural impact of any reward system – in this case impact on the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University.

The criteria presented below recognise the moral purpose of rewarding individual teachers, but only as secondary to the overall purpose of influencing the dominating culture. They also favour engagement on the local arena, even though this is not a clear-cut issue. The discussion about Trajectory 1 and 2, above, describe a search for an optimal balance rather than a choice between one or the other.

In the case of LTH's Pedagogical Academy the following systemic criteria will be discussed and applied in the following:

- Has the reward system influenced the culture?
- Does the reward system really reward good teaching, as measured on systemic level?
- Is the reward system integrated with other academic development measures?

We do not claim this to be an exhausted list of criteria. They are more a short list to start with.

Has the reward system influenced the culture?

Three aspects will be considered: 1. Has it had a social impact in terms of who is being rewarded? How does their career look like after being rewarded? Are the researchers engaging? 2. Has it affected the policy-level, including Dean and Heads of departments as well as written policies within the faculty? 3. Does it have implications for funding and distribution of resources?

1. So far (2001-2008) 69 teachers from all categories have been rewarded (Table 1). Sixty nine teachers equal 10 % of all senior teachers within the faculty.

Table 1: Number of teachers rewarded per year and types of teachers rewarded

<i>Rewarded per year</i>						
Year	2001	2002	2003	2006*	2007	2008
Number rewarded	17	18	14	9	5	6
<i>Categories of teachers rewarded</i>						
Professor	19					
Lecturer (with a PhD)	38					
Lecturer (without a PhD)	12					
<i>* The developed version of the Pedagogical Academy was introduced in 2006.</i>						

During the fall of 2007 a new Dean was elected at the Faculty of Engineering. Within the group of electors chosen by all teachers, twice as many had the distinction ETP compared to the faculty. The new Dean has ETP and has twice acted as assessor for new applicants, and one of the vice Deans (for undergraduate education) also has ETP.

It seems clear that LTH's Pedagogical Academy attracts teachers from all categories, both teachers mainly engaged in teaching (lecturers without a PhD) as well as teachers heavily engaged in research (professors and many lecturers with a PhD). The number of professors and research engaged lecturers among the rewarded support a claim that the reward has attracted interest from the research community within the faculty. The fact that ETP was twice as common among the electors as within the faculty as a whole implies that teachers holding the reward also gain influential positions. There is, however, no evidence that this is because of the reward.

2. The setting up of the reward system is of course in itself a sign of impact on the policy level. Both the Dean and the Heads of departments were involved in the development of the assessment criteria and the Heads of departments nominated candidates from each department for the first round in 2001. Of further interest is what has happen in relation to the policy level since then. Has the Pedagogical Academy continued to work on the policy level even after the immediate installation?

The Pedagogical Academy has been used rhetorically by the Dean to boost the faculty's competitiveness. This has been during prestigious meetings both nationally and internationally, and two subsequent Deans have done so. Furthermore, the reward system has influenced policy levels to an extent where individual teachers and researchers have been affected. An example of this is the process of promotion, especially promotion from senior lecturer to professor. During many years pedagogical merits have been required to gain promotion. But they were not taken seriously, not by the promotion committees and not by the applicants. In 2006, one of the two chairpersons (who also holds ETP) raised the issue of how pedagogical merits were assessed. She referred to experiences from the Pedagogical Academy, especially the use of the model for assessing reflective practice.

The research based approach and alignment with basic academic values was of fundamental importance in this process. Vigorous discussions that followed have resulted in increased demands from the promotion committees on the ability to reflect on pedagogical experiences and on participation in pedagogical training. A number of individuals seeking promotion were rejected because of poor ability to reflect scholarly on teaching and learning, and because of lack in pedagogical training. This has sent strong signals throughout the faculty and as an immediate result the interest for participating in pedagogical courses has escalated. One example is the “Inspirational course for experienced teachers”. During 2005 and 2006 this course had around 15 applicants annually – in 2007, 28 teachers applied for the course.

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence shows that some Heads of departments have started to encourage individual teachers to aim for the reward since this would result in small but still additional funding for the department. One department even has taken a policy decision to be the department with most ETP-teachers at the faculty.

This shows that the reward system does affect the policy level within the faculty, and that decisions made result in change in the visible behaviour of quite a number of individual staff. What remains to be shown is the exact path of this influence and to further explore the role of the reward system in the process.

3. Arguably, a reward system, as well as any part of the policy landscape within a faculty, has a much stronger impact on the culture if it has substantial effects in terms of money for both individuals and for departments. Again this is both as individual sums, as salaries for individuals, but also as a system. If, for example, a reward system results in raised salary for teachers being rewarded, but there is no additional funding for the department, it would, at least in a Swedish context, result in diminished salary raises for the colleagues, a situation where colleagues actually might counteract individuals applying for the reward.

LTH's pedagogical academy awards monetary incentives to both individuals and to their departments. The sums are equal to what is rewarded to individuals and departments when someone is appointed Docent (senior researcher). Since there is no extra funding coming to the faculty, a reward to a teacher in one department results in a small decrease in funding to the other departments.

There are 19 departments within the faculty. Two departments have six teachers rewarded, and two departments have one teacher rewarded (the other have from two to five teachers rewarded). In terms of total funding the resulting difference for departments is not large, but it remains a fact.

As for the individuals, a survey among the teachers rewarded up until 2003 shows that they consider the raise in salary to be important because it proved to them that the faculty was serious. If no link had existed to funding and salary it would have shown that the reward was only cosmetic.

We argue that the reward system clearly is linked to money and funding for both individuals and for departments. To what extent it has affected the choices of individuals and departments remains to be explored.

Does the reward system really reward good teaching, as measured on systemic level?

The Faculty of Engineering uses the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) by Ramsden (1991), to evaluate an absolute majority of the courses delivered. A course in Sweden is normally five-eight weeks of study and courses are organised into master-level engineering programmes. CEQ collects student answers to 25 questions concerning their experiences of a course. The questions are clustered around four themes: good teaching, clear goals and standards, experience of workload, and if the assessment is oriented towards understanding or reproduction. To these 25 questions one is added concerning the overall satisfaction. The questions are answered on a Likert Scale and coded from -100 for the most negative response to +100 for the most positive response – 0 is neutral.

During 2007, five teachers were rewarded. Each of these teachers was during that year responsible for one or more courses. This means being responsible for the organisation of the course, often for the lectures and also for the assessment. Often, they do not teach the course alone, but have both senior teachers and teaching assistants at their disposal. We did compare the CEQ-scores for these courses with all other courses at LTH. Preliminary results show that these courses place themselves ahead of an absolute majority of all other courses within the faculty. This pattern is most accentuated for overall satisfaction and for the good teaching cluster. However, the clusters concerning clear goals and standards, experience of workload, and assessment oriented towards understanding, also support the overall perception that rewarded teachers are responsible for better-quality courses, at least as measured by the CEQ.

The question concerning whether or not the rewarded teachers organise and conduct high quality teaching is of course paramount. Even though these initial results are encouraging, further investigations are needed before a substantial claim can be supported.

Is the reward system integrated with other academic development measures?

LTH has an extensive and integrated academic development program, based in social practice theory (Roxå, Olsson et al, 2007; Roxå, Olsson et al, in press). It is designed to promote an intensified, informed, and scholarly pedagogical discussion within the faculty leading to improved student learning. Alignment with basic academic values within a research-intensive institution is at the focal point. The program operates autonomously towards faculty leadership, departments, programmes, and individual teachers and it includes several interrelated parts: pedagogical courses, focusing on teaching and learning within a scholarly framework; consulting and evaluations directed towards all levels of the faculty, supporting scholarly dialogues; research projects on teaching and learning, always close to practice; an annual campus conference, where contributions are peer-reviewed and documented in proceedings constituting an excellent arena for scholarly discussions. The reward-system for scholarly approaches to teaching and

student learning discussed in this paper is thoroughly integrated with all other academic development measures at the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University.

Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed the cultural impact of reward systems and we argue that relevant criteria at different levels are crucial. These criteria are interdependent and in order to achieve effect at systemic level we recommend a focus on the alignment between assessment criteria, internal criteria and systemic criteria.

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