

A beginner's guide to evidencing your teaching practice

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A beginner's guide to evidencing your teaching practice

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Katharine and David have won number of awards for excellence in teaching practice, from the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) Higher Education Teacher of the year award to National Teaching Fellowships. They are co-founders of the RSB Bioscience Educator Network, which provides support and mentoring to education-focused colleagues working in UK Bioscience.

A career as an education-focused academic in bioscience has now been firmly established through the hard work of several leading individuals. Many universities are now promoting academics based on scholarly activity in teaching and learning, and societies are recognizing the importance through awards.

There are many reasons why teaching-focused academics need to evaluate and evidence their practice. You might want to show that you have met your targets for the year, gather evidence for promotion, gain recognition through HEA fellowship or put yourself forward for a teaching award or national teaching fellowship (NTF). Although there are many similarities, evidencing your scholarly activity is different from evidencing research impact. At the heart of evidencing your teaching practice is a clearly articulated philosophy grounded in the scholarship of learning and teaching and built on personal development. Here, we will look at how you can provide evidence of impact in teaching and learning in a higher education context.

What is impact?

Scholarly impact refers to the influence and significance of an individual's work within their field of study. Within the teaching environment, it can be seen in the measurable and observable effects of instruction on student learning and development, and the influence this has on the practice of others. It can include things like improved test scores, increased student engagement and higher graduation rates. It can also include more qualitative measures such as student and peer feedback, observations of classroom instruction and student portfolios.

Your impact might also be on your colleagues. If you have influenced the way that others teach then you have had impact on your peers, which is just as important as your impact on students. At the start of your career your impact is likely to be on your students but, as you grow in confidence and experience, then your impact

may extend to your departmental colleagues, the wider institution or even at a national scale, e.g., through professional societies.

Define your activity, excellence and impact

It is important to note that scholarly impact in an educational context is not about the number of publications, citations and funding, but about the quality and relevance of your work to students and peers. Who has been impacted: your students, your peers or yourself? Are you claiming activity, excellence or impact?

- Activity = What did you do? This might be developing new teaching resources, writing papers/blogs or developing outreach schemes.
- Excellence = Were those activities high quality? This includes recognition of outputs, citations, invitations and positive feedback from students.
- Impact = What changed as a result of your activities? This might be increases in module outcomes, improvements in National Student Survey (NSS) responses, closing of awarding gaps and adoption of your teaching methods by others.

For example, you develop a teaching intervention and observe an increase in engagement with your students. Your first level of impact is on the learning experience of your students. This is written up as a paper or presented at a conference – that is evidence of activity. You are then invited to talk on the subject at another institution, or shared resources are getting a lot of use. Peers are valuing your work. The paper is being downloaded often or the Altmetric* score is high – these are measures of excellence. Peers are now using your resources and are seeing positive effects in their own context – this is a measure of impact (Figure 1).

* Altmetrics scores are complementary to traditional citation-based metrics, such as peer reviews and mainstream media coverage. They tell you how often journal

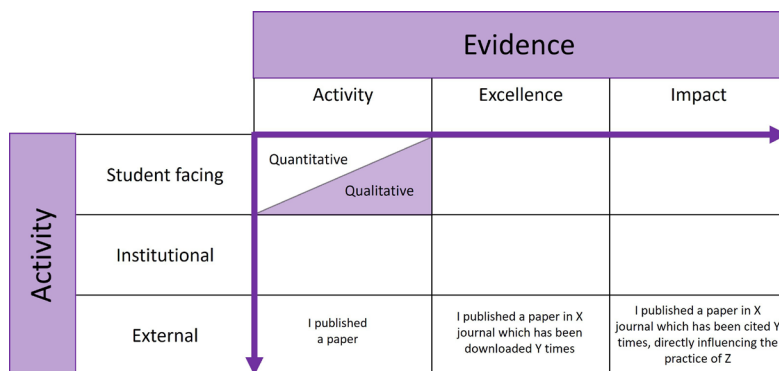


Figure 1. Are you claiming activity, excellence or impact? Both quantitative and qualitative data can be used to demonstrate your level of activity, excellence and impact. It is helpful to consider the sphere of your activity being student, institutional or external facing. It is impact that is most often sought in applications as it affects people more, so make sure that your evidence captures this.

articles and other scholarly outputs are discussed and used around the world and can be used to measure influence and impact of research beyond citation counts alone.

The scale of the impact will be commensurate to your level of experience and career stage. A pro vice-chancellor for learning and teaching would be expected to show impact at a university scale, whereas an early-career academic would have impact at the module level. Scale is important. You might change the life of a single student or write and develop the learning strategy for a whole university (Figure 2). Both matter and have impact, and what you claim will match your experience.

HOT TIP: Focus on your impact more than your activity. Impact affects people more, so make sure that

your evidence captures what has changed because of your work, not just what you did.

Collect evidence

What can you state with confidence that you have influenced, done or created? What evidence do you have that you can show to others?

Tangible outputs can be directly evidenced and include items like documents and artefacts that others can utilise. You can physically point people towards them, reference them, provide links or numerical data. It may help to upload resources to publicly available repositories (e.g., The National Teaching Repository) which will automatically collect usage data, e.g., number of downloads.

- Teaching awards: internal and external
- Papers
- Conference presentations
- Resources (tool kits/blogs/videos)
- Student metrics
- Strategy/policy documents
- Module or course development

Intangible outputs are equally, if not more, important but cannot often be directly documented. Evidence here comes in the form of a narrative supported by testimonials.

- Changes to the practice of others
- Student confidence, aspiration and engagement
- Mentoring and its effect

Evidence comes in two flavours: quantitative and qualitative. STEM academics tend to be more comfortable with quantitative evidence – things that can be measured and recorded – but qualitative evidence paints a richer

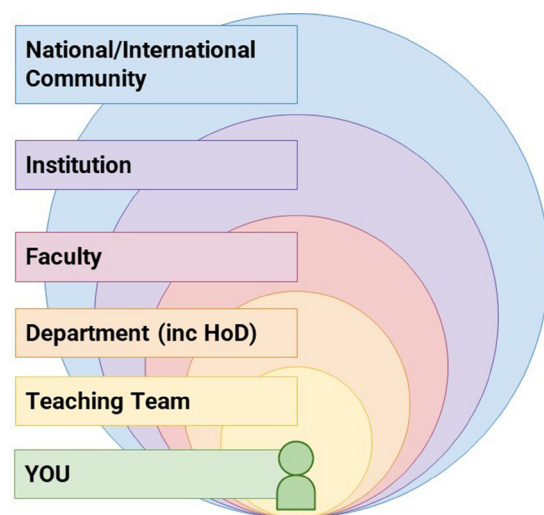


Figure 2. Your sphere of influence can extend from yourself to an international community of practice. Who you influence and how you influence them will be dependent on your career stage and who you are impacting

picture about impact. When collecting your evidence, think about cause and effect – how do you show that your action/artefact/intervention led directly to the evidenced outcome?

Quantitative data are numbers, such as:

- Average assessment marks: Have your actions led to an increase in overall grade, closed an awarding gap or brought up the first-time pass rate?
- Module evaluation scores: Do students rate the teaching on your modules highly? Do they report that it is engaging?
- Graduate attainment: What do the employability statistics say about your students? Are they gaining jobs in the areas you trained them for?
- Demographics: Are all students, irrespective of protective characteristics, reporting the same experience?
- NSS data: At a course level, are the students reporting that the teaching was of value?
- Publications: How many reads or citations have you achieved? What was your Altmetric score? Note that citations of pedagogical papers tend to be lower than research articles as they are read by practitioners rather than researchers. It is useful to explain this, particularly if your application is likely to be assessed by research-active colleagues who may not be aware.
- Internet outputs (blogs, videos, toolkits): How many people read your article and watched your videos? Where are they from? Many blogging sites will collect hits and geographical information.

You will already be collecting much of these quantitative data in your academic role for quality and other reporting. Other data will be available to you through institutional repositories and will provide a benchmark to show how you are doing in comparison to others.

Qualitative data are words. These data will add the story to the numbers, describing the impact you are having on others.

- Anecdotal observations from peers: e.g., reports from teaching observations.
- Student comments and feedback: collect these from emails sent to you, module/course evaluations or nominations for awards.
- Testimonies from peers: comments from peers on how you have changed their practice are a very powerful way of demonstrating impact.
- Comments from external examiners: if an external examiner has mentioned one of your modules in their report this can be used as evidence of good practice.
- Participation in professional development activities: reflections on what you gained from the activity and how you embedded that into your practice.

- Award nominations or recognitions: internal teaching excellence awards demonstrate impact at institutional level; society awards demonstrate impact at a national/international level.

Both qualitative and quantitative data can be used in combination, e.g., backing up increased module evaluation scores with a narrative in the form of student comments that links to your intervention. Increased course evaluation scores, on their own, paint a picture of strong team; alongside testimonies from students and peers, the effects can be attributed to the action of an individual.

HOT TIP: Do not be afraid to ask. Send emails to peers and ask them to comment on how you have influenced. Collecting these responses is often uplifting on its own but can also help you identify your golden thread.

What is your golden thread?

Successful applications have a central theme, idea or feature that is present in all parts of the evidence, holding the submission together and giving it structure. This is the golden thread, your USP! Identifying it will help you focus on what you are claiming as excellence.

Answer these questions:

1. What are you passionate about?
2. If you were given 1 day a week to lead an area, what would it be?
3. When you look at testimonials and comments about you, what do they say?

Your golden thread will run through your applications, writing and evidence. It will be the central theme that you hang your outputs and evidence on. You will open your reflections with it and it will be the first words people read.

HOT TIP: Sell yourself. This does not come easily to many academics, particularly education-focused staff. Avoid words like 'may', 'hopefully', etc. Give concrete examples. Take ownership and state 'I did this', 'I led on this project' and 'I coordinated this'. If you are struggling with the style, ask a trusted colleague to rewrite this for you, making you sound amazing. Ask successful colleagues if they will share their applications so you can see their style – education-focused academics are usually very willing to support each other.

Show you are operating above expectations

Think about your day-to-day role and consider what are you doing that is beyond that. How have your professional development activities enhanced what you do? NTFs or

Teaching Awards panels are looking for traits that are above the normal expectation of your current role. To gain promotion you must often be operating at a higher level before being recognised.

Think about your roles and how they align and build on your USP. For example, you might find that your golden thread talks about student engagement in the classroom – you could then use evidence around being involved with the university learning and teaching panels as a measure of impact. In your writing, state that a role is outside of your normal duties.

HOT TIP: It is often tempting to say yes to every role or job that comes your way. However, you need to be strategic and put your efforts into those that align with your golden thread. Be mindful – if you are asked to do a task that will significantly distract from your career development then don't automatically take it on.

Has your impact been sustained over multiple years?

Many applications require you to show long-term impact. Nice quotes from students and good module scores in one year are positive, but were they a one-off? A few years of good module scores and positive commentary show you are operating consistently above expectation. You can give evidence of advancement since last award/promotion – how did you build on past success? Stating the timeframes over which you are drawing the evidence will show that your impact is long lived.

HOT TIP: Read application guidelines – many awards or promotions require evidence from a specific timeframe. When presenting evidence, spread it out over the required period and draw examples from the full range of dates.

Network, network, network

You will need referees and visibility. These are important as 'external' voices are often required when going for awards or promotion and are used to benchmark you across the sector. Awards criteria and promotional documents often talk about national and international influence. Conferences are good for this, as are social media, external examiner roles or involvement in societies. Follow up any conversations you have at conferences and ask those present for quantitative evidence. Comment on other people's blogs and contact people whose golden thread matches yours. Many educational conferences, including the Biochemical Society-FEBS Evolving Molecular Bioscience Education event, actively encourage talks around teaching practice

and can act as the first stage to getting involved with the wider community.

HOT TIP: Who are your professional friends who can provide testimonials or act as referees? Ideally you want to be able to demonstrate impact at many levels. Have you got someone at each of those levels who you could approach for a testimonial?

Actively make time for career development

Most fellowship and promotion applications require a substantive amount of work and can seem overwhelming to start. It is much better to write in chunks over an extended period than to rush it. It also takes time to work out what your golden thread is going to be, and how you are going to collect your evidence.

Collect emails from students and peers in a folder, store your module evaluation scores and keep track of your CPD and presentations. Being organized really helps. Allocate blocked time every week or every month to work on it and treat that time as sacred – don't accept meeting invites or do other tasks in that time.

HOT TIP: Collect data as you go. Testimonies about how awesome you are as an external examiner are easier to collect before you finish and everyone you know there has left. Follow up on conference presentations you have given and ask attendees for feedback 6 months later – did they implement any of your ideas, and do they have evidence that it worked for them?

Final thoughts

Evidencing teaching excellence involves providing details of your teaching effectiveness and impact on student learning. This requires a different mind-set from evidencing research excellence and can be challenging to start with, particularly with respect to qualitative evidence. There is also more variation between individuals with what teaching excellence looks like. For some people it might centre around outreach activities, while others will show excellence in embedding employability into curricula or have a strong track record of pedagogical research. There is no right way to demonstrate excellence, but hopefully this guidance is useful.

Collecting evidence is essential for applying for promotion or fellowship but is also a valuable and uplifting experience in its own right. Being an education-focused academic is a brilliant job but can be challenging, so use evidence collection to celebrate your achievements and your positive impact on students and colleagues. ■

Further Reading

- Buchanan, J., and Buchanan, J. (2020). The Standardisation of Teaching. *Challenging the Deprofessionalisation of Teaching and Teachers: Claiming and Acclaiming the Profession*, 129–149.
- Schuck, S. (2006). Evaluating and enhancing my teaching: What counts as evidence? *Teacher learning and development: The mirror maze*, 209–220.

Web Resources

- Advance HE - Promoting Teaching: Making evidence count <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/promoting-teaching-making-evidence-count> (last accessed 02/23)
- Advance HE - National Teaching Fellowship <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/awards/teaching-excellence-awards/national-teaching-fellowship> (last accessed 02/23)
- Advance HE – Fellowship <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship> (last accessed 02/23)
- Biochemical Society - Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA) Guide <https://www.biochemistry.org/media/armnovsx/afhea-guide.pdf> (last accessed 02/23)
- Biochemical Society - Teaching Excellence Awards <https://www.biochemistry.org/grants-and-awards/awards/awards-listing/teaching-excellence-awards> (last accessed 02/23)
- Blog - Evidencing Teaching Excellence: A Framework <https://katharinehubbard.wordpress.com/2021/03/19/evidencing-teaching-excellence-a-framework/> (last accessed 02/23)
- Royal Society of Biology - Higher education teaching career progression framework https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/HE_Teaching_careers_progression_document_08.02.2016.pdf (last accessed 02/23)
- Royal Society of Biology - HE Bioscience Teacher of the Year <https://www.rsb.org.uk/get-involved/rsb-awards/he-teacher-of-the-year> (last accessed 02/23)



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