

TED routes and roadblocks: Developing the Teaching Excellence of our PGR community in the Academy

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Context and background	4
3	Methodology	4
4	PGR Teaching Excellence Development (TED) Factors	5
5	TED Routes and Roadblocks	6
5.1	TED Factor 1 – Institutional structure(s)	6
5.2	TED Factor 2 – Community	7
5.3	TED Factor 3 – Scholarship	8
5.4	TED Factor 4 – Mentorship	10
5.5	Summary – TED Routes and Roadblocks	11
6	A principles-based TED-f framework and Toolkit	13
7	Conclusions	18
8	References and further readings	19
	Acknowledgements	21

1 Introduction

This is a time of unprecedented uncertainty and volatility within the UK higher education (HE) sector. Further, while there is a lot of research on developing the research skills of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs), there is less on developing teaching excellence in this group. It is therefore a critical to consider strategic approaches to good practice-based methods of developing PGR teaching excellence in the academy. In support of this, this Advance HE Good Practice Grant Report offers a solution-based approach to address some of the challenges faced by the HE sector seeking to develop teaching excellence of their PGRs. It celebrates existing best practice whilst recognising opportunities for future development, delivering a principles-based framework aimed at achieving sustainable teaching excellence.

Teaching excellence is difficult to define and in some ways, means different things to different stakeholders of education. Of course there are well established frameworks, such as Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which is used as a proxy for teaching excellence, but undoubtedly has its limitations. At its core, is the principle of inclusive, compassionate, anti-racist, pedagogies that provide opportunities for students to take agency of their learning and apply their knowledge and understanding to different complex, unstructured, multi-faceted contexts. Teaching excellence assumes the achievement of a standard of experience that is engaging, enabling and transformative in developing and empowering all students, in their learning. This report, focuses on the ways in which Universities can better support the development of PGRs in this endeavor.

The Report responds to the four main areas of investigation:

- + What does teaching excellence mean to PGRs?
- + Teaching Excellence Development practices for PGRs.
- + Successful transitions: What works for different PGR groups.
- + PGR talent pipeline management into the academy.

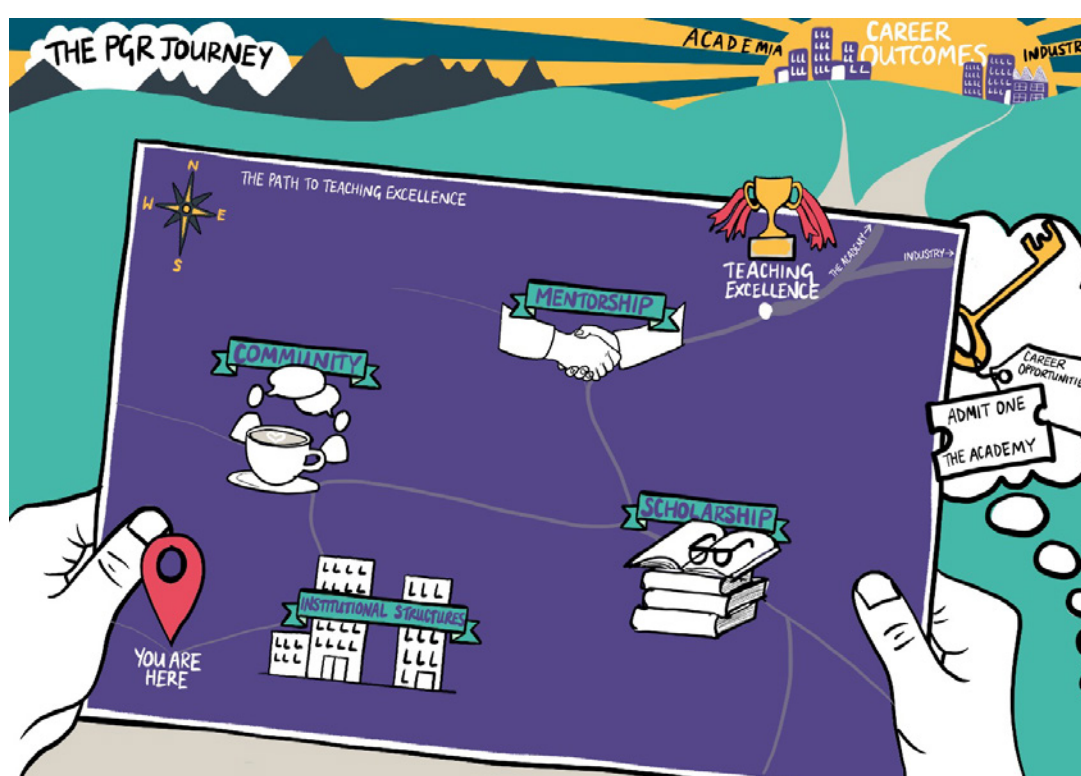
While there is much to celebrate across the UK's PGR sector, there are systemic structures that result in roadblocks in the path to teaching excellence for some PGR student groups. Further, there are inequities of access to opportunities, communities of practice and support that adversely impact on PGR experience and their graduate outcomes.

The Report offers a principles-based **Teaching Excellence Development framework (TED-f)** and associated **TED-f toolkit** that aim to enhance teaching development and level-up access to opportunity for PGR groups within HE and support our vibrant and talented PGR communities. This is evidenced using the Teaching Excellence Development (TED) practices of PGRs at the University of Leeds (UoL) and, more specifically, within Leeds University Business School (LUBS).

The Accounting and Finance (AF) division of the LUBS has a vibrant and successful PGR community and doctoral studies are required to teach as part of their role. There is a system of mentoring support for AF PGRs which has proven successful, with PGR appointments to fixed-term associate teaching staff contracts and to wider academic roles, as well as research posts; this indicates that mentoring within AF effectively prepare our PGRs for entering teaching roles within the sector.

The analogy of the PGR ‘*path to teaching excellence*’ is used (Figure 1) to critically analyse TED factors impacting on the PGR experience, and the Report identifies TED factors impacting on LUBS PGRs in reaching the ‘*destination*’ of teaching excellence by analysing the roadblocks and routes that they encounter along the ‘*path*’.

Figure 1. The PGR Journey – ‘The path to teaching excellence’ (© Image by Frances Noble)



The case study uses both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the development of Teaching Excellence Development (TED) of PGRs at LUBS (Blaikie, 2010). Good practice at UoL, and more specifically within LUBS and the AF division, is analysed to identify TED factors, routes and roadblocks to teaching excellence. The detailed UoL/LUBS context, baseline data, and quantitative and qualitative analyses are available elsewhere for readers who wish to go beyond the ‘what works’ findings and recommendations of the study presented here.

An output of the report is a synthesis of the key TED factors, identifying routes and roadblocks to teaching excellence. This is used, together with a wider sector level analysis, to inform the design of a good practice TED-f for PGRs, the principles of which could also be adapted for PGTs, undergraduate students and PGRs going into industry.

The TED-f is accompanied by a toolkit that can be adapted and adopted by HEIs seeking to adopt and adapt the framework for their own institutional structures and PGR communities.

2 Context and background

This report focuses on Roles 3 and 4 (*Teaching and Lecturing in HE and Other Teaching Roles* respectively) of the six occupational clusters used by Vitae to classify PGRs and frame the TED-f.

There were 112,815 PGRs studying in the UK in 2018-19 (HESA, 2020) and comparisons of data sets using the Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from higher education (LDHLE) data (2008 – 2016-17), shows that, at the aggregate level, just over 50% of PGRs with a PhD go into industry on graduation, with 44% going into the academy. At a more granular level, the LDLHE (2008-2016) shows that just over 50% of Social Sciences PGRs go into teaching in HE, with a further c. 10% going into HE research roles.

HEPI (2020) indicate that 33% of PGRs felt their PhD training is preparing them well for a career outside academia. However, this compares to 81% who felt their PhD is preparing them well for a career in academia. Recently, HEIs have made structural changes in order to better support their PGRs and many now have some form of a Graduate School(s) and/or Doctoral College to ensure that PhD students can access training and careers advice within and outside of their discipline. These institutional structures enable PGR communities to be formed and shaped in different ways and provide opportunities and communities of practice; appropriate support is identified as the most important theme relating to development of teaching excellence of PGRs.

3 Methodology

A wide range of primary and secondary resources have been used to identify and frame what good practice looks like for developing TED of PGRs:

- (i) Stage 1 used secondary data and information (e.g. higher education Statistics Agency [HESA] datasets, Destination of leavers from higher education [DLHE] and LDLHE, Postgraduate researchers' experience survey [PRES] datasets, and Office for Students [OfS] resources) to provide analysis of PGR experiences and institutional structures and communities of support for TED at a sector level. These findings were used to design a TED questionnaire that was completed by a sample (n=63) of PGRs at LUBS, in Stage 2 of the study.
- (ii) Stage 2 used structured interviews with ten LUBS PGRs who had completed the earlier questionnaire in order to provide more in-depth explanatory analysis of the findings from both PRES and the TED project questionnaire.

The findings of Stages 1 and 2 identified the routes and roadblocks along the '*path of teaching excellence*' for LUBS PGRs and a synthesis of all of these data collection points were used to build the good practice case study.

4 PGR Teaching Excellence Development (TED) Factors

Our Postgraduate researchers' experience survey (PRES), across the 2016-17, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years, focused on PGRs experiences of:

- (i) supervision.
- (ii) resources.
- (iii) research community.
- (iv) progress and assessment.
- (v) skills and professional development
- (vi) wellbeing.

and shows that, unsurprisingly, a strong research culture does not have a statistically significant relationship with teaching excellence. However, there is a strong correlation ($p < 0.01$) between research culture and overall satisfaction (although resources are not deemed as important as, for example, collaborations and a sense of belonging).

Analysis of the findings at Stages 1 and 2 identifies four main TED factors:

- 1 Institutional structures (support, wellbeing and counselling)
- 2 Community (informal and formal communities [teaching and non-teaching] practice)
- 3 Scholarship (inquiry into student learning which advances and extends the practice of teaching and learning); and
- 4 Mentorship (a relationship that provides emotional as well as professional support to the PGR)

5 TED Routes and Roadblocks

5.1 TED Factor 1 – Institutional structure(s)

Institutional structure(s) is a theme that captures an HEI's formal structures that embody its culture, values, strategies, approaches, quality assurance processes and financial infrastructure to support its PGR communities (and other communities across the institution)(Figure 2).

Figure 2. ‘The path to teaching excellence’ – Institutional Structures



Good: Institutional routes to teaching excellence

- + Ensuring PGRs have knowledge of the TEF.
- + Understanding PGR motivations to teach.
- + Ensuring the full spectrum of teaching delivery, including assessment, is supported.
- + Understanding the diversity of lived experience and educational background of PGRs.
- + Professional development that enhances teaching satisfaction.

Bad: Institutional roadblocks to teaching excellence

- + PGRs not integrated into human resource management structures.
- + PGRs not valued (real and perceived) within the academic community.
- + Inequity of opportunity to teach.
- + Language can be a barrier to teaching ability.
- + A lack of knowledge of how to navigate institutional structures.
- + Uncertainty about career destination.

“I think there’s a real lack of explaining to people realistically what an academic career looks like and how to get into an academic career and what’s expected of somebody in an academic career.”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

5.2 TED Factor 2 – Community

Communities are collective(s) of people within teaching and non-teaching communities of practice that the PGRs are part of through membership or participation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. ‘The path to teaching excellence’ – Community



Good: Community routes to teaching excellence

- + Providing PGRs with designated, physical space.
- + Including PGRs in divisional meetings, peer observation of teaching etc.

Bad: Community roadblocks to teaching excellence

- + Limited entry to teaching and non-teaching communities of practice.
- + Exclusion from established communities of practice.

“I do not feel like really included in the division to be honest. I think that is what I feel and that makes me feel less and less get involved because I do not really feel that. I am really not included; you know what I mean? ...If there is a conference or something...or a seminar but apart from that, I do not really feel, like get into that society”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

5.3 TED Factor 3 – Scholarship

Scholarship is developed through opportunities to attend staff meetings, opportunities for training, shadowing, associate HEA membership etc., and is recognised through the integration of PGRs as (associate) staff (Figure 4). It is aligned to mentoring frameworks and is about developing a PGRs curricula and needs to acknowledge the interplay between knowledge contexts, peer support, evaluation and teaching.

THE PATH TO TEACHING EXCELLENCE

- COMMUNITY**
 - WELCOME (Access to personal and informal space)
 - Peer support
 - Isolation
 - INITIAL HEALTH PROBLEMS
 - STAFF
 - STUDENT
 - LOST IDENTITY
 - RESPONSIBILITIES
 - POWER
 - HIERARCHIES
- MENTORSHIP**
 - Supervisor
 - Access to other academics
 - STOP
 - MENTORSHIP LOTTERY
 - SHORT-TERMINISM (Being a short-term staff member, not a long-term one)
 - TEACHING SKILLS
 - IDENTITY
 - ADMIN SUPPORT
 - Stilled experienced Mentor
 - INSPIRATIONAL
 - My supervisors inspire me
 - they guide me ... but don't give me all the answers
- SCHOLARSHIP**
 - that's important for good practice
 - EXISTING PRACTICE
 - LACK OF DIVERSITY
 - EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICE
 - with feedback
 - It's almost accepted that some people will engage and others won't
 - I want everyone to be engaged
 - you just have the training once and that's it
- INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES**
 - Grad school
 - Doctoral College
 - TEF score?
 - BARGAIN
 - Exploitation
 - YOU ARE HERE
 - STRUCTURED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE
- TRANSFORMATIVE**
 - OPPS LEARN LEVEL
 - FOR GROWING & OPEN
- TEACHING EXCELLENCE**
 - INDUSTRY

Other notes and quotes:

- I always watched teachers
- The culture of Chinese education is very different
- that's important for good practice
- that's important for good practice
- that's important for good practice

“The culture of Chinese education is really different to teaching THE UK students and so it’s not that the students are unwilling to talk...it’s about how you get them to talk” it’s almost accepted that some people will engage and others wont. I want everyone to be engaged. I’m having to adapt every week”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

Bad: Scholarship roadblocks to teaching excellence

- + Non-continuous training whereby training to inform teaching is at the beginning of the PGR’s teaching path and does not continue throughout their doctoral studies.

“You just have the training once and that is it. So, I kind of think that you might need support at different times.”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

5.4 TED Factor 4 – Mentorship

Mentorship is the guidance, teaching and support that is provided through a mentor/mentee relationship (ie. senior academic and PGR)(Figure 5).

Figure 5. ‘The path to teaching excellence’ – Mentorship



Good: Mentorship routes to teaching excellence

- + Ensuring strong, empowering mentorship and good mentor feedback.

“I think the biggest support is from the mentors you’re working with, and normally the mentors are the people who you’re working with.”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

- + Creating opportunities for peer observation of teaching and time for reflection and feedback, so the process is more dialogic.
- + Promoting the academy as a career aspiration.

Bad: Mentorship roadblocks to teaching excellence

- + The lack of a structured system of mentorship separate from that of doctoral supervision.

“I think there should be a system of mentorship apart from the one you get from your supervisor.”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

- + Not knowing how to navigate the path to teaching excellence and the general institutional structures of the academy.

“I think the majority of students I know eventually kind of get lost, and I’m talking about, you know, my experiences. They, I think, start off with a lot of more academic ambitions and eventually they don’t see where they fit in and it must be... you know, whilst it’s disheartening for somebody in my shoes I can also see from the other side of the coin, it must be quite difficult for the management school or the LUBS team to put together something that makes getting into teaching easier for certain students.”

(PGR Student, LUBS)

- + Perceived favoritism.

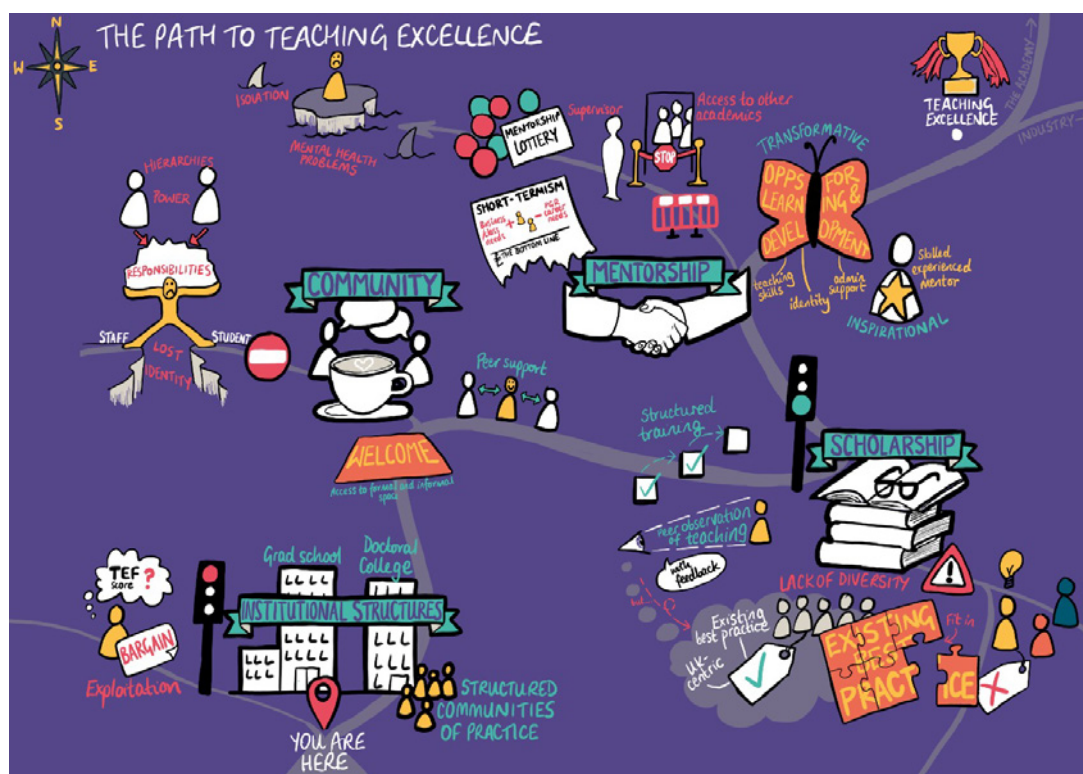
5.5 Summary – TED Routes and Roadblocks

The research revealed that (Figure 6):

- + PGRs need well-established institutional structures in place to support their teaching experience and excellence development and they value training. However, some still feel isolated and disempowered.
- + Mentorship is highly valued but needs to be well-structures and consistently applied. Crucially, facets of coaching such as guidance, relationship and trust, dialogue, goals and action plans are especially important to PGRs at the start of their ‘*path to teaching excellence*’.

- + Lived experience plays a significant role in a PGR's pedagogical approach to the development of their teaching excellence along their journey, and PGRs should be empowered to draw on lived experiences and be able to flex and adapt to the dynamic intricacies of the demands in the classroom.
- + PGRs value ownership of their space where their community can come together and discuss things. However, they also need access to wider and more informal teaching and non-teaching communities of practice.
- + Perceptions of wider support from the university communities can be low.
- + Most PGRs interviewed aspired to a career in academia, though many do not know what the expectations of the academy are.
- + Teaching excellence is associated by PGRs with what they themselves expect from their own doctoral learning experience. They associate teaching excellence with enhanced inclusivity and demonstrating an ability to inspire students. PGRs suggested a critical element of achieving teaching excellence is the ability to flex and respond to students' needs and ever-changing dynamics in the classroom. PGRs also highlight the need to successfully empower students and help them navigate unfamiliar structures and systems. They are motivated to ensure that their students 'get it' and reflect on their practice and experiences to determine what works in deconstructing complex concepts and ideas into a meaningful way to be applied by the student.

Figure 6. TED Routes and Roadblocks – 'The path to teaching excellence'



6 A principles-based TED-f framework and Toolkit

Based on our research into a path to teaching excellence for PGR students the final section of the report presents a principles-based framework (*TED-f*), that has been framed as a result of our quantitative and qualitative data analysis. It is presented, together with a *TED-f toolkit*, for colleagues in the sector to adapt and adopt in the Teaching Excellence Development of their own PGRs.

Figure 7. The Teaching Excellence Development framework (TED-f)



TED-f Toolkit

The TED-f toolkit can be used by PGRs for career planning into either academia or industry. PGRs aspiring to careers in industry may still wish to develop their teaching excellence as part of their professional development; however, they will wish to frame their TED goals differently as a result.

This research study has surfaced issues relating to varying levels of opportunity and access for LUBS PGRs to develop their teaching excellence. Additionally, whilst structures and communities of support exist, PGRs are not accessing them for a variety of reasons; *one significant reason is because they do not know about them.*

This TED-f toolkit tries to provide an equality of opportunity for PGRs. It is personalised and recognises the importance of dialogue and facilitation through coaching principles to understand the PGRs structures of opportunity at the planning stage (Roberts, 1977). However, expertise and knowledge are needed to help PGRs navigate their career management, so mentorship at this stage is important.

It is imperative that the explicit and tacit knowledge gained by PGRs through their TED is captured and framed using constructive alignment principle (Biggs, 1999). This knowledge can be recorded and stored through 'artefacts' (or 'assets') in the form of examples of work, module feedback, reflections, POT feedback to enable the achievement of SMART TED goals and Advance HE Associate Fellowship competences to be evidenced in a verifiable way (Ugiagbe-Green, 2017). UoL has designed an internal credited course called Professional Recognition in Student Education (PRiSE studenteddev.leeds.ac.uk/professional-recognition-awards/prise/). This can then be used for application for Associate Fellowship status on completion of doctoral studies.

Finally, coaching and mentorship are obvious features of the TED-f. In AF an important locum of support is the divisional administration support provided to PGRs and in particular an individual who is very much a point of personal and professional support for all PGRs within the division. This locum of support has developed culturally within AF but is a divisional structure that PGRs value greatly.

Figure 8. The TED-f Toolkit

TED-f Toolkit			
	(1) PGR develops a career management plan		
	Scaffold		
	SMART TED goals – set by PGR (Aligned with Advance HE Associate membership competences) (Record in E-Learning journey platform eg Pebble Pad)		
	Task	(Teaching) Excellence Development activity*	Facilitation
Stage 1 Planning	Professional and personal development (PPD)	+ Assess your career-readiness – what is the context? What observation is required? eg marking and assessment, feedback – or is it in classroom teaching? + Reflect and engage in dialogue on current (teaching) experience and scholarly knowledge + Align periodic SMART objectives with PPD goals and evaluate them during POT and in conversations within communities of practice + Focus on good personal health and well-being – seek out support if feeling anxious, isolated, scared, unsure + Do not underestimate the value of good administrative support for PGRs – this is another community of support	Coaching Communities of Practice and Support

TED-f Toolkit

(2) PGR undertakes training and mentorship.

Artefacts and reflections relating to professional practice are attached to SMART TED goals (period of at least one year)

Reflect in e-Learning journey platform

Stage 2 Periodic review	Training and development	+ Complete a formal course to enhance scholarly activity and knowledge of theory relating to the practice of teaching- meet peers and share lived experiences + Align course learning outcomes with The UKPSF + Discuss deployment – teaching and teaching related activities available to do in line with PGR aspirations/goals (may be cross Faculty rather than just divisional) + Collaboratively redesign and evaluate SMART TED goals based on PGR deployment + Align SMART TED goals with Advance HE Associate Fellow requirements, ideally as part of an internal accredited scheme (e.g. PRiSE at UoL) + Peer observation of teaching (POT)– including materials, marking, assessment, feedback (no module leadership unless prior experience and/teaching qualification) + Enable PGRs to observe each other (if desired by PGR) + Ensure that modules do not have more than 50% of the content (both lectures and seminars) taught by PGRs, as this will have an impact on any AACSB levelling + Keep PGRs informed about relevant administrative procedures, e.g. plagiarism and cheating, late or non-submission of work, attendance at classes. + Provide peer support mechanisms such as regular meetings of PGRs teaching to pool ideas, discuss teaching methods, problems and solutions	Formal and informal training (e.g. Alumni events, Advance HE promotional events)
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TED-f Toolkit			
	Mentorship	+ Structured support of mentorship (regular updates, coffee meetings etc – does not need to be formal but should be structured) + Signposting by mentor to internal teaching and non-teaching communities of support + Collective responsibility to evaluate progress of agreed PGRs SMART TED objectives, PPD and Advance HE Association Fellow requirements + Feedback opportunities between mentor and PGR should also focus on health and well being + Reverse mentoring should be considered where appropriate + Formal feedback should be aligned with THE UKPSF and Advance HE Associate Fellowship competences	Formal and informal feedback
	3) Create, record, store and retrieve artefacts in the e-Learning journey platform, evidencing achievement of SMART TED goals and Advance HE Associate Fellowship competences		
	Career management	+ Review of career targets – does the PGR need to access new structures of opportunity? New training courses, workshops, networks, conferences + Engage with careers services + Engage with experienced academic staff (peers for advice) + Create a record of achievement to showcase verifiable evidence of progress and achievement of SMART TED goals and Advance HE Associate Fellowship requirements + Validation of experience – mapped to AFHEA requirements	Peer Validation and verifiable assessment of experience
(3) Assessment of verifiable evidence (artefacts and assets) relating to teaching practice, PDP reflections that have been scaffolded and aligned with Advance HE competences and SMART TED goals (eg PRiSE at UoL)			

TED-f toolkit Stages

STAGE 1 – Planning for Academia

PGRs sets their SMART TED goals, for both the short and long term. PGRs need to identify what their structures and communities of opportunity are within the teaching and non-teaching communities available to them. PGRs should be supported by a process of coaching and support at this stage. This stage focuses on the PGR taking an informed approach to their career management. Successful TED requires guiding and support through communities of practice and peer observation of teaching (POT).

At this fundamental planning stage of the '*path to teaching excellence*', the PGR's SMART TED goals need to be articulated within their own current and personal and professional development context.

STAGE 2 – Periodic Review

PGRs should receive formal training in which they learn not only about the theory and practice of teaching, but also assessment design, feedback, building confidence in themselves and their students as well as developing relationships of trust and effective working with peers.

Essentially training should be a combination of structured training and conversations with trusted peers and mentors, to share thoughts and perspectives on the interplay of lived experiences, subject curricula and knowledge contexts.

The PGR should be mentored into accessing and contributing within formal and informal teaching communities. Accessing these opportunities allows the PGR to access structures and opportunities of support to share and learn from practice.

A collective responsibility between mentor and PGR should be adopted to re-shape and evaluate the PGR's SMART TED goals. This recognises that the locus of power of decision making should be with PGR, who is responsible for the professional and personal development. However, it is the 'mentor' who is likely to have professional knowledge and expertise within the mentoring relationship.

In some cases, for example where PGRs have gained a teaching qualification already or may be from a 'non-traditional' background, a reverse mentoring relationship may be considered.

The frequency of the periodic review of these SMART TED activities should be determined through dialogue by the PGR and their 'mentor' and other trusted peers.

PGRs who express within their SMART TED goals and career planning an aspiration to go on into academia, should scaffold artefacts evidencing achievement of their SMART TED goals and associated Advance HE Associate Fellowship competences.

This will mean that the PGR will be in a good position to apply for Associate Fellowship on completion of their doctoral studies.

7 Conclusions

Many of today's PGRs will be the thought leaders and academics of the future.

Their path to teaching excellence is an undoubtedly bumpy, transformative, uncertain, exciting and rewarding journey. No journey to teaching excellence is the same for two PGRs.

This research study has shown that routes and roadblocks to teaching excellence are shaped by systemic structures but also by the personal characteristics of the PGR themselves. The research has shown that factors such as gender, mode of study and ethnicity has a significant impact on PGR outcomes and experience.

Although institutional structures and communities of practice provide transformative spaces of learning for PGRs, it is clear that there are factors that lead to inequity of opportunity to access spaces of support and learning for some PGR groups. Notably, first generation and international PGRs in this study.

The world is facing global problems that thought leaders and academics of the future will work to address. Knowledge creation in transformative spaces of innovation and learning is much needed.

Access to, and quality of, teaching in higher education has never been more important.

This research study has provided an in-depth analysis on multiple aspects of Teaching Excellence Development practice within the HE sector. It has celebrated best practice and recognised opportunities for future development of teaching excellence using a principles-based approach to develop TED-f.

It is a framework that puts the PGR at the heart of the TED journey.

An emphasis is placed on adopting supportive practices that centre the PGR, their context, lived experiences, structures of opportunities and career management strategies to achieve sustainable teaching excellence.

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