

## **Book Review:**

# **Grimwood, M and McHanwell, S. (2024) *Evidencing Teaching Achievements in Higher Education*. Critical Publishing.**

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This book arrives at a timely moment in Higher Education as, particularly in the United Kingdom, it seems increasingly important to know how to evidence your successes and tell the 'right story'. Across the past ten years, the HE sector has seen many universities develop internal promotion and recognition pathways for teaching colleagues, in order to establish a degree of parity with research-focused career pathways. Additionally, January 2025 saw the announcement by Advance HE that they had met the milestone of awarding their 200,000<sup>th</sup> Fellow, showing the significant growth of their professional recognition pathways too. Therefore, this book arrives at a moment in HE when it feels like more colleagues than ever would need some guidance and support on how best to evidence their achievements.

Each chapter has several recurring features which will help colleagues to go further with their practice. Chapters are concluded with a series of critically reflective questions designed to prompt further reflections and self-investigation. Chapters also feature summaries of the chapter and a list of useful further sources of information, offering readers 'breadcrumbs' to both reflective discovery and further linked reading. Alongside the very practical focus on supporting colleagues, the book frequently explores why we must evidence our achievements, offering important political and sector-wide contexts to many discussions. The first chapter, in particular, establishes the terminology used throughout, acknowledging that 'teaching' is not as simple a term as we might first think and encompasses a whole

range of activities and practices in modern HE. It also highlights the inherent complexities and challenges of existing measures of teaching achievements such as league tables, reputation, and many more. These discussions are handled sensitively and with a refreshing candour.

The book also utilises five case studies throughout, which are provided without anonymisation. This decision is incredibly helpful and gives full case studies to the book, rather than risking anonymised case studies not quite carrying the same message. As a reader, I found it refreshing and admirable that the authors worked to include these within the book and it definitely enhances its usefulness.

The book would be useful for colleagues seeking guidance in this area, but also for colleagues in academic or educational development roles who support colleagues through their careers too, or have oversight and input into institutional support for various recognition pathways (Chapter 6 is particularly helpful in this regard). I suspect it would also be a really valuable text for colleagues who are studying HE itself, perhaps in staff-focused postgraduate programmes.

Chapters are easy to read and filled with supporting research, often exploring contentious issues with reference to individual, institutional and sector concerns. Indeed, the early discussions of common areas of alignment in conceptualisations of good or great teaching are really helpful and will resonate with many colleagues. The authors also, throughout the book show how such conceptualisations are embodied and explored in recognition schemes such as Advance HE Fellowships and other areas like National Teaching Fellowships. Crucially, however, the authors sensitively explore how many of the common conceptualisations of teaching excellence, such as 'going the extra mile' for example, can mean different things in different universities: "it is misleading to speak of teaching excellence as if it is a universal quality...University teaching missions differ considerably as a function of their student recruitment as well as their disciplinary mix" (p.17). I feel we can also naturally infer faculty/school/departmental differences in teaching missions too, given the demographic differences between different disciplines present in a modern university.

Chapter 3 in particular offers a balanced approach to mythbusting some of the common misconceptions about choosing a career specialised in teaching and then setting out four aspects of developing a career in teaching which are managing your professional learning; individual practice; leading and co-ordinating practice; and research, enquiry and dissemination of practice. As a colleague working in academic development, these four spheres of work are often what colleagues seek support in, particularly the first and last of the four above. Here, the authors offer critical but constructive advice on how to develop your continuing professional development (CPD) and growing your dissemination profile. On CPD, in particular, the authors stress the importance of seeking out new sources of development as we move through different stages of our careers, each with their own focus – teaching, local leadership, strategic leadership, formal and informal roles and so on. The case studies here are a particular strength, showing how different colleagues have gained promotion at different institutions with starkly different academic journeys.

Sections on evidencing teaching effectiveness and advice on writing applications for different recognitions (internal promotions, teaching awards, etc) will undoubtedly be helpful to all readers. The authors discuss the need to obtain and utilise a range of evidence types to produce a triangulated case of effectiveness. Their précis of the strengths and limitations of different data types, and a natural over-reliance on quantitative data is effective and compelling. Additionally, they argue that, where possible, we need to make evidencing teaching effectiveness and storing this evidence part of our day-to-day practices for it to be both developmental on a personal level and to have it to hand when building cases for promotion and teaching awards. Their advice on gathering good quality evidence is particularly strong (pp.54-56) and stresses the importance of gathering this evidence in a timely fashion, to possibly then allow a longer-term follow up perspective. They also, quite rightly, highlight that at times we need to ask students and colleagues for this evidence and that, more often than not, they will be willing to provide it. Chapters throughout feature a range of advice and guidance for colleagues at different points in their academic career journey and are easy to navigate if taking a more strategic approach to using the book.

This book arrives at a timely moment in HE, offering not only sage advice and sound practical exercises, but a considered examination of a range of topics that orbit the theme of evidencing teaching achievements. This book would be a valuable addition to colleagues seeking to develop their practice in this area, but also to colleagues who work in academic development and support others to seek our professional recognition for their teaching achievements.