CUSU Teaching Excellence Awards Impact Report - 2014

Introduction

The CUSU Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) celebrates excellent teaching and student engagement. Students are given the opportunity to nominate lecturers, supervisors, administrators and other staff who are exemplary teachers and mentors.

Award nominees are celebrated for their abilities to generate enthusiasm for a subject matter, engage students in the development of the course, as well as nourish intellectual curiosity and talent. Lecturers in a Faculty, Supervisors in a College, or Support Staff members (librarians, custodians, lab demonstrators, College nurses, porters, etc.) are all eligible for nomination.

The CUSU Teaching Excellence Awards is a pioneer project of its kind here at Cambridge. There is no other student-led initiative at Cambridge where students are invited to highlight outstanding qualities that make a lecture, supervision, or the educational experience exceptional.

When this project was first proposed last year on a University committee, it was feared that such a project would become a "beauty contest", where the most popular teacher wins. However, of the 192 nominations we received, students focused on elements of teaching which enrich and deepen their encounters with the subject material at hand. Students and academics who form our selection panel were impressed by the quality of the nominations.

We were very impressed by the diversity of faculties and disciplines, experience levels, and colleges represented by the nominees. In particular, it is gratifying to see so many PhD students and post-docs being nominated by students at a time when teaching opportunities for postgraduates have become more important in determining the quality of a postgraduate experience.

The project is completely student-led, funded by a £1,000 grant from the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). CUSU covered the additional costs associated with the running of the project.

Report prepared by: **Jia Hui Lee, CUSU Education Officer 2013-14**

The Project

TEA by Numbers

Number of *nominations*:

192

Number of *individuals nominated*:

119

Number of *students* submitting nominations:

181

Number of *Colleges* represented:

23

Number of Institutions (*Faculty or Department*) represented:

33

Number of *Academics* in the Selection Panel:

2

Number of *Students* in the Selection Panel:

10

Timeline and Budget

Planning for the project began in *mid-October 2013*; the grant application was submitted by *November 2013*. During the winter vacation, the Education Officer worked with the Engagement Coordinator to set a timeline, find a venue and finalise the budget. The budget included costing for publicity (flyers), programme materials, invitations, trophies, food and drink, and venue. In the future, some allowance for a more professional website and publicity design would greatly improve the project.

Nominations opened at the end of *February 2014* (just before the end of Lent Term) and lasted over the vacation period. Nominations closed one week after Easter Term began.

The total cost of the project came up to £1,500. The Appendix provides a detailed breakdown of the costs.

The judging process took 8 hours in total. 2.5 hours were spent finalising the nominations criteria in advance of nominations opening. 3 hours were spent shortlisting the 192 nominations we received and a remaining 2.5 hours were spent selecting the winners.

At each stage of the selections process, at least 3 people were involved. Nominations criteria and winners were selected by a panel of students and academics.

The Award Ceremony was held on 9th May 2014.

Demographics

What Information Was Collected?

The selection panel agreed that collecting specific information from students may dissuade students from nominating. It was decided then that students could supply their CRSid if they choose to do so and was told specifically that they should provide this information if they wished to be invited to the Awards Ceremony.

Students submitting a nomination provide three pieces of information about the nominee: name, faculty or affiliation, and a description of why the person deserves to win the award. Criteria (see Appendix) that were confirmed by the selection panel were provided to guide students in writing this description.

Nominations by College and Faculty/Department

Overall, there is a large amount of diversity from across the disciplines and colleges in the nominations we received. The numbers in the tables do not add up to 192 since there were nominated individuals without a college affiliation or institutional affiliation. The department or college affiliation is also counted once per individual despite the individual receiving more than one nomination.

Table 1.1. The number of individuals nominated for a Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) by College.

College	Number of Individuals Nominated
Christ's	3
Churchill	4
Clare	2
Clare Hall	-
Corpus Christi	-
Darwin	-
Downing	-
Emmanuel	4
Fitzwilliam	10
Girton	6
Gonville and Caius	3
Homerton	1
Hughes Hall	-
Jesus	2
King's	9

Lucy Cav	1
Magdalene	2
Murray Eds	4
Newnham	6
Pembroke	-
Peterhouse	1
Queens'	4
Robinson	3
St. Catharine's	4
St. Edmund's	-
St. John's	7
Selwyn	-
Sidney Sussex	1
Trinity	6
Trinity Hall	3
Wolfson	3

In Table 1.2. The number of individuals nominated for a Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) by Institution at the University of Cambridge, arranged from most to least.

Faculty or Department	Number of Individuals Nominated
Faculty of Economics	10
Faculty of English	8
Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics (DAMTP)	7
Faculty of History	6
Department of the History of Art	6
Department of Geography	5
Department of Zoology	4
Faculty of Music	4
Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience (PDN)	4
Faculty of Philosophy	3
Faculty of Education	3
Department of Engineering	3
Faculty of Law	2
Faculty of Divinity	2
Faculty of Classics	2
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES)	2
POLIS/HSPS	2
Department of Pure Mathematics and Mathematical Statistics (DPMMS)	2
Department of Veterinary Medicine	2
Department of Social Anthropology	2
Department of Medicine	2
Department of Spanish and Portuguese	2
Computer Laboratory	2
Department of Physics	2
Department of German and Dutch	1
Department of Pathology	1
Faculty of Mathematics	1
Department of Architecture	1
Department of Psychology	1
Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy (DMSM)	1
Department of Chemistry	1
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics	1
Department of Plant Sciences	1

Of the 192 nominations, 50 were shortlisted based on how many nominations a person received and the thoroughness of their nominations. Thoroughness was determined by the level of detail and use of examples in a student's nomination. Of the 50 shortlisted nominees, 15 were awarded a Teaching Excellence Award and 10 were awarded a special mention.

Student Engagement and Feedback

The qualitative data collected from this project may be treated as a rich source of student feedback. Nominations data are a unique form of student feedback in that they identify best practice rather than areas for improvement.

Such forms of feedback are encouraging because it 1) conveys appreciation and recognition for good work and 2) sets an example for others to adopt according to their own localised particularities.

In processing the nominations data, I used grounded theory as a method of analysis. Using this method, the data is analysed for themes that emerge from the content of the data. The themes that emerge from the TEA data were identified during the selection process. The selection panel highlighted themes that they thought defined best practice in teaching and support. These themes were then used to code the rest of the data to see if a specific theme is repeatedly identified by students as best practice.

During the analysis, the panel found that the five themes that emerged from the data which students identified as best practice in teaching and support were actually ideal outcomes of the learning process. Students were aware that an excellent education experience is one that enabled them to be excellent and imaginative thinkers.

Excellent teaching and support for students encouraged the following five outcomes:

The ability to be independent and critical thinkers

Students valued lectures and supervisions that inspired them to think independently and critically. They noted how lecturers offered tools and approaches to read critically, facilitating a way in which students can form their "own independent opinions" and encouraging "independent" and "original" readings of texts, scientific journals, and studies.

A key characteristic that was highlighted was a lecturer's ability to "[give] students a huge amount of confidence and faith in their own ability" to articulate their ideas. Such learning outcomes usually leave students feeling "enthused" and "challenged", "excited to go away and learn more" beyond "[just] answering the exam".

Being treated with respect as collaborators in the learning process

In the nominations data of over 50% of our shortlisted candidates, students appreciated supervisors who did not leave students "feeling completely hopeless and even stupid". Students also praised lecturers who were patient with their questions or when a student had struggled with course material. A student specifically pointed out a lecturer's ability to "make [them] want to do well in the course". Another lecturer and supervisor was described as "the kind of teacher who wants to learn *from* her students", who endorsed a much more "reciprocal exchange of ideas".

Students feel more engaged in the learning process when the relationship between their supervisor or lecturer and them is collaborative. "Very few," one student writes, "are able to go beyond the role of being a mere instructor – to become a true teacher not by authority, but more importantly, by example."

Being able to understand complex ideas in accessible ways

Students engage with complex ideas through their course and find that they learn better and are more engaged when they are able to accessibly process and understand these complex ideas. This may be facilitated by effective use of presentation and interactive media, helpful handouts, and effective supervisions. A student described a supervisor's explanations of "physical/mathematical concepts" that could be easily understood, making things start to "magically make sense in PhysNatSci". Another supervisor "prepared us a booklet of some proofs together with his explanations to help us with revision".

The teaching style of one lecturer "communicate[d] very difficult material in a way that makes it seem easy" and thoughtfully "provided handouts (very rare in the History of Art Department!)". Another lecturer used personal stories to highlight points, "and these captivate students and often add humour to the lecture".

Gaining an adequate understanding of the aims or significance of a lesson

A significant number of students found that lecturers and supervisors who pointed out the significance or usefulness of a lesson or course material contributed to a better learning experience. One student praised a lecturer's provision of the "right amount of information", which will "make it easier for the student to revise during exam season". Another student identified the "summaries of crucial evidence and statistics" provided by their supervisor and how the material in the course might illuminate other areas of study in the discipline as reasons for why she deserved to win an award.

Students also appreciated detailed and helpful comments on their work.

Feeling supported and engaged with the learning process

Nominations overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of feeling supported and engaged during the learning process. A student particularly wanted to share an experience where their supervisor provided excellent support by being "highly understanding of different people's individual circumstances". The student struggled with their health in the previous year; the supervisor remained "encouraging and supportive" of the student's development during a "difficult time".

Another student who has intermitted in her first year due to "being too stressed and overwhelmed" noted that her supervisor was "helpful and supportive". Having supervisions with this person, the student highlighted, never left her feeling "stressed or too stupid to be at Cambridge" due to the supervisor's constant support and encouragement.

The awards highlighted the tremendous role that support staff played in shaping an excellent Cambridge experience. Every nomination submitted about tutorial staff, custodians, chaplains, disability staff, librarians and other staff provided extremely detailed examples and reasons. Of a chaplain, a student said that they "would not have made it through [their] degree half as calmly or happily as [they] have" without the chaplain's support. The Registrar of a College was noted for her support in "removing barriers to [the student's] course", making the student's time at Cambridge

"the most enjoyable period of [their] life so far, despite it being the only period [the student has] spent in a wheelchair".

Support staff received the most number of nominations per person.

A custodian known for his friendliness, dedication and hard work received 8 nominations. Students noted his contributions to keeping the faculty areas organised while being a friendly face as well as occasionally making biscuits and tea available. A student described him as "the centre of the community in the faculty", "working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the faculty" while "cheering everyone up during the hardest points of the terms".

Word Cloud

The most frequently occurring words in the nominations that described lecturers, supervisors, and support staff were found to be:

Award Results

Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) Selection Committee

1. Eilish Hughes
2. Bhavik Shah
3. Sarra Facey
4. Leah Sidi
5. Dan Safka
6. Kenny Aruwa
7. Michael Shin
8. Claire Barlow
9. Johannes Richter
10. Jia Hui Lee

List of Winners and Special Mentions

Lecturer category
Winners

Dr Alex Da Costa	Faculty of English
Dr Chris Briggs	Faculty of History
Jasmine Xiao	Faculty of Economics
Dr Joel Cabrita	Faculty of Divinity
Monique Ingalls	Faculty of Music

Special mentions

Prof Kaivan Munshi	Faculty of Economics
Dr Sarah Haggarty	Faculty of English
Dr David Parker	Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience
Revd Dr John Munns	History of Art
Dr Mia Gray	Department of Geography

Supervisor category
Winners

Anna Paterson	Queens'/Pathology
Professor Robin Kirkpatrick	Robinson/Faculty of English
Robert Dillon	Physical Sciences
Daniel Goya León	Faculty of Economics
Dr Philine zu Ermgassen	Fitzwilliam/Department of Zoology

Special mentions

Damian Valdez	Trinity/History
Chloe Valenti	Murray Edwards/Music
Jacek Mosakowski	Trinity/Department of Physics
Tom Pascoe	Robinson/Faculty of Law
Dr Eivind Kahrs	Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Non-academic staff category
Winners

Tony Brinkman	Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and of Classics, Custodian
Katheryn Ayres	Department of Veterinary Medicine, Tutorial
Alan Stevens	Sidney Sussex College, Librarian
Angela Elliott	Emmanuel College, Registrar
Revd Liz Adekunle	St John's College, Chaplain

Feedback about the Project

The project received extremely positive informal feedback from students and academics. The following quotes are extracted from emails (with minimal edits to their length):

I just wanted to extend my thanks to CUSU and yourself for the wonderful award I have received. It means a lot to me to have my teaching recognised in this way, and all the more because it comes from the student body. Hearing about the other incredible dedicated supervisors and lecturers who received awards was also incredibly inspiring.

I just wanted to say how pleased I was to win an award on Friday. It has given me a real boost to know that a student took the trouble to nominate me for an award. Thank you again for all your work organising this, and for the invitation to the event.

Thank you very much for the great news! I really enjoyed teaching over the past two terms and I did my best to try to make the classes helpful for the students. I didn't even know I was nominated, so this award was a very nice surprise.

I think the TEA's are great because it not only recognises great academics but is encouraging students to think about what a good teacher is, and to highlight what elements make a successful educational experience at Cambridge.

I don't want to sound too Oscar-ceremonial about this. But 'teaching' - especially perhaps, though not exclusively in the literary field - is less a matter of instruction than of collaboration in a performance. The beauty, force or cultural importance of a text is most likely to be realised in an ensemble, in the pleasures of discussion with new players bringing fresh ideas and unexpected nuance even to works that have been studied over and over again. That's it, really. I've been working here - writing books and all the rest of it - for some forty years. But the real discoveries have always been sparked, as they continue to be, by the brilliance of Cambridge students. Thank you again - and again. The warmest of good wishes to you and to CUSU.

As a student, I am very proud to see my supervisor receiving an Award. She goes all out to support us and it's really nice to know that she can be appreciated for it.

Recommendations for Future TEA Iterations

Data for Faculties, the Colleges and the University

The data in this report is being made available to Faculties, the Colleges and the University as a form of student feedback. Nominations for winners of the award will receive anonymised student comments. Many of the themes highlighted above may provide best practice guidance across the University and Colleges. ***Action:*** *The future Education Officer could work more closely with the three counterparts to see if there are any helpful questions the nominations form could ask.*

Staff support

We received 192 nominations, which is an average number of nominations received given the size of the university. Other than the Education Officer, the only staff support available was during the two weeks leading up to the ceremony and during the shortlisting process. Shortlisting and selections, as well as event managing, for larger number of nominations would require more staff support, which CUSU is unable to support right now. ***Action:*** *The Education Officer should assess a more structured system of support, either through recruiting more volunteers or enlisting more staff support.*

Publicity

Publicity for the event was minimal. The website for receiving nominations was launched and publicised via Facebook and Twitter. Flyers advertising the awards were distributed to the pigeon holes of 14 colleges. Increased publicity would predictably increase the number of nominations. ***Action****: This should be considered only if CUSU can secure enough resources and staff support to manage the project.*

College Involvement

Several Colleges showed significant interest in the awards. The Newnham College Communications Officer featured their winning Fellows on their webpage. There were also a significant number of College-based support staff and teaching officers who were nominated for an award. It is hoped that an additional category for "Tutorial" may be added if the project is repeated, especially in light of current work to improve the tutorial system. Staff in the tutorial office, Tutors, and other pastoral-related support staff would be considered under this category. ***Action:*** *The Education Officer, working with the Welfare Officer, should assess the potential of adding a "Tutorial" category to the Teaching Excellence Awards.*

Future of the Awards and Sustainability

The overall budget of the event was £1,500, which includes venue hire, food and drink, publicity, award costs, and part-time staff support. £1,000 of the budget was funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

CUSU should not expect to receive this funding again next year since the fund's main aim is to the piloting of a student-led teaching awards project by students' unions. It is recommended that the Education Officer should follow-up with Education and Student Policy (ESP) to secure future funding. Funding from the Colleges, subject to the addition of a "Tutor" Award, may also be considered.

Notwithstanding the constraints of funding sources, the project has considerably left a net positive impact on students and academics, fostering a supportive environment for sharing and rewarding best practice in education. It may be the case that the CUSU Education Officer feels strongly about prioritising its Education Budget (usually reserved for training Faculty Reps and holding meetings with student reps) on this event.

APPENDIX

Teaching Excellence Awards Nominations Criteria

The following criteria are not exclusive, but are examples of the impact that a lecturer, supervisor or member of non-academic staff whom you wish to nominate has had on your educational experience. They do not all need to be present for you to consider nominating a member of staff for a Teaching Excellence Award, but the key component to any nomination should be that the member of staff in question has had a strong positive impact on your learning experience.

Teaching Excellence (Lecturer Category)

- Your lecturer inspires and motivates, through teaching styles and approaches that generate enthusiasm in the subject matter
- Your lecturer produces quality teaching materials such as lecture hand-outs and revision materials that you have found are key to your doing well in the course
- Your lecturer makes use of innovative teaching methods that engage you and make the subject matter accessible
- Your lecturer is responsive, going above and beyond to support you or answer your questions
- Your lecturer is able to break down complex ideas and communicate effectively so that you can better grasp the subject matter

Teaching Excellence (Supervisor Category)

- Your supervisor provides thorough and helpful feedback that you can use to improve your work
- Your supervisor is a source of encouragement and support, especially when you are under pressure to perform
- Your supervisor is accommodating and responsive to your needs, going out of their way to ensure that you can fully participate and benefit from supervisions
- Your supervisor broadens your understanding of a subject and effectively fills in the gaps not covered by lectures
- Your supervisor is responsive and supportive, going above and beyond to support you or answer your questions

Teaching Excellence (Non-Academic Staff Category)

- This person could be a lab demonstrator, a librarian, an administrator, a porter, a College nurse, a non-medical assistant, or any non-academic staff whose work and commitment have enhanced your learning experience
- This person goes out of their way to support your needs and facilitate your education
- This person provides the support you need to thrive as a student

Project Costing

Budget (NUS, HEA, CUSU)	
	£1,500.00

Publicity Materials	
Leaflets	£120.00
Invitation Cards	£20.00
Total Cost Publicity Materials	£140.00

Room and Furnishings	
Evening Room Rental	£200.00
Total Cost Room and Furnishings	£200.00

Catering	
Red Wine	£53.64
White Wine	£98.34
Finger Buffet	£624.00
Staffing	£200.00
Total Cost Catering	£975.98

Awards and Certificates	
Trophies x 15	£150.00
Certificates x10	£5.00
Total Cost Awards and Certificates	£155.00
Miscellaneous	
Printing, snacks and tea for selection panel, stationery	£30.00

Total Spending	**£1,500.98**