

“AdvanceHE

+ Embedding reward, recognition and promotion in teaching & learning

Perspectives from Australia, New Zealand, the UK & Ireland

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1 Executive summary

This research report explores how higher education institutions (HEIs) reward teaching excellence through promotion and career progression. In particular, the project focuses on structures, policies, processes and practices that embed recognition and reward for university educators in the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. This study seeks to uncover the mechanisms and policies used by HEIs to incentivise and acknowledge teaching contributions from academic staff.

The study reveals that, historically, academic funding and reward structures, institutional cultures and promotional criteria in these regions have predominantly favoured research outputs and achievements over teaching performance often marginalising the teaching role.. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift toward rebalancing this focus, driven by increasing public and student demand for quality education, changes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, governmental policy interventions, and the need to meet strategic goals related to educational outcomes.

Co-created with sector experts and informed by participants from member HEIs from the UK, Australasia and Ireland, this project considered how promotions to senior roles are currently configured and administered, particularly for those in teaching-focused career paths, also variously termed ‘education focused’, ‘teaching-focused’, ‘education specialist’, ‘teaching and scholarship’ or ‘teaching stream faculty’.

Through interviews and roundtable discussions that brought together senior academic and educational leaders, and human resource and organisational development directors to share experiences, the report provides a comprehensive overview and cases for Advance HE members that illustrate the ways in which learning and teaching excellence can be effectively built into progression, reward and recognition.

It provides a multinational lens, bringing together different perspectives and showcasing practices from different contexts to explore how teaching performance, professional development and teaching-related leadership are recognised and rewarded.

The sources provided identify several factors influencing the career landscapes of university educators across the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. These factors, which have significantly altered how teaching and learning are valued in career progression, include the following.

1 Political shifts and market-driven policies

Government policies and reviews in Australia, the UK and New Zealand have significantly impacted higher education policies, funding and structures. Participants describe a market-oriented approach in higher education that emphasises universities proving their value and contribution in response to funding constraints and market forces. This approach has led to increased scrutiny, dependence on

international student revenue, a focus on research metrics and the casualisation of academic staff.

2 Increased focus on vocational outcomes in higher education

An increasing pressure for university programmes to align with industry demands, producing work-ready graduates with practical skills, was noted. Universities are integrating experiential learning components into their curricula and collaborating more closely with industry partners, but this work is not necessarily that which is rewarded and recognised.

3 More diverse student populations

Policies promoting wider access to higher education, along with rising international student numbers, have resulted in more diverse student populations with varying learning needs. This diversity requires university educators to develop inclusive teaching strategies and support students facing various barriers.

4 The digitisation of education

The shift to online and hybrid teaching, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has changed the nature of academic work. The sources highlight the pressures of adapting to emerging technologies and the increasing expectations for flexibility and efficiency in teaching.

5 New career pathways reshaping the academic workforce

Participants described the emergence of specialised roles and management systems in response to external demands, including the growth of academic positions with a focus on teaching and learning, variously referred to as teaching-focused, teaching-specialist or education-focused positions.

In addition to these factors, participants noted a persistent emphasis on the recognition and reward of research over teaching. This emphasis is driven by the competitive nature of higher education, where research performance is heavily linked to funding and institutional prestige. Participants report concerns about the impact of research-driven agendas on teaching priorities and the challenges faced by educators seeking career progression based on teaching excellence. This is particularly significant in light of workload allocation practices that can leave educators with limited time to engage in activities that could enhance their teaching or build a scholarly profile in teaching and learning.

Therefore, this study sheds light on specific barriers hindering the recognition and reward of teaching, including:

- + ambiguous and inconsistent promotion criteria, making it difficult for evaluators and educators to understand how teaching excellence is evidenced

- + a lack of clarity and consensus around the definition and value of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), leading to its marginalisation in some institutions
- + inadequate preparation for teaching, with many academics entering the profession without formal training in pedagogy.

1.1 Recommendations

This study highlights several strategies that enable the recognition of teaching excellence in academic career pathways that can rebalance an over-emphasis on research and recognise the significant contributions of educators to student learning and institutional success.

1 Recognise teaching contributions through enhanced promotion pathways

HEIs should consider or revise promotion pathways for teaching-focused roles, with clear and transparent criteria aligned with pedagogical impact.

2 Provide clearer promotion criteria and metrics for teaching excellence

Institutions should strive for greater transparency in promotion criteria and ensure that evaluation processes are consistently applied across departments.

3 Draw on expert-informed evaluation and feedback

Broader embedding of SoTL literacy needs to be incorporated into professional development schemes, enabling academic staff to incorporate scholarly approaches to their practice portfolios.

4 Build Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) literacy

Institutions need to provide clear guidance on what constitutes SoTL and ensure that SoTL outputs are appropriately valued in promotion criteria.

5 Promote academic citizenship and mentoring

Institutions need to encourage mentoring as it plays a crucial role in fostering teaching excellence and supporting career progression.

6 Provide flexible career pathways

Institutions need to provide more flexible career pathways that allow educators to adjust their focus on teaching and research based on their career aspirations and current roles.

7 Provide professional development opportunities focused on teaching

Institutions should invest in professional development programmes that align with promotion criteria and address the specific needs of teaching academics.

8 Building communities of practice and networks

Institutions can facilitate these networks through teaching academies, mentoring programmes and other initiatives that bring together educators with a shared commitment to teaching excellence.

This report underscores the need for clearer, more robust frameworks to evaluate and reward teaching excellence. This strategic report and the accompanying Windows on Practice case studies provide insights into university educator career pathways. These include the creation of dedicated promotion pathways for teaching-focused roles, transparent criteria aligned with pedagogical impact, and stronger institutional cultures that prioritise and celebrate teaching excellence. The report concludes with a synthesis of key enablers for embedding teaching excellence into reward and recognition structures and processes.

2 Introduction and background

This section of the report provides an overview of the objectives of the report and the importance of the study.

In April 2013, the Higher Education Academy published its [Promoting teaching: Benchmarking guide](#), with the purpose to: “assist in the process of review and improvement of academic promotion, aligned to institutional goals and best practice in the higher education (HE) sector” (Wills et al, 2013a, 3). Eleven years on, this member benefit project explores the ways in which the sector has developed mechanisms to value teaching. The publication of *Promoting teaching: Benchmarking Guide* (Wills et al, 2013a) was a response to a time when higher education institutions (HEIs) were beginning to grapple with how to recognise and promote learning and teaching excellence.

It constituted a very practical ‘how to’ guide and methodology for UK higher education providers to benchmark promotion approaches. HEIs were able to use the guide to self-review local practices against those used across the sector. In addition, a cross-institutional benchmarking methodology enabled HEIs to work with partner HEIs to compare standards and benefit from multiple external perspectives and mutual problem-solving linked to the sister report *Promoting Teaching: Making evidence count* (Wills et al, 2013b).

Since then, HEIs across the globe have continued to wrestle with the issue of the need to recognise, develop and reward teaching-focused career paths and how promotions to senior roles should be configured and administered to give efficacy and parity with traditional research-focused job families.

This challenge has been exacerbated by the increased focus on research performance in higher education funding models (McKinley et al, 2021). This is partly a response to the continued reduction in state funding for higher education initiated by the global financial crisis of 2008, resulting in an intensified competition for resources. At the same time, the higher education landscape has seen significant global upheaval and change, most notably with the sudden pivot to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. It coincided with other global developments, such as the imperative to implement sustainable development goals; transformation of education towards ensuring inclusion and equity; and responding to challenges posed by generative AI and academic integrity. All of these major themes are evident in published reports (see OECD, 2019, for example) and in research funding calls and are central to strategic goals in enhancing teaching and learning quality and the student experience.

Addressing these societal changes and challenges requires substantial innovative and adaptive adjustments to traditional approaches to teaching and learning in higher education to realise successful outcomes for students, graduates and wider society. Yet, the ways in which teaching and learning is valued, rewarded and recognised within academic career pathways remains undervalued in a sector that ostensibly continues to privilege research

over teaching. Historically, academic promotion and career progression has been contingent on achieving success in disciplinary research in universities (Chalmers, 2011). Academics directing their attention to the learning of their students have risked their potential career progression and access to tenure and promotion (Huber, 2004); a situation that doesn't appear to have changed over recent years. According to recent surveys exploring the culture and status of teaching in higher education, with participation from 15,659 academics from 21 universities across 10 countries, research performance remained very important to professorial promotions (Graham, 2019, 10).

In an effort to recognise the importance of the role of teaching and learning, a significant number of universities in the UK and, increasingly, across the globe have adopted the Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting learning (PSF, 2023) and in many cases have included the achievement of categories of fellowship recognition in their recruitment and staff progression criteria. More than 200,000 HE staff have now achieved fellowship in over 116 countries across the world

There is a marked contrast between importance of building capacity in universities for new ways of learning prompted by the current context and the apparent absence of the valuing of these capabilities through extrinsic motivation mechanisms such as promotion and reward and recognition of teaching capabilities. This contrast requires further examination with career pathways for HE teaching staff coming into sharp focus.

Such a focus on career paths needs to be conducted on a global scale. As Sterling et al note,

“career framework redevelopment [that takes into account adjustments made to accommodate the current context] has been uneven across the sector globally [resulting in] insufficient comparative data and limited guidance on how to design frameworks that enable the sector to thrive for the benefit of society.”

(Sterling et al, 2023, 3).

A deeper understanding of common barriers and challenges as well as exemplars of teaching recognition, reward and promotion can enable shared understandings of success across countries. In recognition of a need to update contemporary understandings and experiences and build upon previous projects conducted in the UK (Cashmore et al, 2013; McHanwell and Robson, 2018) and Australia (Chalmers et al, 2014; Probert, 2013), Advance HE commissioned this project to support strategic leaders of teaching and learning and their stakeholders.

3 The project

This section of the report provides an overview of the project aims, guiding questions and the approach to data collection and analysis. It also outlines limitations.

This project explores the ways in which HE providers in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have developed structures, pathways, policies and practices to value teaching and learning within career pathways. The project brief called for identification of current challenges and barriers to embedding reward and recognition of teaching and learning within HE structures and processes as well as gaining insights into practice that works well in different contexts.

3.1 Project aims

The project aimed to:

- + examine how HEIs in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand effectively recognise and reward teaching and learning through promotions policy and structures
- + explore the extent to which teaching and learning is successfully embedded in and has an impact on promotion, career progression, reward and recognition structures, policies, processes and practice
- + illustrate both successes and challenges in embedding teaching and learning reward, recognition and progression in career pathways in the contemporary context.

3.2 Key questions

The following overarching question guided the study:

To what extent is teaching excellence successfully embedded in (and having an impact on) promotion, career progression, reward and recognition structures, policies, processes and practice?

With the following sub-questions:

- + What works for HEIs, the sector, individuals?
- + What are the issues, barriers and the challenges in embedding teaching recognition at institutional level?
- + Are there examples of good practice we can learn from?

4 Methodology

Because of the changing and varied landscape of higher education across each jurisdiction, the project was underpinned by a qualitative exploratory methodological approach. We adopted this approach as we recognised the need to develop a deeper understanding of this complex issue, allowing us to adapt our methods as we gained new insights through our investigation (Stebbins, 2001). We drew on in-depth desk-based research, semi-structured interviews and roundtable discussions to gather comprehensive data that was not always evident through documentary analysis or institutional websites. This allowed for patterns and themes to emerge that then led to new lines of inquiry (Cresswell, 2013).

Ethical approval for the study's data collection methods was granted by Advance HE and participants were given assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Consequently, quotations from the interviews and roundtables are attributed by HEI number and country only and anonymised without any potentially identifiable information.

4.1 Data collection methods

1.1.1 Desktop research and literature review

We began by conducting desk research on higher education policy development and change across each jurisdiction since 2013. This exploration included searching for publicly available information on career pathways and routes to promotion across HEIs in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. In tandem with the desk research was an extensive literature review on key issues related to learning and teaching careers, progression, reward and recognition. The literature search yielded new insights into developments over the past decade.

1.1.2 Roundtable discussions

Online roundtable discussions were held with invited senior leadership policy and decision-makers interested at the strategic level in learning and teaching careers in member organisations. Invitees included DVCAs, PVCs or VP Teaching and Learning, Directors of Teaching and Learning Centres or HR/OD Directors.

Two roundtable discussions were convened in the UK and Ireland on 5 and 6 June 2024, respectively. The Australasian sessions were conducted over two sessions, on Tuesday 4 June 2024 and Thursday 19 June 2024, with 26 participants from 20 member HEIs from Australia and New Zealand. Participants included Directors or Managers of Institutional Teaching and Learning Centres, Pro Vice Chancellors of Learning and Teaching, Deputy Vice Chancellors Academic, Professors of Learning and Teaching as well as coordinators of HEA Fellowship schemes or communities who have an outreach responsibility.

Each session began with a short presentation outlining findings from the literature review and desktop research. The presentation served as a springboard to a discussion about current strategic drivers within the regional HE context that hold particular relevance to those

in senior management. Current practices and trends in embedding reward and recognition of teaching and learning excellence into institutional mechanisms/systems for progression and promotion were next considered before an open discussion which invited participants to share possibilities for embedding teaching and learning excellence in national and regional HE contexts and priorities. Participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and share practice. Participants were also invited to capture responses and thoughts anonymously with some using a Padlet wall for this purpose.

1.1.3 Interviews with senior leaders

The interviews aimed to capture a range of perspectives from senior HE leaders across the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. Invitations were issued to senior managers across HEIs to participate in one-to-one interviews on key issues drawn from the literature and that aligned to the focus of our inquiry. Sampling varied across jurisdiction due to contextual differences.

In the UK and Ireland, a purposive sample of 10 senior leaders (two men and eight women) was selected from a range of HEIs representing university 'type' (for example, post-92, Russell Group) and size (small, medium and large). The following criteria for inclusion guided the sampling strategy:

- 1 role and responsibility: senior managers with strategic responsibility for learning and teaching
- 2 HEI type and size

A similar approach was adopted in Australia and New Zealand, where a purposeful sample of nine senior leaders (six women and three men) was selected. The following criteria for inclusion guided the sampling strategy:

- 1 role and responsibility: senior managers with strategic responsibility for learning and teaching
- 2 HEI type (Group of 8, ATN, rural and remote)
- 3 location

All those interviewed held a senior role in an HEI; typically Deputy/Pro Vice Chancellor for Education/Learning and Teaching, Executive Dean, Director/Head of Learning and Teaching including professors with responsibility for education/learning and teaching at organisational levels. Interviews explored the extent to which recognition and reward of teaching and learning is embedded in academic career pathways and key challenges and enablers within each HEI context.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, drawing on the following prompts to guide discussion:

- + overview of HE context
- + overview of institutional teaching and learning structures and processes including, for example, faculty structures, governance, quality assurance, scope and scale of institutional teaching brief
- + description of any recent changes to career pathways
- + overview of how teaching and learning is recognised and rewarded
- + overview of extent to which teaching and learning recognition is embedded in probation, progression or promotion
- + commentary as to what is working well and what practices other HEIs could benefit from
- + comments about barriers, challenges or limitations to embedding recognition and reward of teaching and learning at the institution
- + overview of relationship of Fellowship work in recognition processes
- + an invitation to consider what possible actions might be imagined that could change the culture around teaching and learning at the institution.

1.1.4 Windows Into Practice case studies

HEIs were also invited to contribute case studies entitled Windows into Practice.

The purpose of these was threefold:

- 1 to present an overview of changes or key successes from HEIs within the broader national and institutional context rather than focusing on individuals and groups
- 2 to provide important insights into, and accounts of structures, policies, pathways and/or processes that illustrate how HE HEIs provide progression pathways and opportunities
- 3 to highlight the nuanced nature of leadership in progression and promotion of teaching and learning.

Each case 'window' contributes different perspectives on reward and recognition of teaching and learning from which other leaders and HEIs can benefit and draw inspiration.

The Windows into Practice case studies offer an in-depth exploration of how universities are embedding strategies to recognise and reward teaching excellence. Together, they paint a comprehensive picture of how universities are fostering a culture that values and rewards teaching excellence.

These examples illuminate the practical application of policies, structures and processes that underpin effective teaching-focused initiatives. Windows into Practice highlight distinct approaches related to:

- + developing and implementing supportive institutional policies
- + establishing robust strategies for fostering teaching innovation and excellence
- + creating structures that elevate teaching in career progression pathways
- + refining processes to ensure transparency and fairness in recognition
- + aligning promotion criteria to explicitly value teaching contributions.

By showcasing diverse practices across institutions, these case studies aim to inspire actionable insights and demonstrate how systemic support for teaching can be integrated into the academic landscape.

4.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within the data emerging from the interviews, desktop reviews, roundtable groups and literature review.

Transcripts and documents were carefully read to gain a comprehensive understanding before grouping into broader themes that reflected commonalities, differences and relationships within the dataset. Emergent insights were then discussed with team members to ensure validation and transparency.

4.3 Limitations

Despite the rigorous approach taken to conduct this study, a number of limitations should be acknowledged to provide context to the findings and guide potential further exploration.

1.1.5 Scope of the study

This project focused primarily on experiences from a selected sample of HEIs across the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. While the data collected allows for an in-depth analysis, it is limited in broader generalisability. The findings, therefore, may not directly apply to all HEIs in the focus countries, especially those with substantially different contexts or operational models. However, our findings echo much of the contemporary literature and thus we envisage that the vignettes and overarching themes may resonate with current global changes within the landscape of teaching and learning in higher education.

1.1.6 Time constraints

The data collected in this study was gathered between May to July 2024. While efforts were made to ensure data quality and relevance, potential gaps due to data incompleteness or limited availability may have impacted certain analyses.

Further data generation, including quantitative and/or longitudinal data, could complement and expand the findings described in this report. Given the dynamic nature of the higher education sectors in the targeted countries, and the rapidly evolving regulatory, economic and policy factors, some findings may become less relevant over time. This study reflects the conditions and knowledge at the time of research, and subsequent changes should be considered for long-term application of the findings.

In addition, the sample for interviews consisted of institutional senior leaders. Although attempts were made to include a broad and diverse range of perspectives, there may still be voices that were underrepresented, influencing the comprehensiveness of the insights.

5 Higher education contexts

This section of the report presents an overview of the HE policy contexts for the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

5.1 United Kingdom

At the time of writing, Universities UK reports in excess of 140 universities among its members with an additional approximately 70 private/specialist providers. Categories include research-intensive HEIs (Russell Group), 'red brick' universities with an explicit civic mission, universities established between 1963 and 1992 to enable greater participation in higher education, post-1992 universities (known as former polytechnics), as well as higher education providers with firm links to industries and professions.

In a study of recognition and reward of teaching in research-intensive institutions in the UK, Fung and Gordon (2016) found that education-focussed staff expressed frustration around career pathways and opportunities for promotion. Critically, they argue for strengths-based scholarship and strengths-based promotion strategies to facilitate flexibility in career pathways while also enabling institutions to fully realise their overall mission.

Academic staff in UK universities are under increasing pressure to meet the criteria for excellence in research, teaching and, most recently, 'knowledge' through system-level evaluations. These are known as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), respectively, where performance is related to league tables, reputation and the ability to access funding. These macro-conditions separate teaching and research into distinct and often competing priorities and activities.

Over the past decade, universities have been grappling with funding cuts, increased competition for research grants, and uncertainties surrounding tuition fees. Brexit has also impacted funding from European Union (EU) sources. Brexit, along with the changes to visa rules (a government strategy to reduce net migration to the UK), has disrupted the flow of EU and international students and staff, impacting revenue streams and research collaborations. Maintaining global partnerships and attracting international talent is essential for research excellence and diversity.

Staff report being under pressure in terms of workload and performance, sometimes with issues they have little control over (see, for example, Smith, 2024). There is a continued effort to improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups, including students from low-income backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, and those with disabilities, as required by the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plan. Ensuring high academic standards while meeting regulatory requirements poses a challenge, especially in light of rapid changes in technology and teaching methods.

Universities are under pressure to produce graduates who are equipped with the skills needed for the modern job market. Bridging the gap between academia and industry is crucial for enhancing graduate employability.

5.2 Ireland

Higher education in Ireland is governed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) which measures and assesses the performance of designated HEIs and provides annual capital funding to all designated HEIs.

There are 19 publicly funded HEIs (eight universities, five technological universities, six specialist colleges). Umbrella bodies such as the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) represent the concerns and interests of their members while, currently, the specialist colleges do not have an official forum for this purpose. Pay grades and powers of each HEI to award promotions differ across the sector. For example, while IUA members offer regular merit academic promotions rounds, promotions in THEA member HEIs are only made available when advertised with additional administrative/leadership duties.

Historically and to the present day, there has been no mandatory requirement for teaching staff to demonstrate qualifications in teaching on entry to the profession. Yet, in 2011, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 stated:

“All higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning and should support ongoing development and improvement of their skills.”

(Hunt, 2011).

Established in 2013, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education. Following an extensive national consultation process, Ireland's first framework to support professional development was published in 2016 (National Forum, 2016). Although studies have examined the impact of professional development on improving teaching and learning (McAvinia, 2015), the need to consider flexible pathways to professional development (O'Brien et al, 2023) and the implementation of Fellowships in Irish context (Donaldson, 2022), to date no national mechanism or benchmark has been mandated by government. This means that engagement with CPD is at risk of being overlooked in academic promotion and reward structures.

More critically, the number of part-time/hourly paid teaching academic staff in Ireland has increased exponentially over the past decade (Cush, 2016). A survey conducted by the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) revealed that 36% of respondents were precariously employed and that 65% of those engaged in unpaid work are female (IFUT, 2023).

At the time of writing, traditional promotion pathways (research, teaching, service), while weighted differently across HEIs, appear to be the only career development structure in Irish higher education. Consequently, teaching-only academic staff in Ireland are largely precluded from opportunities in research development and in promotion (Flynn, 2020), revealing systemic inequalities in practice. At the same time, gender pay gap reports of universities show that part-time, fixed-term and atypical employment in the sector is disproportionately affecting female workers (HEA, 2022; IFUT, 2023).

5.3 Australia

Australia's higher education system is overseen by the federal government and comprises public and private universities, technical institutions, and vocational education and training (VET) providers. The nation is home to 43 universities, including 40 universities, two international HEIs, and one private speciality university. The higher education framework emphasises quality assurance through agencies such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which maintains strict standards for accreditation and monitoring of HEIs.

Tertiary education in Australia has evolved into two sectors: the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector. Higher education qualifications are generally obtained through self-accrediting universities which mostly co-produce research and teaching, while the vocational education and training sector delivers government accredited vocational training opportunities through registered training organisations such as technical and further education institutions (TAFE). TAFE institutions are generally funded by state and territory governments, rather than the Federal Commonwealth government.

Many of the unique features of Australian higher education have been attributed to the vast expanse of the Australian landmass. For example, market diversification and differentiation is not as pronounced and HEIs tend to compete for student enrolments with other HEIs in the same local area. Despite numerous attempts to differentiate between Australian universities, HEIs typically replicate many of their programme offerings. Australian students tend to choose to study in HEIs close to the location of the family home, with less than 15% of students typically studying outside of their home state.

A further unique feature of the Australian higher education system is that all Australian universities are shaped by direct influence from the state. Most Australian universities are established through Parliamentary statute and publicly funded by the Federal Commonwealth government through to the Higher Education Support Act 2003. While these Acts of Parliament enable universities to maintain a high degree of autonomy in terms of accrediting and curriculum development processes, it also fundamentally connects them to the state. Approximately 60% of university income comes from government grants or loans. Recurrent funding for teaching and learning is allocated to HEIs according to formulas based on student numbers. The dependency on government funding means that the Commonwealth has considerable influence over university education in Australia and

indirectly influences curriculum decision-making by forcing universities to make market decisions.

The university workforce is something that HEIs do have power over. The Australian workforce has historically been delineated into academic or professional roles, with the types of duties, accountabilities and salaries appropriate to each level prescribed in position classification standards codified within the Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) of each university. Academic promotion is similarly entrenched in the EBAs, with two core concepts underpinning academic promotions: the scope of influence and responsibility arising out of the duties and the demonstrated performance relative to the expectations for a particular level (Vardi and Quin, 2011).

Similar to the experience of Ireland, there is no requirement for university educators to have formal credentials in teaching prior to entering the workforce, or to have engaged with formal professional development. The Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) legislation does include a requirement that university educators have *“the knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline or field”* and *“skills in contemporary teaching, learning and assessment principles relevant to the discipline, their role, modes of delivery and the needs of particular student cohorts”* (Australian Commonwealth Government, 2021). However, there is no stipulation as to how these are to be achieved or recognised.

The most recent review of Australia’s higher education system resulted in the Universities Accord report with 47 recommendations that could fundamentally alter the sector (Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, 2024). The Accord (as it is commonly known) emphasises the importance of raising the status and quality of teaching in higher education and offers several recommendations to achieve this goal.

5.4 New Zealand

New Zealand’s higher education system is comprised of a range of HEIs, including eight universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga emphasising Māori culture and traditions, and various private training establishments.

The governance structure of New Zealand’s higher education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education, with key regulatory roles played by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). While regulatory bodies ensure accountability and quality assurance, universities retain significant autonomy over their academic and research activities. Universities typically emphasise research-led teaching approaches, often designed to tackle pressing local and global issues, including sustainability and indigenous studies.

Research is a fundamental component of New Zealand’s higher education system. The establishment of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) in 2003 serves as a key mechanism for incentivising research excellence. While the 2026 round has been cancelled,

for the period it was in operation, the PBRF has encouraged universities to focus on the quality of their research output (Löfgren et al, 2022) by assessing and allocating funding based on institutional research performance. This competitive model has positioned New Zealand's HEIs as major contributors to global academic research. However, several studies have highlighted concerns regarding the emphasis on research, particularly its impact on teaching priorities and the potential tension between balancing research excellence and instructional innovation, resulting in an increasing reliance on a casualised, precarious teaching workforce (Simpson et al, 2023).

The bicultural foundations of New Zealand's higher education system, shaped by the Treaty of Waitangi, are evident in efforts to promote equitable access for Māori students and to incorporate Te Tiriti principles within institutional practices (Baice et al, 2021). Universities and other providers are embedding Māori values, language and knowledge into their curricula and governance structures as part of their commitment to cultural responsiveness. This approach extends to supporting Pasifika students and creating inclusive educational environments for international learners, reflecting New Zealand's dedication to fostering multicultural aspirations.

Despite its many strengths, the higher education sector in New Zealand faces ongoing challenges. These include demographic shifts, funding limitations, and the rapidly changing demands of the labour market (Naepi, 2024). HEIs increasingly need to demonstrate their value in terms of social and economic impact, with a particular focus on enhancing employability, skill development and industry collaboration.

6 Changing higher education landscapes

This section explores key shifts in higher education as identified through participant input and literature review.

Over the past decade since the publication of *Promoting Teaching: Benchmarking Guide* (Wills et al, 2013a), the higher education landscape in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand has undergone profound changes, driven largely by external forces embedded in or influencing national higher education policies. These influences have altered how teaching and learning are valued in career progression.

Synthesising the literature and findings, the following key themes emerged:

- + the marketisation of higher education
- + emphasis on vocational outcomes and pathways
- + widening access and participation
- + changes to teaching and learning practices
- + changing academic roles.

While discussions anticipated a stronger emphasis on aligning with sustainable development goals, this was notably less prominent.

6.1 The marketisation of higher education

Participants in the Australian and New Zealand roundtables described a market-oriented approach that has made universities increasingly vulnerable to perceptions of “*student as consumer*” and the need to ensuring “*customer satisfaction*” (HEI 6, Aus) as dictating institutional and national policies and governance.

Australian and New Zealand participants particularly noted the need to ensure that student enrolment numbers are consistently increased or at least maintained. They shared a view of the HE sector as being under increased scrutiny and needing to prove value and contribution that appear to be largely in response to constraints to funding and needing to respond to market forces. They described pressures that meant that a reduction in student numbers potentially reduces an institution’s capacity to maintain the viability of offering a breadth of programme disciplines, which further raised concerns about the precarious nature of ongoing employment.

“It’s kind of logical – no students, no course. No course, no staff needed... redundancy payouts all round! You have one [redundancy payout]... you have one... It’s kinda hard to justify your application for a promotion when your job is on the line. And you are surrounded by casual teachers who aren’t too sure whether they have a job next semester and are worried about how they are going to pay the mortgage.” (HEI 2, Aus)

They also noted reductions in government funding, which have increased reliance on international student revenue. This dependence has, in turn, heightened the focus on research metrics and global university rankings amid international competition. Additionally, these financial challenges have contributed to the casualisation of academic staff to meet teaching demands. These financial pressures intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, further complicating governance. This perhaps accounts for the view found elsewhere that HEIs in the UK and Australia have experienced a fundamental shift toward structures and governance practices akin to corporate entities, which emphasise accountability and responsiveness to external pressures (Grossi et al, 2020).

“We're operating in a rapidly changing sector, and there's a lot of pressure to show the real value and contributions of our institutions. With funding getting tighter, we need to be creative and innovative to respond to market demands. That means attracting the best students. And more of them... especially international students. While our commitment to providing excellent education and conducting top-notch research remains unchanged, it's now more important than ever to prove our worth in clear, measurable ways.” (Roundtable 2, Australia/New Zealand)

However, it is important to note that the impact of funding pressures vary across contexts. For example, Ireland relies less on a ‘user-pays’ model, whereas Australia increasingly depends on external funding sources to sustain its core teaching and research functions.

This increased competition occurs in a climate where public trust in educational institutions is waning, resulting in universities being under pressure to demonstrate their value and relevance to society (Olssen, 2021). As Hibbert and Semler (2016) observe, accountability measures from policymakers have influenced changes to practice, for example audits of curriculum development and student supports.

Study participants described persistent resource pressures from senior leadership to cut costs, ensure programme viability and implement more “efficient” teaching methods. Furthermore, the growing demand to demonstrate teaching effectiveness has increased the administrative burden on academic staff as funding pressures reduce administrative support through professional staffing cuts or hiring freezes. These tasks take time, but are not recognised in promotion criteria, which are viewed as having a focus on traditional academic pursuits of teaching and research.

An example of this is evident in the quality assurance processes of the Australian higher education system. Over the past 20 years, the Australian government has been systematically driving the agenda for better accountability and improved quality in teaching from all Australian universities. The state measures performance, provides incentives and sets the bar for teaching performance, both at the institutional and individual staff levels (Vardi and Quin, 2011). Teaching quality initiatives include establishing national student surveys, reporting of student progression and institutional quality audits. The Australian higher education sector has been directly shaped by reviews and investigations

commissioned by the Commonwealth State. These initiatives, and the legislation that follows, have directly impacted HE policies, funding and structures. The 2008 Bradley report, the 2012 Australia in the Asian Century Task Force, the 2015 Higher Education Threshold Standards, the 2020 Job Ready Graduates Bill, to name but a few, have all had substantial implications. The most recent review of Australia's higher education system resulted in the Universities Accord report with 47 recommendations that could fundamentally alter the sector (Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, 2024). While only a few of the Accord's recommendations have been taken into account so far, the ramifications – particularly in terms of attracting international students to study in Australia – have already affected the sector.

Similar national policies that have shifted the direction of universities are evident in the UK and New Zealand. In the early summer of 2010, a decision was taken by an inner cabinet of the incoming UK coalition government that has revolutionised higher education in England and Wales (though not in Scotland). Framed as part of a wider dismantling of public services in the name of 'austerity', the decision was to almost totally remove public funding for university teaching and replace it with high student fees backed by income-contingent loans, with the intention of creating a 'market' in higher education. Since then, a succession of steps have been taken to consolidate this marketisation. It has been made much easier for private providers, both for-profit and not-for-profit, to obtain degree-granting powers and the right for their students to be eligible for publicly backed loans.

Measures in the marketisation drive included the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which was introduced by the UK government in 2015 as a way of assessing evidence of teaching excellence and incentivising quality enhancement and assurance. Since then, trends also emerged for incentivising or mandating formal professional development for new teaching staff (Fink, 2013). Consequently, there have been concerns around the motivations behind such changes with scholars questioning neoliberal agendas of quality assurance in HE (Barnett, 2023; Brown and Carasso, 2013) alongside burgeoning responsibilities assigned to those working in HE teaching and learning centres (Gosling, 2009). National directives in New Zealand, such as the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), assessed the research performance of HEIs, providing funding on the basis of performance. This initiative (cancelled for the 2025 round pending further evaluation) placed increased emphasis on research and appears to have stimulated the use of teaching-only academics by some universities (Buckle and Creedy, 2024).

6.2 Emphasis on vocational outcomes and pathways

The demands and expectations of students, industry and government entities have shifted markedly over the years. Stakeholders are increasingly focused on outcomes, such as employability, return on investment and the social impact of education (Small et al, 2018).

Increasing pressure for university programmes to align educational outcomes with industry demands, emphasises the development of work-ready, skilled graduates who are not only

academically proficient but also equipped with practical, industry-relevant skills. Academic programmes are increasingly required to meet the demand for preparing work-ready, skilled prospective employees.

“We're under considerable government pressure – even through legislation – to churn out graduates who are somehow instantly ready for today's job market. It feels like we're being forced to not only cover solid academic ground but also magically provide practical, hands-on experiences that fit with what industries want. We're expected to arm our graduates with technical skills along as all the discipline stuff. As well as soft or 'smart skills' I think we are supposed to call them now.. you know critical thinking, flexibility, adaptability, and creativity... All for a workforce for a job that's not even invented yet. And we're supposed to do all this with fewer resources and less staff... less time. It's an almost impossible demand. All that doesn't get counted or even mentioned in any promotion criteria ...” (HEI 4, Australia)

Through these strategies, universities aim to bridge the gap between academia and the labour market, ensuring that graduates are not only knowledgeable but also adaptable and prepared for the demands of a rapidly evolving workplace. In addition to making the programme graduate attributes much more explicit, many universities have responded by integrating experiential or work-integrated learning components, such as internships, placements and project-based courses into their curricula, providing students with direct exposure to industry environments and challenges (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021) and networks to enable future job prospects as well as hands-on experience.

However, a lack of experience in the professions on the part of university educators who are required to teach industry-specific skill sets has been noted (Borah et al, 2021; Martinsson and Jägerström, 2024). For some HEIs, this has resulted in a closer working relationship with industry partners and a shift in academic workforce, with Industry Fellows or Clinical Educators becoming an emerging category of staffing.

6.3 Widening access and participation

The increasing diversity of student populations in universities driven by policies aimed at widening access and rising numbers of international students has brought new learning needs and challenges to the fore. The growth of diverse student populations brings both challenges and opportunities for enhancing educational equity and inclusivity. While substantial progress has been made, ongoing efforts to provide tailored support and responsive pedagogy are essential for ensuring that all students, regardless of background, can thrive in higher education settings.

Widening participation policies have led to increased enrolment among students from diverse backgrounds (Breeze et al, 2020; Salmi and D'Addio, 2021). Legislative and policy frameworks in both Australia and the UK, such as the UK Equality Act (2010) and Australia's Disability Discrimination Act (1992), mandate HEIs to provide accessible and inclusive

learning environments for students with disabilities. Effectively addressing the needs of students from diverse backgrounds can enhance educational outcomes and student satisfaction for all students (Devlin, 2013) but to do so successfully requires appropriate resourcing and capacity building. Increasingly diverse cohorts necessitate pedagogical shifts in how learning is designed and delivered in universities (Mitchell et al, 2019). Academic staff need to be equipped with the skills and understanding to adopt inclusive approaches, which requires institutional investment in continuous professional development, cross-cultural training and curricular adaptation (Sanger, 2020).

The increasing diversity of student cohorts in universities has significant implications for academic promotion pathways, particularly in HEIs where research output dominates promotion criteria. Constructive alignment and culturally responsive teaching can improve engagement and outcomes for diverse learners (Biggs and Tang, 2011). However, transforming learning environments to ensure inclusion requires academics to invest considerable time and effort into developing inclusive teaching strategies, tailoring content to varied learning needs, and supporting students facing barriers such as language proficiency, disability, or socioeconomic disadvantage.

This sentiment was reflected in interviews with senior educational developers:

“We emphasise to our teaching staff the importance of adopting inclusive and accessible approaches, but the truth is, they’re being asked to do this without adequate support. As someone who’s here to help them, I see the gaps every day – there’s not enough investment in continuous professional development, no comprehensive cross-cultural training – or time to do it. We offer it, but they can’t come. On top of that, the workload pressures leave little time for them to focus on these changes, and their efforts often go unacknowledged in promotion processes. It’s frustrating to watch dedicated educators struggle without the tools or recognition they deserve.” (HEI 3, Aus)

Despite this increased investment and specialisation, the value placed on excellence in teaching often lags behind that of research output in promotion frameworks. Studies, such as those by Probert and Sachs (2015), Cashmore et al (2013) and Godbold et al (2023a), highlight the perception among academics that teaching achievements are undervalued compared to research, creating a disincentive to engage deeply with the complexities of educating diverse student groups. Consequently, academics who prioritise teaching innovation and student support may find their efforts inadequately rewarded, potentially impacting morale and professional development.

6.4 Changes to teaching and learning practices

In a similar vein, participants reported a lack of incentive for academics who prioritise teaching innovation. The need for innovation is prompted by changes in practice that have occurred because of:

- 1 responding to a shift towards massification of university teaching
- 2 shifting to student-centred participatory modes of teaching that adopt educational technological enhancements, particularly in light of changes that happened as a consequence of responding to the Covid pandemic
- 3 curriculum changes required to incorporate employability, entrepreneurship and responses to the influence of artificial intelligence (AI), while maintaining academic integrity and assessment security.

For many university educators teaching today, small class teaching is a thing of the past; the image of acolytes sitting at the feet of the venerable master in wooden panelled offices a historical artefact of a bygone era (Allais, 2014). Participants in the Australia/New Zealand roundtables agreed that this is an era of massification of education, where classes with a cohort of over 300, 400 or even 1000 students are an everyday occurrence for many students and teachers. The present, and the future, of higher education is massive class teaching.

The current higher education context of increasing class sizes alongside space and budget constraints, and pressures on teaching staff results in a push for more effective and more cost-effective approaches to teach en masse. To address such challenges, traditional lecture-centric models are increasingly complemented by student-centred, participatory and technology-enhanced approaches (Laurillard et al, 2018).

Work begun to transform teaching and learning to address these challenges was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced a seismic shift in university teaching practices, compelling HEIs globally to adapt rapidly to new educational paradigms and hastening digital transformation. The need to maintain continuity of learning amid lockdowns and social distancing measures led to the adoption and refinement of digital teaching methods, transforming traditional models of higher education. University educators were required to adapt their teaching, traditionally designed for face-to-face delivery, for virtual environments in both synchronous and asynchronous formats (Bao, 2020). The onset of the pandemic necessitated a swift transition to online platforms for teaching, leading to widespread use of tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and university-specific learning management systems (LMSs) (Crawford et al, 2020). Many educators employed creative strategies to engage students remotely, using virtual labs, online simulations and multimedia content, which proved critical in maintaining interaction and engagement (Dhawan, 2020).

These changes, while initially reactive, have since evolved into more sustained alterations in pedagogical practices and institutional structures. The innovations and lessons learned during this period continue to influence how universities structure and deliver education, fostering more flexible, inclusive and digitally sophisticated environments. In the aftermath of the pandemic's initial wave, blended and hybrid learning models have gained prominence. This approach, which integrates both in-person and online learning, offers increased flexibility and can lead to better learning outcomes (Raes et al, 2020). As a consequence, in an increasingly post-pandemic world, universities made investments to enhance digital infrastructure, provide flexible curricula and train faculty to design pedagogically sound blended courses.

Assessment practices also underwent transformation due to the pandemic. With physical examinations largely impossible, HEIs pivoted to online assessments, prompting experimentation with alternative forms of assessment, including open-book exams, project-based assessments, collaborative activities and remote proctoring (Holden et al, 2021). More recently, the emerging use of AI has raised issues surrounding academic integrity (Eke, 2023; Sullivan et al, 2023).

6.5 Changing academic roles

Even prior to the transition to online and hybrid teaching prompted by Covid, the nature of academic work was changing. The literature highlights:

- + the pressures of meeting the needs of a globalised, commercially focused higher education sector, driven by neoliberal policies (Bowl, 2010)
- + the requirements for academics to develop strategies to keep up with emerging educational and engagement technologies (Crittenden et al, 2019)
- + increasing expectations for academic staff to heighten productivity while maintaining a disposition that is flexible, entrepreneurial, efficient and open to change (Blackmore et al, 2010) in order to meet increasing market competition and industry demands for a job-ready work force (Winterton and Turner, 2019)
- + increasing casualisation of teaching (Deem and Lucas, 2007; Sarrico et al, 2022)
- + added requirements for additional skills in managing teaching teams that include professional and academic staff (Fanghanel et al, 2016; Gappa et al, 2007; Whitchurch, 2012).

To meet the challenges outlined above, some universities have created specialised roles, and management systems have emerged to handle institutional responses to external demands (Jongbloed et al, 2008). Some have emerged from needing to formalise connections with practice such as clinical educators (Duffy, 2013), industry fellows and teaching or education-focused academics (Probert and Sachs, 2015).

For the past decade, UK HEIs have adopted a variety of approaches to academic job families. In their comprehensive study of career pathways in Russell Group universities in the UK, Fung and Gordon (2016) note the recent proliferation of parallel job pathways with a significant proportion of academic staff employed in research and education roles, or education and scholarship and research pathways.

Many of these fragment traditional academic functions into specialised functions. For example, the teaching-focused position is usually a specific teaching-related employment contract to deliver high-quality teaching (Flecknoe et al, 2017; Godbold et al, 2023a). These positions are institutionally defined roles, created at the discretion of individual universities and formalised through enterprise agreements rather than national legislation (Bennett et al, 2018; Godbold et al, 2023b; Krause, 2020). They often have particular roles and responsibilities defined and are often aligned to a specific career pathway with specific recruitment, probation and promotion requirements and criteria.

It is in this context of change that project participants identified challenges, barriers and constraints that impacted reward and recognition structures, policies and practices and career pathways for teaching and learning in higher education.

6.6 Growth in Fellowships (2013-2024)

Since the initial *Promoting teaching: Benchmarking* guide (Wills et al, 2013a) was published in 2013, HEA Fellowships have gained particular traction as a mechanism for recognising teaching expertise, particularly in the UK and Australia. They provide a structured pathway for educators to reflect on their practice, demonstrate their commitment to teaching excellence, and gain recognition from their peers as well as potentially shape student learning experience (Cathcart et al, 2023).

The growth of Fellowship is demonstrated in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: growth in Fellowships in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand since 2013

Country	2013/14	2016/17	2019/20	2022/23	Current
UK	42,124	78,132	115,260	170,796	179,740
Ireland	106	143	206	373	518
Australia	224	1,009	3,588	6,995	8,898
New Zealand	42	112	378	659	814
Total	42,496	79,396	119,432	178,823	189,970

In the UK, where Fellowship engagement is more established, holding a Fellowship, particularly at a senior level, is often viewed favourably in recruitment and promotion processes. Many UK universities require new academics to achieve a certain level of Fellowship as a condition of probation and, in recruitment processes, Fellowship is often

offered as an alternative to a teaching qualification/PGCERT and existing Fellowship recognition at D2 (Fellow) is looked on as an advantage.

While Fellowship status has not featured in recruitment documentation in Australian universities, the desktop review of promotion criteria showed that Fellowship status is favourably regarded at the point of confirmation of appointment (probation) and promotion. In fact, many institutions list HEA Fellowship status as a feature that those applying for promotion can draw on as an example of evidencing their teaching quality and impact.

The growth in Fellowship nationally is, in part, due to the strategic policy of global expansion that was accelerated by the formation of Advance HE. Advance HE was established in 2018 through the merger of three key organisations in the UK's higher education sector: the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU). The origins of this merger lie in a recognised need for a centralised body to enhance standards of teaching and leadership within higher education in the UK.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA), founded in 2003, played a pivotal role in the recognition/Fellowship initiative by advocating for evidence-based teaching practices and recognising university educators through fellowship awards. The HEA was established following a committee recommendation from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals, which called for a single entity to oversee teaching quality standards in higher education. The subsequent integration of the HEA with the Leadership Foundation, which focused on leadership development in higher education institutions, and the Equality Challenge Unit, which promoted equality and diversity in the sector, enabled Advance HE to address the evolving challenges within higher education more comprehensively by fostering collaboration among institutions to promote teaching excellence, inclusivity and social justice in teaching and leadership. This consolidation aimed to unify expertise in teaching excellence, leadership development, and equality, diversity and inclusion, creating a single organisation capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges of modern higher education.

Since its formation, Advance HE has responded to a global demand for similar services by offering professional recognition, consultancy, accreditation and professional development services tailored to diverse educational contexts worldwide. Advance HE has focused on advancing the quality of teaching, institutional leadership and equitable practices in higher education on a global scale.

The Professional Standards Framework (PSF) is a cornerstone of Advance HE's professional recognition services; a key initiative developed to support and recognise staff development in higher education. First launched in 2006 as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), it has undergone various updates, with the latest major revision occurring in 2023 in recognition of a need to better reflect shifts in teaching practice and the fact that the PSF has been adopted at a global level. The framework, now called PSF 2023

to demonstrate its global applicability, emerged after a sector-wide consultation involving more than 800 academics and higher education professionals from more than 20 countries.

Advance HE integrates the PSF across its accreditation, fellowship and professional development offerings. Institutions can align their internal training programmes with the PSF to achieve accreditation, ensuring consistency with recognised teaching standards. For individuals, the PSF underpins the Fellowship scheme that provides professional recognition for educators at different career stages (Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow). These categories correspond to different roles within higher education.

The PSF, as it is used both within the UK and internationally, provides the opportunity to develop a shared language and benchmark for what constitutes teaching expertise and teaching excellence. It provides a structured framework for professional development and a clear set of standards that define effective teaching practice, possibly explaining why a number of the universities investigated have used the PSF as a framework against which to centre both professional learning opportunities and mechanisms to recognise teaching excellence.

7 Challenges and barriers to teaching and learning recognition

This section explores the themes emerging from the desktop review, interviews, roundtables and existing research around challenges and barriers related to career progression pathways focused on teaching and learning.

Recurring themes related to prevailing challenges and barriers in rewarding and recognising teaching and learning via career progression pathways emerged across the data.

Participants identified challenges related to:

- 1 Prioritisation and reward of research over teaching
- 2 Structural processes that undervalue teaching and SoTL

7.1 Prioritisation and reward of research over teaching

The privileging of research is not unexpected: without a strong research record, universities face disadvantage in the competitive market of HE, which arguably focuses hierarchies on research and a concomitant lesser value on teaching (McKinley et al, 2018). Historically, academic promotion and career progression has been contingent on achieving success in disciplinary research in Australian universities (Chalmers, 2011). Academics directing their attention to the learning of their students risked career progression and access to tenure and promotion (Huber, 2004).

As outlined earlier, the increasing nature of competition and performance funding in HE has disrupted traditional roles of the teacher-researcher academic. Thus, teaching and research, as complementary knowledge creation endeavours, have become increasingly divided (McIntosh et al, 2022; McKinley et al, 2021). It was a decade ago that Locke (2014) problematised the impact of ranking cultures and the fragmentation of increasingly diverse academic appointments; a warning that many of our participants have seen come to fruition.

Throughout roundtable discussions and interviews, most participants highlighted overlapping tensions between teaching and research in terms of institutional structures, priorities and values. Echoing the findings from the Wills et al 2013 report, comments from the roundtable discussions reflect the disparity between teaching and research: *“there is a divide between teaching and learning and research and the former is held in less regard than the latter”* (UK roundtable) and *“less recognition of teaching and learning compared to research”* (Australia/New Zealand roundtable).

One Irish senior leader noted:

“So there's almost that bias built into the system that you've got to be excellent at research to get promoted but whichever level you can be less good at teaching... But you've got to hit, you know, the real targets in terms of research.” (HEI 2, Ireland)

At a basic level, HEI structures and hierarchies signify key priorities and strategic direction. These priorities can be seen in light of TEF in the UK, where the role of Pro-Vice/Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching/Student Engagement has elevated the status of learning and teaching because of accountability metrics and measures. Similar roles exist in Australia and New Zealand where most institutions will have an Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) or (Education), frequently with oversight of student support structures, teaching and learning centres and educational technologies and often with a brief to enhance teaching and student experience in response to data emerging from national quality assurance data such as the QILT (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching) in Australia and NZQA tertiary evaluation indicators in New Zealand. There are also formalised middle management roles at faculty/college/school level for directors/deans/PVCs of teaching and learning/student engagement.

However, within the Irish context, those with responsibility for learning and teaching generally fall under the umbrella of the office the registrar/academic affairs, holding titles such as Directors/Heads of Teaching and Learning. Exceptions to this are very few: an Office and Vice President (VP) for Learning and Teaching (Pro-Vice Chancellor equivalent) that was established at University College Cork in 2008 and, more recently, a position of VP Students and Learning at Maynooth University in 2023. One senior manager noted the imbalance of research and teaching and learning within HEI structures thus:

“If we say in any institution about, you know, that the importance of that balance of teaching and research, and yet when we look at the research side of the House in most cases, that senior management structure usually looks very, very different. You know, so having that equivalence would be really important.” (HEI 3, Ireland)

In some Irish HEIs, academic staff have very high teaching workloads, making research outputs and funding the main markers of differentiated success. In some HEIs across the UK and Ireland, promotion occurs on a cyclical basis with some institutions limiting the number of available promotions. Other HEIs operate a threshold process whereby if colleagues score above a particular threshold they are promoted without regard to a cap on numbers. In teaching-intensive HEIs in Ireland, progression and promotion opportunities are limited in frequency (in some institutions every five to six years) and by availability, which can be a very low number of promotional posts. When teaching workloads are heavily weighted for all academic staff, research output and grant capture become key measures of differentiation:

“There's a tension at the moment between research and teaching and learning...we would have run promotion rounds, which are very rare opportunities and the number of opportunities is so limited. The number of applications is obviously very high and what tends to happen is that the applicants are difficult to differentiate between in terms of teaching and learning. And sometimes research ends up being the differentiator. So there's a perception out there that teaching and learning actually isn't valued at all.” (HEI 4, Ireland)

To compete globally, universities in Ireland have come under increasing pressure to demonstrate excellence in research, thus research-intensive institutions prioritise grant capture, research output and global metrics. It should come as no surprise then that research tends to be prioritised over teaching. Where teaching workloads are lighter, senior managers hold the view that the remainder of time should be spent on research activity and service:

“I don't see teaching in conflict with research. They are two separate activities you know, I mean they shouldn't be seen as coming head to head. I mean they're two separate things and if you see them in contrast, you're going to give people an excuse for not doing research or vice versa.” (HEI 2, Ireland)

Similarly, in another Irish HEI, a participant outlined the tensions between strategic priorities, progression routes and promotion. In this context, academic staff can choose the promotional weighting for teaching, research, engagement. However, this flexibility is perceived as problematic in practice, especially when strategic priorities and senior management change occurs:

“So the institution has, you know, ambitions about research...even though they permit progression on the basis of an emphasis on teaching and learning, but in practice it's actually quite difficult to do that and the general feeling among academic staff is that research still is very, very strong and you still have to be doing everything you know...so, the debate about the relative merits of research versus teaching is still going on. Then a new registrar can come in and completely change their mind, and you spend the next few years undoing the stuff that was actually working.” (HEI 1, Ireland).

In the UK roundtable discussion, it was acknowledged that structures and hierarchies had changed considerably in the UK over the past decade: “*better recognition of different pathways for academics*” and “*in my institution, the path to Professor in T&L has been more established*”. However, challenges were raised both in discussions and in the interviews about the dominance of research agendas and their impact on milestones achieved over the past decade. Such challenges were described as structural barriers to progress:

“If everybody across the whole institution saw teaching on a par with research, like if everybody woke up in the morning, went hang on these people, this is so important what they're doing. Our whole income comes from these students. We care passionately about these students. I see it as being really similar to the kind of if you want change around EDI issues you have to have structural change...” (HEI 6, UK)

In our study, participants spoke about the difficulty of consistent application of criteria, benchmarking and differentiating indicators of teaching excellence in promotion applications. Evidencing research tends to revolve around quantitative metrics of citation indexes and journal impact factors which can be benchmarked globally. In one Irish HEI, which includes

academic staff holding contracts with heavier-weighted teaching loads, one senior leader explained:

“It's quite clear to people on these contracts that there's still a very heavy emphasis on research than the criteria for teaching. They always say that it's easier to evidence research than teaching. So, the teaching one you have to make a really strong case; you provide a teaching portfolio, but there's also an emphasis on publication in teaching, so people say, well, that's to support scholarship of teaching and learning, which it can be. But others argue that, well, if it's a research publication, it should count as research. And that what you're doing is simply saying that in order to get promoted, you've got to be researching on your teaching rather than being excellent at teaching or other kinds of impact measures such as managing national projects, for example, which many people do and it doesn't count.” (HEI 1, Ireland)

Here, the participant alludes to the blurring of boundaries between what counts as research and scholarship; a theme that emerged quite strongly across all the interviews. However, it also speaks to a pervasive lack of knowledge and literacy around teaching and learning and how excellence and impact can be demonstrated. Two senior leaders with expertise in teaching and learning shared their frustration at this lack of sectoral knowledge. For example:

“One of the things I think that that we all grapple with is what do we actually mean when we talk about excellence in teaching? Like it's really interesting when you look at the promotion criteria on the teaching side which is still very quantitative. It's like, you know, the number of classes that you teach, the number of students that are in your classes, the number of teaching related research publications that you have. So what do we actually mean when we talk about excellence in teaching or whatever other superlatives we might use?” (HEI 3 Ireland)

In this excerpt, reference is made to similar quantitative measures being applied to criteria for teaching. Clearly, the number of classes or students (whether undergraduate or graduate) may be controlled at institution/faculty level so that is hardly a valid or reliable measurement of an individual's measure of good teaching. Qualitative evidence is perceived to be less valid or reliable according to this comment:

“One problem we've had significant difficulty with is putting a very clear metrics around teaching. I'm always a little bit unsure when I'm reading stuff in promotion applications. I'm not sure if it's reflective of really good teaching practice or people's *ability* to write about teacher practice, which is something different, you know? It'd be wonderful if we could actually get a kind of a process for more objective or harder metrics around teaching excellence.” (HEI 2 Ireland)

This illustrates uncertainty around someone's ability to write philosophically or in a narrative fashion, perhaps about teaching and learning, but is missing the outcomes or impact piece of evidencing what was innovative or what was successful.

This view was also confirmed as a feature of the Australian and New Zealand experience where conversations highlighted engagement in research as crucial for reward and recognition:

“Teaching is undeniably central, but let’s be honest, research often holds more weight when it comes to promotions. Here in New Zealand, groundbreaking research doesn’t just boost a university’s reputation – it drives innovation and progress across countless fields. That’s why it’s so important that promotion systems properly recognise and reward far-reaching impactful research.” (HEI 1, NZ)

7.2 Structural processes that undervalue teaching and SoTL

Internationally, academics who have focused on teaching rather than research or who are on teaching/education-focused appointments have expressed dissatisfaction with career progression pathways (Gretton and Raine, 2017); reporting challenges related to their professional identity and capacity to progress (Bennett et al, 2017; Cashmore et al, 2013; Smith and Walker, 2021) and the lack of institutional recognition for their expertise in education (Godbold et al, 2023a).

As Fung and Gordon established in their extensive study, rewarding excellence in teaching within the context of research-intensive universities has been met with resistance and challenges (Fung and Gordon, 2016). A critical step in addressing these challenges involves refining promotion criteria to explicitly acknowledge and reward educational contributions (Bull et al, 2024).

Some participants in the Australia/New Zealand roundtable came from institutions that had promotion criteria aligned to teaching excellence and reported successful promotion to professor on an education/teaching career pathway and could share details about promotion criteria that clearly recognised and valued teaching expertise in addition to research. This was not a universal experience, however. As one participant noted:

“We’ve got brilliant educators pouring their hearts into innovative teaching methods, conducting rigorous research on effective pedagogy, and genuinely transforming students’ lives. But when promotion time rolls around? It’s all about how many papers you’ve published or grants you’ve secured. It’s as if the very act of becoming an expert in how to teach is somehow less worthy than other forms of research. This myopic view not only undermines the quality of education we provide but also sends a clear message – a very clear message – to our staff: your dedication to teaching excellence doesn’t count. It’s... it’s disheartening, to say the least. And I’m supposed to be the one inspiring and motivating others!” (Roundtable 1, Aus/NZ)

There was also a sense from Australian and New Zealand participants that standards for successful progression might be higher than might be expected for successful promotion applications. With the demise of the Australian Office for Learning and Teaching, there is no central funding agency that funds teaching innovation projects. Yet there is still an

expectation that, in order to be successfully promoted to professor, the litany of grants, publications and a higher citation score persists. In the absence of such measures, then, there is an expectation of a national teaching award (awarded to a maximum of nine Awards for Teaching Excellence each year).

“We've got to face facts here. It doesn't matter if your teaching record is impressive or that someone has clearly put heart and soul into it for years. But here's the thing – when it comes to promotion, we're looking at hard numbers. We're all feeling the squeeze to 'publish or perish,' and unfortunately, teaching excellence alone just doesn't cut it. How do you demonstrate your leadership externally – which you need to, to be able to argue for professorship, if all your impact is internal? Where's your pubs? Where's your external funding? Your national teaching award? (HEI 3, Aus)

Yet the institutional dependence on quantitative performance metrics that do not align to teaching expertise persist. Much of the use of performance metrics in higher education stems from the pervasive global university rankings and citation indices and have significantly infiltrated the reward and recognition landscape. These quantitative measures, while ostensibly designed to assess institutional quality, have perhaps inadvertently created a system that often prioritises research output over teaching excellence. This shift is evident in recruitment practices, promotion criteria and resource allocation. For many institutions, the 'publish or perish' mantra persists, regardless of career pathways. Traditional scholarly outputs, such as research grants, research publications and h-index citation scores persist as measures of academic work.

“External funding, that's the gold standard. Without the Office of Teaching and Learning, there's just no mechanism to fund or collaborate on teaching innovations. It's not that the work isn't valuable, but in this climate, it's all about bringing in those research dollars. It's frustrating. Believe me, I get it. But without concrete evidence of impact – and by impact, I mean cold, hard cash from outside sources ... It's not personal, it's just the reality of our current academic landscape.” (HEI 5, Aus)

Resonating with the literature on the importance of transparent indicators of success in teaching and learning (Cashmore et al, 2013; Fung and Gordon, 2016), Irish and UK participants shared concerns around a lack of understanding and transparency around key metrics in evaluating teaching and learning excellence. Assumptions of progression on the basis of seniority (years in the job) or hard work was identified as problematic, not only in managing expectations but in empowering colleagues to evidence impact aligned to promotional criteria in their applications:

“That it's about your fit to the criteria for promotion and I think there is sometimes this sense that people just think I'm a dead good teacher. I work really hard. I need to be promoted. So, it's for me, it's about being clearer with people that actually they do.” (HEI 4, UK)

In many institutions participating in this study, developing distinct categories, metrics and reward systems for evaluating teaching contributions (Boshier, 2009; Chalmers, 2011; Tierney, 2020; Vardi and Quin, 2011) tended to be dependent on student evaluation survey data; engagement with Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL); and HEA Fellowship status.

Attempts to adapt metrics to measure teaching excellence or expertise has been largely dependent on data emerging from student evaluation surveys. The use of this data is pervasive in informing decisions related to recruitment, promotion and reward, yet increasingly has low response rates, questionable rigour and impact (Stroebe, 2020). Indeed, there are concerns about the misuse of student evaluations of teaching, with reports suggesting these surveys are occasionally weaponised to punish staff rather than being used constructively to improve teaching practices (Lakeman et al, 2023). This misuse further undermines efforts to foster a culture that genuinely values educational expertise.

In a similar vein, many Australian, New Zealand and UK universities explicitly reference engagement with SoTL in their promotion guidelines as an expectation of those on a teaching-focused career pathway. This then includes metrics associated with publications, impact statements and grant funding, effectively a substitution for traditional research metrics. However, definitions of SoTL, when provided, vary significantly, reflecting the diversity of interpretations in the literature (Godbold et al, 2023a; Vardi and Quin, 2011). This variability contributes to ongoing debates about whether SoTL should be considered a form of research, an investigation into professional practice, or a hybrid of both (Miller-Young and Yeo, 2015; Tight, 2018). Moreover, SoTL outputs are frequently perceived as inferior to traditional research, further marginalising its role in academia (Canning and Masika, 2022; Cotton et al, 2018; Tierney, 2020).

Resonating with research by Fanghanel et al (2016) on the importance of defining SoTL, one participant noted the occasional flippant use of language in promotion applications that can be widely used but not properly understood. In the following excerpt, the senior leader probes the use of terminology such as ‘co-creation’ and ‘student partnership’ in discussing promotion applications with faculty; terms which are frequently misconstrued:

“[I’d ask]...What sort of co-creation have you done? And they would say “I did some consultation with students. Then I made my change and then I asked students at the end if they were happy with it” and I said, well, that's not co-creation. So, you know you need to know that they actually understand. They've put student partnership, but actually that's not student partnership. That's just consultation.” (HEI 5, UK)

Of greater concern is that many institutions fail to recognise or adequately support SoTL. Even if SoTL is included as part of the promotion criteria, the kinds of support structures, such as institutional funding to support projects or conference participation, are not available, effectively stalling the capacity for career progression. Roundtable participants reported limited access to essential resources such as funding and time, impeding ability to

engage with SoTL and gain formal recognition for their scholarly contributions (Simmons et al, 2021).

In addition to the lack of support underscoring broader institutional challenges in embedding the value of educational expertise within university structures, workload allocation practices often mean that there is no time to allocate to such activities, even if they were available. This has the effect of making teaching-focused career tracks and promotions more complex due to individual departments, and institutions, interpreting workloads differently (Godbold et al, 2023a)

During Covid, many institutions revised policies related to attendance, workload and teaching evaluation to reflect the realities of the mass migration to online teaching. However, for many, that initial transition was viewed as contributing to their “*deprofessionalisation as pedagogues and also to the collapse of responsible work-allocation by their institutions*” (Watermeyer et al, 2021, 634). Participants in the roundtables and interviews indicated that many of the teaching pressures that had emerged during Covid haven’t gone away, and workload allocations for some teaching-focused staff had progressed to the point of effectively being teaching only, with no or little time to devote to activities that might lead to evidencing teaching impact.

In fact, the devaluing of a teaching pathway to the point of limiting career progression has led one Australian institution to remove the teaching-focused pathway and revert to the traditional balanced teaching/research appointments:

“Actually, we’ve just canned our [teaching focused pathway]. People who were on that pathway were effectively teaching only – with no option for promotion – because they were never going to be able to show the same metrics and impact as people who had a research profile. They were teaching 100% of their workload allocation, effectively slaves to the system with no way to advance.” (Roundtable 2, Aus/NZ)

8 What works well? Charting a way forward

This section explores themes emerging from the desktop review, interviews and roundtables around practices that address the challenges and issues.

Emerging themes reflect a broader paradigm shift towards valuing teaching excellence and innovation within academia. Amid such numerous, competing demands, the professionalisation and recognition of teaching remains a critical cog in retaining and rewarding excellent practice.

Themes that emerged as interrelated factors in embedding systemic recognition and reward in learning and teaching are illustrated in Figure 1 below, as follows:

- + leadership in teaching and learning policy and practice
- + SoTL literacy and valued expertise
- + professional development and fellowship
- + academic citizenship and mentoring.

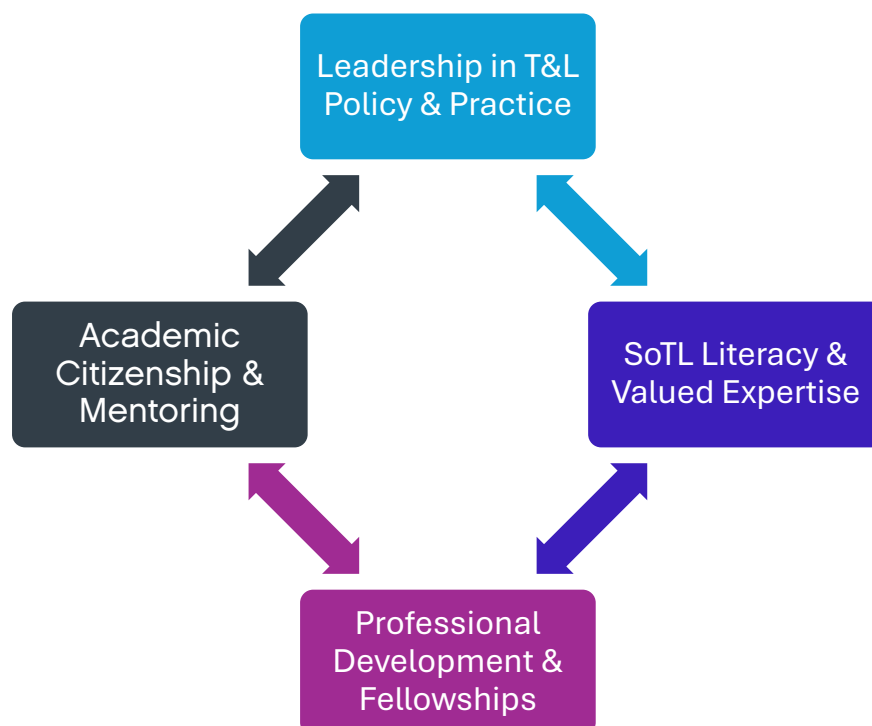


Figure 1. Interrelated factors in embedding teaching and learning recognition and reward

8.1 Leadership in teaching and learning policy and practice

Particular success around structural barriers was noted as being led by Pro-Vice Chancellors (or senior leaders) with backgrounds in teaching and learning leadership or those who had in-depth knowledge of the field. It was also noted by many that these roles were created in response to government quality assurance imperatives, for example TEF in the UK and the Higher Education Threshold Standards and the Universities Accord in Australia. While seen varyingly as a neoliberal managerialist exercises (Blackmore et al, 2010; Smyth, 2017), participants in this study highlighted the pivotal role such government-based activities has played in structural higher education change (Gunn, 2018). These changes are also prompted by a change in what is being described in Australia as “middle management” in roles such as “*associate dean education/academic who are now increasingly [teaching-focused positions]*” (HEI 1, Aus). These roles take on a mentoring and role modelling position, generating a clear career trajectory for teaching-focused roles.

Participants in our study noted a gradual shift from perceptions of teaching and learning as ‘everyday work’ and ‘just doing your job’ to evidencing impact, leadership and scholarship. This shift included significant changes to what constitutes excellence in teaching in promotion criteria:

"We've rebuilt our promotion criteria to be much more explicit around what we are looking for in teaching... more interested in evidence of impact rather than just doing something new....It's about leadership... making sure [teaching academics] have space to lead, be scholars, and disseminate their practice, not just teach." (HEI 1, Aus)

"We've included a teaching leadership component in the promotion criteria... making it clear we expect leadership and transformation of culture and practice." (HEI 3, Aus)

"The HEA framework has been quite important, particularly for teaching-focused academics, to map their contributions against something tangible." (HEA 5, Aus)

A successful academic career is embroiled in processes that reward individual achievements, leading to competitive and environments where women's contribution to mentoring and academic citizenship is frequently overlooked (Macfarlane and Burg, 2019). For example, gender inequity was led in this instance from the top by a senior leader who identified the core problem:

"So I am the only female Prof promoted internally...we fight a gender battle here and I think that's partly because of our subject base, but we can't just blame that. That's not good enough. I think partly it's about role. So we have a lot of women in what you might describe pastoral and maternalistic type roles that don't get reflected. So we've adjusted our criteria..." (HEI 2, UK)

It is evident that this senior leader acknowledges the gender disparities in ‘academic housework’ (see Macfarlane and Burg, 2019), dismisses the notion of over-representation of males in particular disciplines and has led change to promotion criteria to ensure parity and equity.

Another senior leader noted structural changes such as performance management as ‘fundamental’ to carving sustainable career pathways in teaching and learning:

“So previously the PDR form for academics was completely driven by REF and now it's now it's a development form for any academic and that's a fundamental change and it's those kind of fundamental structural changes – you change the promotions criteria, you change the PDR, you change the way managers support people, you change the support networks, you change how promotion panels view excellence around teaching and learning.” (HEI 4, UK)

In a similar vein, senior leadership is necessary to affect institution-wide equity in relation to workload allocation that ultimately affects performance measurement. The lack of clarity and consistency on teaching roles and performance indicators compared with discipline-based research performance results in unbalanced workloads (Bennett et al, 2018; Krause, 2020; Probert, 2013; Rawn and Fox, 2018).

Yet, workload allocation seems to be highly variable and contextualised. Consequently, career tracks and promotions are often complex due to individual institutions and departments interpreting workloads differently (Godbold et al, 2023a). Some institutions are allocating workload specifically for teaching innovation and impact-related activities, fostering a culture of valuing teaching contributions beyond classroom instruction. A typical “balanced” teaching and research appointment for most Australian and New Zealand workload was a 40:40:20 split of time allocation, where 40% is devoted to research, 40% to teaching and 20% of time to service or citizenship. Until recently, a teaching-focused allocation was typically 80% teaching and 20% administration/service. This allocation effectively meant, for many, a 100% allocation towards face-to-face teaching and associated tasks. Little, if any, time was allocated to impact-related activities such as teaching innovation, SoTL investigation or research into teaching practice, change management, publications or external engagement and service, the very things that are necessary in most institutions for successful promotion.

This is beginning to change. Participants from two of the Australian universities described changes in workload allocation to explicitly devote time to impact-based activities:

“An 80:20 divide is recommended as a base, and then individual faculties can negotiate that. ... that's where individual faculties are kind of negotiating that 80% so that might include the amount of time that they're engaged in contributing to some kind of professional development within the faculties as well. They're also kind of going down the model of teaching focused academics being part of like the academic development as well. So, it not being solely professional services from Central, I suppose, with learning designers or academic developers.” (HEI 3, Aus)

As this participant alludes to, teaching leadership is being recognised as an identity more closely related to an academic developer, whereby they want to improve teaching quality in the university (Godbold et al, 2023a; Nutt and Tidd, 2016). The desktop review identified Australian institutions, which included impact-related activities such as an academic development-style function included in performance criteria. This recognition is not universal, however, with studies in Australia reporting that those who do take on this developmental role feel frustration over a lack of recognition for their educational expertise.

There is a sense of a change towards clearer pathways, criteria and successful outcomes for academic careers that prioritise teaching. Clear performance expectations for teaching-focused roles and pathways to advancement are seen in many Australian and New Zealand universities, marking a shift towards recognising teaching contributions as equal to research outputs in career advancement.

“When I came here, I think there were maybe three [teaching focused] professors in the university. And you know, after this will probably be up to about 10, which will be maybe bit more than 10, which will be wonderful.” (HEI 1, Aus)

“Our [teaching- focused academic pathway] is now three years old and approximately 50 staff strong – all of whom are engaging in mission-critical learning and teaching issues.” (HEI 2, NZ)

While universities in the UK, Australia and New Zealand appear to be increasingly establishing teaching-focused roles with dedicated career tracks and promotion criteria, there are cautionary tales in the literature in creating highly restrictive career pathways. Boundaried careers in teaching and learning can limit opportunities for developing research profiles and hinder career mobility. Previous studies have highlighted the restrictive nature of boundaried careers in teaching and learning – for example, not having time to develop a research or scholarly profile that makes transferring between career categories difficult (see Cashmore et al, 2013; Smith and Walker, 2021). Hence, comments related to flexibility in relation to career pathways arising as a theme as potential barriers to progression and mobility.

Prior assumptions of teaching/education-focused academics as second-tier are changing as this comment illustrates:

“There are people who are actually *want* a career in this area. It's not it's not a zone of punishment it's not you've done badly in your research, so you're being downgraded. It's people who genuinely love teaching and learning who are genuinely motivated to have a teaching.” (HEI 2, UK)

Another senior leader referred to career development and progression as “*dialling up and dialling down*”, not only in terms of responsibility but also in terms of workload and corresponding expectations of outputs and performance:

“Our process talks about it in terms of dialling up and dialling down, so rather than this really fixed idea that if you are a teaching and research academic, you do teaching and research but if have a really big admin role like Director of Research or Teaching for their school, we should expect then maybe that they're not doing so much in terms of research.” (HEI 3, UK)

Arguably, some disciplines and/or roles may have less available time or opportunities for traditional career development indicators such as postgraduate supervision. For instance, this senior leader identifies the need for progression/promotion panels to acknowledge contextual factors:

“What opportunities has this person had to develop excellence in teaching or to develop a research profile, to supervise PhD students, or take on a bigger role?” (HEI 3, UK)

In terms of motivation and the need for guidance, the following comment illustrates the questions and mentoring needed in carving a career pathway:

“You're clearly shaping yourself to one track or another in development. It's not a random event that you're going to say or what am I good at? Oh, I kind of. I think I've got enough in this category. You would be in your PDRs [*personal development reviews*] in your line management discussions. You would be having the conversation about your career development. Am I here to be a researcher? Am I here to be teaching only?” (HEI 2, UK)

Many Australia and New Zealand universities have distinct teaching-focused roles, with some providing support to these roles through tailored networks and innovative teaching-focused academic career tracks formalised in recognition and reward frameworks (Godbold et al, 2023a). These frameworks underpin promotion criteria as well as support mechanisms. In instances where there is a strong culture of valuing the contribution of those focused on quality teaching and learning, performance metrics highlight teaching impact, allowing contributions beyond just classroom teaching and recognising innovative teaching contributions that have been disseminated more broadly, with influencing practices outside of the home institution particularly well-received and can result in successful careers.

“[the promotion panels are] really looking for that kind of collaboration beyond the university. But of course, they're also looking for quality, sustained work within the university, and they are very willing to promote based on it... And actually, our [teaching focused academics] achieve promotion at a higher rate their application than our [balanced]. ... in spite of the narrative that education is not valued.” (HEI 1, Aus)

While there are some institutions where teaching contributions are becoming increasingly more valued, in the past, teaching-focused roles have been framed as practical fixes for academics who aren't meeting research expectations. This means that, by adjusting workload allocations, less productive researchers can be excluded from rankings metrics rating research activity and assist in balancing salary budgets. As the following participant outlines, this shift is fairly recent:

“... people are now seeing the [teaching-focused role] as something competitive, worthy. And it wasn't when it first started here. It was purely something people were managed into if they weren't doing well in their research.” (HEI 2, Aus)

It is crucial that promotion panels assessing applications for reward and recognition are abreast of recent changes and are not replicating practices of the past.

8.2 SoTL literacy and valued expertise

As discussed earlier, studies focused on the inclusion of teaching scholarship in promotions have often concluded that there continues to be a bias towards research achievements in promotion decisions (Subbaye and Vithal, 2017), particularly at the higher levels of professorship (Trigwell, 2013). However, simply changing promotion criteria was not viewed as the only solution that would then address all the issues. Participants noted historical and contemporary challenges when experts are omitted from discussions and policymaking around progression and promotion. A major theme across all of the discussions and interviews in relation to pressing challenges was a lack of understanding of promotion criteria for teaching and learning and the ability to assess or evaluate teaching excellence.

Participants referred to varying processes of assessment for promotion and what they believed worked well in practice. In one HEI, for example, key experts lead assessment of promotion for teaching and learning or research as, noted here:

“But what they've also done is that they've split the panels so that it's got a lead from the person who is essentially heading up the area of work that's associated with the track, so I'll be heading up the learning and teaching panels. The lead in research will be heading up the research panels and so on. So there will always be a lead person in the room who can calibrate the panel's understanding. But what you don't want is somebody who's saying 'A blog article and a podcast that's not research'.” (HEI 3, UK)

In this example, the senior leader's expertise is critical in sharing understandings of what counts as research and scholarship in teaching and learning.

In an Australian HEI where reward and recognition of teaching excellence is considered to be well established, this participant highlighted the need for coaching or mentoring of panels in understanding the nuances of teaching recognition:

“So, for example, in things like promotion committees... it's only this year that we don't need or require a [teaching focused academic] to be on a committee if there's an [teaching focused academic] going for promotion. Previously, we needed to educate the promotion committees, and the new hired committees, because they don't quite get it until they've actually been on a committee, a panel with a [teaching focused academic] to sort of educating them on the spot, for want of a better word. And we've now got to a point where, I think, we have managed to get shared understanding across all of the institution, so we don't necessarily need that anymore. I think there's much better understanding.” (HEI 3, Aus)

Moreover, listening to, and validating expertise in teaching and learning emerged as indicators of success both for individual career trajectories and in underscoring the centrality of teaching and learning to the mission of HE. Across the discussions and interviews, Advance HE fellowships were perceived as key enablers of success, especially when experts translated the prestige and impact for others who may have been less aware of them:

“So I like the way that the faculties do look to us for that kind of validation or advice. For example, we're the ones when they say...looking at someone's profile and going, oh, PFHEA, what does that mean? We can say PFHEA. That is incredible. That's a really, you know, prestigious thing that that person's got. So being able to have that input and give advice to the committee.” (HEA 3, UK)

However, simply being awarded a fellowship or an accredited programme for instrumental ‘tick-box’ purposes was seen by senior leaders as a particular pitfall in expectations for promotion. In the UK, where fellowship is widely embedded in HEIs, several senior leaders pointed to the need for greater awareness of the fellowship process as a way for staff to evidence impact and reach of practice. They emphasised that this needed to be incorporated into promotion processes – for example, so what? what next for your career?

It was evident from the discussions and interviews that most of the challenges and barriers were structural, thus requiring systemic change at institutional or national level. Positive structural change in relation to HE strategy and policy developments such as EDI (through Athena Swan, for example) and embedding sustainable development goals in HE learning environments (buildings, curriculum etc) were identified in roundtable discussions and interviews, for example:

“Like, if you take sort of EDI as an equivalent, 10 years ago, you had to make the argument as to why it was important to decolonise one's curriculum, whereas now that isn't a question, the question now is how are you decolonising your curriculum? And I feel like it's a sort of similar critical moment for teaching and scholarship careers.” (HEI 1, UK)

This also resonated in the UK context, where senior leaders emphasised the need for professional learning and development for all staff and especially senior leadership in literacy around learning and teaching excellence.

It could be argued that the lack of understanding and literacy around teaching and learning is reflective of the emphasis HE policy has placed on research. Although participants felt that attitudes were gradually changing, there was still evidence of perceived snobbery and hierarchies around research and teaching grant capture:

“I think in some cases there’s a bit of a snobbery around, you know, educational research. And it’s, ‘oh... that’s the pedagogy stuff’. I started my career on a teaching-only contract and then after three years switched to teaching-research contract. And so my first grant that I got when I was on a teaching-research contract was a Higher Education Academy teaching development grant. I remember going to my head of department to say, you know, I’ve got the grant, this is great. And he went, oh, that’s really great, but it’s not *real* research, is it? And I think, yeah, that’s the problem, ‘cos it was a research project!” (HEI 3, UK)

Historical practice and the roles that senior management play in decision-making around progression and promotion emerged across all interviews in relation to perceived outdated understandings of career trajectories, development and promotion. One senior leader highlighted such misunderstandings thus:

“If you’re on a T and R contract, your career is so clear and it everyone recognises it’s like a language that everyone speaks, isn’t it? Everyone knows what a research trajectory looks like and it does not matter what subject you do. We all speak that language of the research trajectory. But because teaching careers are so varied, there isn’t a universal language.” (HEI 4, UK)

For institutions that have adopted the HEA Fellowships schemes, these networks also provide a community of scholars formally recognised for their expertise in teaching and learning, providing ongoing mentorship, social networks and peer support. These groups are designed to support prospective fellows through the process. There is evidence of a connection between Fellowships and engagement with and learning about SoTL as engaging in the Fellowship application process often encourages educators to engage in SoTL activities, which can then be used as evidence of teaching excellence in promotion applications.

8.3 Recognition structures and fellowships

Despite the fact that the three core interrelated activities of teaching, research and societal impact underpin the core mission of universities, the PhD remains the typical benchmark for entry into the academic workforce (Probert, 2014). While the PhD may provide suitable training for research careers, 65% of Australian academics have not undertaken any teacher preparation or teaching development courses (Bexley et al, 2011). This is despite the

expectation in most institutions that newly recruited PhD graduates will be “*expected to hit the ground, running, from Day 1*” (HEI 3, Aus) and assume a full teaching load early in their careers, without any teaching capacity development. While there is increasingly a trend towards some degree of teaching qualifications, it is highly varied.

At some universities in the UK and Australia, professional development needs and potential pathways are identified at the point of recruitment. Successful conclusion of probation is contingent on engagement with the agreed path. The requirement to be at a particular standard is made clear at the point of recruitment in some institutions. This is different to some European countries and in Asia where it is a legislative requirement for new academics to have participated in a teacher preparation programme prior to teaching, in much the same way as teachers in the school sectors are required to have a teaching preparation degree. There is a probationary period of one year during which new staff will be expected to demonstrate their suitability for the post.

In the UK, a Fellowship awarded against the Professional Standards Framework (PSF2023) is seen to be an advantage at the point of recruitment. Many institutions expect that staff will already have Descriptor 2 of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education and thus be HEA Fellows or there is an expectation that they will be able to achieve Descriptor 2 within their probationary year; attainment of such is frequently achieved through engagement with a Graduate Certificate of Higher Education or similar. This expectation is not evident in Australia, New Zealand or Ireland.

The Australian Universities Accord Report emphasises the importance of raising the status and quality of teaching in higher education and offers several recommendations to achieve this goal, one of which is to recommend that all higher education teaching staff, including sessional staff and PhD students involved in teaching, to obtain accredited teaching qualifications in a similar way to other education sectors such as schools, vocational education and training, and early childhood mandate (Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, 2024)

While CPD in teaching and learning has seen considerable growth in the UK and Australasia (Gosling, 2009) for many years and more recently in Ireland, scholars have questioned whether recognition and reward mechanisms such as Advance HE Fellowships have an impact on teaching quality and the student experience (Spowart et al, 2019; van der Sluis, 2023; Warnes, 2021). However, other scholars have argued that Fellowship pathways promote reflective practice, engagement with peers and constitute a more nuanced driver of teaching and learning enhancement (Cathcart et al, 2023; Donaldson, 2022). Fostering informal professional encounters or communities of practice are also key to sustaining meaningful engagement with CPD (Matthews and Dobbins, 2021; O'Brien et al, 2023).

In response to UK HE reforms proposing new standards and formal credentialisation of teaching through CPD programmes, certificates in teaching and learning/academic practice have been increasingly mapped to the Professional Standards Framework (PSF). Since it

was introduced, the PSF has been used internationally to benchmark pedagogical standards and practice. It has also contributed to recognition of teaching excellence through Fellowships and has had an impact on the higher education sector and on individuals (Spowart and Turner, 2021). Studies have identified a variety of factors in engaging in professional development towards HEA Fellowships, including personal recognition in addition to strategic and political motivations (Botham, 2018; Spowart et al, 2019).

Most Australian universities offer development programmes that provide the foundations for teaching in higher education. Some require new teaching staff to complete a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching. The research literature shows that these award programmes promote improved teaching practices (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004; Ho et al, 2001). Engagement with such programmes requires a cultural shift in understanding of the role of academic as solely scholars in their disciplines and therefore focused on teaching and researching in their discipline (Kheovichai, 2014) to being scholars of higher education (Orrell and Sanderson, 2015). Disciplinary scholarship gives flavour, substance and identity to an academic's teaching, while higher education scholarship gives pedagogical expertise and reflective evaluation of teaching quality. Blending these two scholarships and acquiring additional competencies is complex for an already busy academic.

It is likely that this blending and enhancement of academic skills will not happen consistently unless an appropriate reward and recognition structure is provided within the university itself, or it becomes a condition of continuing employment. The requirement to engage with professional learning in higher education principles is a condition of employment in a number of universities in the UK, where early career academics are often required to provide have reached at least the level of Associate Fellow of the HEA to achieve meet probation requirements.

As HEA Fellowships have become more pervasive in the Australian context, Fellowship status has become a mechanism to quantify teaching excellence and it is captured in institutional dashboards and reflected on in evidence statements for promotion applications. As a senior executive noted in interview:

“When considering promotions for [teaching focused] staff, for example, I expect to see applicants who have demonstrated their commitment to educational excellence through HEA Fellowship. If I don't see it, I want to know why. No Fellowship raises a red flag for me. This isn't just a box-ticking exercise; it's about ensuring our educators are recognised by their peers and aligned with global best practices. I'm particularly impressed by those who've achieved Senior Fellow status. It shows a depth of reflection and leadership in teaching that aligns with our institutional standards.”
(HEI 2, Aus)

For Australian institutions participating in this study, Fellowship status appeared to be primarily gained through a reflective or CPD pathway. Encouraging a reflective approach

enables applicants to reflect on their recurrent practices, implicit theories, tacit assumptions and conventions of appropriateness, and change them if necessary (Bamber et al, 2006; Gibbs, 2013; Hicks et al, 2010). However, this type of reflective learning is not available to all groups of staff, nor is it explicitly identified as a professional learning activity in many institutions.

Within the Irish context, there are no individual national teaching awards. Across the roundtables and interviews, recognition through schemes such as Fellowship was identified as a potential reward mechanism in underscoring the centrality of teaching and learning in higher education. However, some senior leaders expressed unfamiliarity with what fellowship actually involved while others cautioned that, in order for uptake to have impact, fellowships need to be framed more clearly within the context of recognition, promotion and prestige.

HEA Fellowships are potentially a mechanism to reflect on and evidence teaching expertise. HEA Fellowships feature heavily in policy structures for recruitment and probation in UK, but as much in the institutional landscape of the institutions contributing to this study from elsewhere. This historic concentration might be perhaps because UK has more mature – and longer term – engagement with the Fellowship scheme than elsewhere. However, the significant international growth and take-up of Fellowships means that the value is beyond merely the individual or institution level but provides a standard and recognised global framework for recognition.

It was also noted in the deeper dives into institutional practices gathered in interviews that, despite greater awareness of Fellowship in the UK, Fellowship status is not universally embedded as evidence of teaching effectiveness in promotion or reward and recognition processes. While Fellowship is increasingly becoming expected in order to evidence teaching pathways for promotion in Australia and in some New Zealand universities, Fellowship status is not a requirement for recruitment or probation and not universally accepted as a crucial feature of career evidence of effectiveness. The data suggests that Fellowship status is not evident in Ireland at all

8.4 Academic citizenship and mentoring

Participants identified that surviving and thriving in a system that predominantly still privileges research over teaching was largely dependent on the quality of mentorship that new teaching academics received. Fostering a culture of mentoring and peer support and creating networks of teaching award winners and HEA Fellows was viewed to foster a sense of prestige and provides mentorship and support for other teaching staff. This mentorship came in the form of individuals and networks.

Developing a network of staff who are publicly recognised for their expertise in teaching and learning also allows for mid- and late-career staff to further develop their leadership capacity and is an opportunity to celebrate, recognise and reward exceptional work.

“We see great value in creating networks of staff who are publicly acknowledged for their expertise in teaching and learning. These networks build a sense of prestige, of visibility, of status. That’s important, because, from where I sit, academics are less driven by money... but recognition from their peers is really important and validates so much of their work.” (HEI 3, Australia)

Acknowledging the potentially divisive nature of competition, senior leaders noted the importance of being a good citizen within the university, for example,

“At the end of the day, we need our senior academics to be putting institution before self.” (HEI 4, UK).

Feedback, mentoring and citizenship were identified by many senior leaders as key enablers of success in career pathway development. For example, one senior leader spoke about the importance of encouraging a culture of mentoring and how fellowships had fostered collegiality:

“They’re that kind of colleague. They’re doing great stuff, which is why they’re doing the Fellowship, because they’ve got something to talk about. And they want to help. So, I think they’re kind of intertwined, really.” (HEI 6, UK)

Teaching communities that include a network of teaching award winners, HEA fellows and teaching expertise to act as champions and mentors for other teaching staff were identified as crucial sources for career mentoring in pathways. Formalised networks are also frequently the sources for funding, collaboration and innovation. They offer informal professional learning communities for concepts such as scholarship of teaching and learning and capacity development for publication and grant writing as well as a place for a voice through conferences or showcases.

“It’s just a [teaching and learning] conference support kind of thing, but it’s unbelievably important for us, because a conference is the only place that you really can network outside of your classroom, with like-minded people. It’s a place to meet and collaborate with other institutions. It’s also for external referees. You need potential referees who can comment on your work....We have a whole big programme that we support for SOTL and for abstract writing....That was one of the barriers, for those engaging with SOTL for the first time, it’s very, very difficult to move from their discipline. So we were providing all sorts of informal introductory conversations – sort of 101, how to write an abstract. We had panels where you had editors coming in, ... We also had this peer review of journal mentoring programme. The deal was that if your abstract was accepted for a conference, we would give you funding to go. And then [we followed it up with] a whole scaffolded approach about how you take advantage of the conference. You don’t just go and present, you really take advantage of it.” (HEI 5, Aus)

This mentoring also extends to coaching and preparation work for promotion, for example.

"[Promotion] prep reviews include classroom observation and feedback on teaching, followed by a meeting with mentees 12 months later to close the loop." (HEI 7, Aus)

It is interesting to observe, perhaps somewhat tangentially to this project, how Fellowship networks are being used to advocate, support and nurture teaching focused academic pathways. Some of these emerging networks occur at disciplinary level, for example, T-Fun (available at: t-fun.co.uk), which is a network supporting people in teaching-focused careers in psychology. Others work at a national level, for example, the National Learning and Teaching Focused Network (available at: lrfocusednetwork.wordpress.com/), a network of colleagues in learning and teaching-focused roles in UK higher education institutions; the emergent Australian Education/Teaching Focused Network, a similar network of colleagues; and the invitation-only Global Education Focussed Community of Practice. Each of these networks draws on HEA Fellowship connections or communications links to connect to like-minded individuals. They also provide a national or discipline-based focus for advocacy for recognition and reward of teaching practice; a forum to demonstrate impact through publications, showcasing innovative practice or identifying future opportunities for funding or collaboration; and mentoring of new or early career teachers in "*understanding the game*" (Round table 1, Aus/NZ).

In Australia, these networks have the potential to empower teacher track voices. One of the intended outcomes of some of these networks includes cross-institutional work in helping educators evidence the value of their contribution including plans "*to work together to build a 'national theme' around helping teachers specifically evidence their work and thus build that recognition and reward*" (HEI 2, Aus).

9 Key influences and enablers of success

9.1 Factors influencing teaching career landscapes

The project identified several factors influencing the career landscapes of university educators across the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. These factors, which have significantly altered how teaching and learning are valued in career progression, include:

1 Political shifts and market-driven policies

Government policies and reviews in Australia, the UK and New Zealand have also significantly impacted higher education policies, funding and structures. Participants describe a market-oriented approach in higher education that emphasises universities proving their value and contribution in response to funding constraints and market forces. This approach has led to increased scrutiny, dependence on international student revenue, a focus on research metrics, and the casualisation of academic staff.

2 Increased focus on vocational outcomes in higher education

An increasing pressure for university programmes to align with industry demands, producing work-ready graduates with practical skills, was noted. Universities are integrating experiential learning components into their curricula and collaborating more closely with industry partners, but this work is not necessarily that which is rewarded and recognised.

3 More diverse student populations

Policies promoting wider access to higher education and rising international student numbers have resulted in more diverse student populations with varying learning needs. This diversity requires university educators to develop inclusive teaching strategies and support students facing various barriers.

4 The digitisation of education

The shift to online and hybrid teaching, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has changed the nature of academic work. The sources highlight the pressures of adapting to emerging technologies and the increasing expectations for flexibility and efficiency in teaching.

5 New career pathways reshaping the academic workforce

Participants described the emergence of specialised roles and management systems in response to external demands, including the growth of academic positions with a focus on teaching and learning, variously referred to as teaching-focused, teaching-specialist or education-focused positions.

In addition to these factors, participants noted a persistent emphasis on research over teaching in academia. This emphasis is driven by the competitive nature of higher education, where research performance is heavily linked to funding and institutional prestige. Participants report concerns about the impact of this research focus on teaching priorities and the challenges faced by educators seeking career progression based on teaching excellence, particularly in light of workload allocation practices that leave educators with limited time to engage in activities that could enhance their teaching or build a scholarly profile in teaching and learning.

The study sheds light on specific barriers hindering the recognition and reward of teaching, including:

- + ambiguous and inconsistent promotion criteria, making it difficult for educators to understand how teaching excellence is evaluated
- + a lack of clarity and consensus around the definition and value of SoTL, leading to its marginalisation in some institutions.
- + inadequate preparation for teaching, with many academics entering the profession without formal training in pedagogy.

9.2 Recommendations – key enabling strategies

This study highlighted several strategies for recognising and embedding teaching excellence in academic career pathways that aim to rebalance the emphasis on research and recognise the significant contributions of educators to student learning and institutional success.

1 Professionalisation of teaching

Recognising the diverse contributions of academics, HEIs need to create or enhance career pathways for teaching-focused roles with clear criteria for progression and promotion. HEIs should consider or revise promotion pathways for teaching-focused roles, with clear and transparent criteria aligned with pedagogical impact. The Professional Standards Framework and associated fellowships provide a common global foundation and benchmark.

2 Clearer promotion criteria and metrics for teaching excellence

Participants emphasised the need for clearer and more robust frameworks to evaluate and reward teaching excellence. This includes developing workload models, metrics and indicators that explicitly enable and recognise teaching contributions, going beyond student evaluation data and encompassing a wider range of evidence. Institutions should strive for greater transparency in promotion criteria and ensure that evaluation processes are consistently applied across departments.

3 Draw on expert-informed evaluation and feedback

Teaching and learning experts with SoTL literacy need to be included in teaching and learning evaluation and promotion processes. This includes senior leaders with backgrounds in teaching and learning leadership as well as individuals with in-depth knowledge of the field. By incorporating these experts in promotion panels, institutions can ensure expert-informed, valid and reliable assessments of teaching excellence. Broader embedding of SoTL literacy needs to be incorporated into professional development schemes, enabling academic staff to incorporate scholarly approaches to their practice portfolios.

4 Build Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) literacy

Developing and supporting SoTL literacy among educators, fostering its acceptance as a legitimate form of scholarship, and integrating SoTL outputs into promotion criteria is crucial to ensuring that both applicants and members of promotion and recruitment panels had the necessary capabilities to appropriately articulate and assess teaching excellence and impact. Supporting academics in engaging with and understanding SoTL is important in raising the profile and value of teaching career recognition and reward. Ideally, SoTL involves systematic inquiry into teaching practices and can be used to evidence the impact and effectiveness of teaching. However, there is variability in how SoTL is defined and often a perception that SoTL outputs are less valuable than traditional research. Institutions need to provide clear guidance on what constitutes SoTL and ensure that SoTL outputs are appropriately valued in promotion criteria.

5 Promote academic citizenship and mentoring

Academic citizenship, where senior academics demonstrate collegiality, mentorship and service, needs to be both rewarded and recognised. In HEIs where this is prioritised, there has been a welcome shift away from individualised, self-motivated ambition to a broader understanding of the importance of collegiality and team success. As well as providing guidance on teaching practices, navigating promotion processes and developing a scholarly profile in teaching and learning, mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering teaching excellence and supporting career progression.

6 Flexible career pathways

Participants acknowledged the need for more flexible career pathways that allow educators to adjust their focus on teaching and research based on their career aspirations and current roles, to 'dial up' or 'dial down' their focus on research and teaching depending on their career aspirations and current roles.

7 Professional development opportunities focused on teaching

Participants advocated for ongoing professional development opportunities for educators at all career stages. Programmes that focus on developing teaching skills, promoting reflective practice and engaging with SoTL can support educators in continuously improving their teaching practices and advancing their careers. Institutions should invest in professional development programmes that address the specific needs of teaching-focused academics and align with promotion criteria.

8 Building communities of practice and networks

Building communities of practice and networks enables educators to share best practices, collaborate on projects and support each other's development. There was a strong sense of the value of fostering communities of practice and networks to support educators in sharing best practices, collaborating on projects, and supporting each other's development. Institutions can facilitate these networks through teaching academies, mentoring programmes and other initiatives that bring together educators with a shared commitment to teaching excellence.

In essence, institutions need to address the persistent barriers and biases that undervalue teaching in academia, including the overemphasis on research metrics in promotion processes. One way to do so is by creating a culture that genuinely values teaching excellence, recognising the diverse contributions of educators, and ensuring that promotion criteria reflect the full scope of academic work.

A big challenge in this scope is the casualisation of the teaching workforce. Strategies that provide adequate support and development opportunities for all educators, regardless of their employment status, remain elusive, but there are innovative approaches being applied to meeting these challenges.

9.3 Key enablers – role of Fellowships

The study offered insights into the role of Fellowships within teaching career pathways in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. There is evidence of a connection between Fellowships and engagement with and learning about SoTL. Engaging in the Fellowship application process often encourages educators to engage in SoTL activities, which can then be used as evidence of teaching excellence in promotion applications.

However, research participants also stressed that these schemes must be effectively embedded in institutional practices and aligned with promotion criteria to have a meaningful impact. The study highlighted both potential benefits and challenges associated with the use of Fellowships in teaching career pathways.

Benefits

- + **Enhanced recognition and prestige:** Fellowships can elevate the status of teaching and provide formal recognition of educators' expertise. This can boost morale, encourage innovation and contribute to a culture that values teaching excellence.
- + **Structured professional development:** the Fellowship application process itself can be a valuable form of professional development, prompting educators to reflect on their practice, identify areas for growth and develop a scholarly approach to teaching.
- + **Evidence of teaching excellence:** Fellowship portfolios can provide concrete evidence of teaching effectiveness and impact, going beyond traditional metrics such as student evaluations. This can be particularly beneficial in promotion processes where clear evidence of teaching excellence is required.
- + **Building communities of practice:** Fellowship schemes can foster the development of communities of practice, connecting educators with shared interests and providing opportunities for mentoring and peer support.

Important considerations

- + **Instrumental use and 'box-ticking':** participants cautioned against using Fellowships simply as a box-ticking exercise for promotion. If not effectively integrated into institutional practices and accompanied by genuine efforts to value teaching, Fellowships may not lead to meaningful changes in teaching quality or career progression.
- + **Varied institutional practices:** the study identified that the extent to which Fellowships are embedded in career pathways varies significantly across institutions and countries. This lack of consistency can create confusion and uncertainty for educators.
- + **Awareness and understanding:** in some contexts, senior leaders and educators may be unfamiliar with Fellowship schemes and their potential benefits. This lack of awareness can hinder the effective integration of Fellowships into career pathways.
- + **Potential for elitism and exclusion:** if not carefully implemented, Fellowship schemes could create a new hierarchy within academia, potentially excluding or disadvantaging certain groups of educators.

To maximise the benefits and mitigate the challenges of incorporating Fellowships into teaching career pathways, the following themes emerge from this study:

- + clearly define the role of Fellowships within promotion and reward systems, ensuring alignment with institutional values and strategic goals

- + provide clear guidance and support for educators seeking to apply for Fellowships, including workshops, mentoring programmes and resources for developing a strong portfolio
- + educate senior leaders and promotion panels about the value of Fellowships and how to effectively assess Fellowship applications as evidence of teaching excellence
- + integrate Fellowship engagement into professional development pathways, offering opportunities for educators to work towards Fellowship recognition as part of their ongoing development
- + foster a culture that values teaching excellence and recognises the diverse contributions of educators, ensuring that Fellowships complement and support broader efforts to enhance the status of teaching in academia.

By taking these steps, institutions can leverage Fellowships to create a more equitable and rewarding environment for educators, ultimately leading to improved teaching quality and student outcomes.

9.4 Final reflections

This research report, focusing on the context of teaching and learning within the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand higher education contexts, offers valuable insights into the evolving landscape of higher education and the ongoing efforts to recognise and reward teaching excellence. The study aligns with a growing international movement advocating for a greater emphasis on teaching excellence in higher education. The insights presented in the report contribute to this movement by providing evidence-based arguments for change and practical strategies for implementation.

The report identifies key factors driving change in higher education, such as political shifts, market-driven policies, the emphasis on vocational outcomes, increasingly diverse student populations and the rise of teaching-focused academics. These factors present both opportunities and challenges for educators, requiring them to adapt their teaching practices and develop new skills to meet the evolving needs of students and institutions.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of teaching excellence, the report's findings demonstrate that, while research output often remains the dominant factor in career progression and promotion decisions, there is evidence of concrete strategies for embedding teaching excellence in academic career pathways. These strategies, already being implemented in a range of institutions, offer a roadmap for positive change. By highlighting successful practices and identifying areas for improvement, the report encourages institutions to critically examine their own policies and practices related to the recognition and reward of teaching excellence.

By offering a comprehensive analysis of the current context, identifying barriers and showcasing promising solutions, the report empowers institutions and educators to work collaboratively towards creating a more equitable and rewarding environment that values and celebrates teaching excellence. It is hoped that this report will serve as a catalyst for continued dialogue and action among key stakeholders in higher education.

Building on this work, future studies could include underrepresented stakeholder groups, such as teaching academics or university educators, to enrich findings.

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