Introducing the University Teaching Fellowship Scheme

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Hello. My name is Eileen Hyder. I work in the ADE team within CQSD and I coordinate the University Teaching Fellowship Scheme along with my colleague, Jennie Chetcuti, from the QAP team. The purpose of this short screencast is to tell you a little bit about the University Teaching Fellow scheme: things like why we have it, the benefits of being a UTF and how you go about applying.

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So what is the UTF Scheme? Well, it’s an award that has real profile in the University. You’ll see on this slide that there’s a special badge for UTFs that they can put on their email signature. This is something that people do proudly. They know it’s a sign to everyone that they’ve been recognised for the excellence of the impact they’ve had on teaching and learning: impact on student experience and outcomes that’s come about through the excellence of their own practice, and impact on teaching and learning more widely within and across the university. This wider impact will be the result of activities such as supporting colleagues in developing their pedagogic understanding and practice, developing T&L initiatives, disseminating good practice or pedagogic research, or by being part of institutional working groups or committees that set the agenda or develop policy around teaching and learning.

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The scheme, therefore, plays a significant role in foregrounding the importance of teaching and learning at Reading. It signals that we value those members of our community who are committed to developing teaching and learning, both in terms of their own practice and in terms of supporting others so that we can provide high quality learning experiences and excellent outcomes for students.

But it isn’t meant to be a terminal award – another purpose of the scheme is to provide a platform for these expert practitioners to contribute further and extend their impact. Obviously that has value for them as individuals but also for the institution more widely – and obviously for our students.

Another important aspect of the UTF scheme is that it plays a key role in raising the status of teaching. Excellent practice will be evidence-based. Our UTFs will be people who are making informed choices by engaging with literature, research and other evidence, or even by engaging in pedagogic research themselves. Because of this, the UTF scheme acts to showcase teaching and learning as a scholarly activity.

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I’ve alluded to some of the benefits of being a UTF in the previous slide. In addition to those, it’s important to remember that the award is not time-limited – you have the title for as long as you work at the University.

Successful applicants benefit from being members of our University Teaching Fellow Community of Practice. This is a really vibrant and dynamic group that comes together once a term. As a group it’s both inward- and outward-looking. By that I mean UTFs use the CoP as a forum for sharing ideas and challenges, but they also use it as a way of thinking about how they can collectively contribute to T&L at Reading. And it keeps evolving in response to what members are interested in. At the minute the CoP is exploring how it might support members in terms of carrying out pedagogic research. Pedagogic research might be new to some members whereas others have lots of experience. This is just one example of how the CoP can act as a really positive peer network. You can see, therefore, that being a UTF can really provide a platform for you to develop and extend your influence, impact and profile.

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Of course, nothing comes for free – but you can see that the expectations of our UTFs are not onerous. UTFs constantly comment on how they find the Community of Practice a supportive and energising group. They would participate actively in the CoP even if it wasn’t an expectation because they get so much out of it.

Equally UTFs are the type of people who are always actively looking for ways to further their reach and impact. Being a UTF provides opportunities such as sitting on selection panels for TLDF funding and recognition schemes such as the Collaborative Awards and future UTF Selection Panels. These are valuable ways of supporting colleagues and the development of T&L more widely. UTFs embrace these opportunities, seeing them as an opportunity, not an obligation.

There is another expectation which I haven’t listed on the slide as it won’t apply to everyone, but it is important that I flag it up. That is the expectation that our University Teaching Fellows think of themselves as potential applicants for National Teaching Fellowship. So you can see how everything interlinks. The fact that UTF provides opportunities for developing expertise and expanding impact means that some of our UTFs should eventually have a strong enough profile and evidence-base to apply for NTF. As a University we have a good record of success in the NTF Scheme. If you become a University Teaching Fellow, this is something you could aspire to one day.

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But, what you really want to know is what an application involves – exactly what you have to submit. Well, there are four sections to your application. These haven’t been chosen randomly but mirror the format and criteria for applications for National Teaching Fellowship. The only difference is in the word limit.

The first section is essentially a context statement. This is where you provide any background information you think will help the reviewer to tune into your application. Applicants work in very different contexts and hold a variety of roles. And even if two applicants seemed to have the same role, we can’t assume that role means the same thing in every context. It really helps the reader if you give some information to help them to get a feel for the context of your work.

The three main sections you have to write about are: your own individual excellence, how you have raised the profile of excellence (essentially how you have developed excellence in teaching and learning beyond your own practice – or, in other words, how you have supported others within our community to develop their pedagogic practice and expertise) and developing excellence (which is essentially your own professional development activity – how you have developed your knowledge, skills and expertise in relation to teaching and learning, and how you have applied learning from your CPD to enhance practice).

You have 200 words for background information and 600 words for each of the other three sections.

It’s also important to know that on the application form you’ll be asked to confirm that you’ve consulted your Teaching and Learning Dean so that they are aware that you are applying, and that your Head of School or Service is supportive of you applying. Your SDTL/Head of School will be approached to endorse the claims you make in your application.

We also ask you to declare the status of your professional teaching recognition as defined by HESA. For those of you with HEA Fellowship you’ll declare your current category of Fellowship. I’ve put the link to the HESA categories on this slide in case you want to check which are relevant for you.

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In terms of who will assess your application, it will go to a selection panel which will be made up of two Teaching and Learning Deans (one of whom will chair the panel), two existing University Teaching Fellows, someone from CQSD and the RUSU Education Officer.

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They will review your application and send in their preliminary thoughts, and then at the actual panel meeting itself, they have the chance to hear what everyone else thought and come to their final decision. Each criteria is scored out of 4 (except the contextual statement which isn’t scored because its role is just to help orientate the reader).

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In terms of key dates there are only two for you to keep in mind:

* Monday 15th March which is when the scheme opens, and
* Monday 17th May which is the closing date. All applications have to be with us by 5pm that day

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There are a number of things you might do now as next steps:

* There’s another screencast you could watch explaining what the focus of each section should be and giving a little more information about the criteria.
* You could watch the recording of the UTF Showcase. During this Showcase a number of recently successful UTFs talked about why they applied, what they’ve got out of being a UTF so far and passed on their top tips for developing a successful application. The link is on the website.
* The website has other useful information and resources so it’s worth exploring what’s there
* And remember our UTFs are incredibly supportive people. They’d be happy to talk to you if you’d find that useful. You’ll find the list of current UTFs on this webpage.

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And as well as the UTF community, Jennie and I are also happy to help where we can. Jennie has copies of past applications that we have permission to use so contact her if you’d find that helpful. Otherwise it just remains for me to wish you luck. The very fact you’re considering applying for UTF is a sign of your commitment to T&L. Whether or not you actually apply or are successful, it’s fantastic that you are part of the community who cares passionately about teaching and learning. It’s thanks to people like you that our students and staff have positive experiences as members of that community.