What is teaching excellence, (why) does it matter, (how)can it be led & assessed and (how) should it be rewarded?

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Introduction

- Less interested in the literature on teaching excellence than the politics & policy & organisational networks supporting its rise
- What is teaching excellence (TEx) & why is it a key issue now?
- How does TEx emerge? How is it sustained?
- How do equality & diversity relate to teaching excellence & to initiatives?
- What lies behind national initiatives on teaching excellence?
- Why do some initiatives fail?
- Is teaching excellence measurement leading to just another set of rankings or league tables?

What is teaching excellence?

- Elton (1998): we must link it to excellence in learning
- Hard to define; covers individuals, teams, departments, institutions
- Can include pedagogy, scholarship, curriculum design, assessment
- May be very subjective ('a nice teacher') or more evidenced
- May involve professional service staff as well as academics
- Teaching isn't a linear process & no-one is excellent all the time (Ashwin 2015)

Apples for the teacher

Why does teaching excellence matter?

- Quality of student learning & outcomes?
- Status and reputation of teaching in HE?
- A counter to research excellence?
- European Commission priority (2013)
- Shows valuing of teaching, especially in research-intensive universities?
- An ideological stance: universities have lazy staff and waste money?

Lewis Elton (1998) on teaching excellence (p.3)

- 'the lack of precision is due essentially to the multidimensionality of the concept …
- The dimensions are of two kinds; first, classificatory, distinguishing the three levels of institution, department and individual …
- second, substantive …different ways in which each of the three levels can exhibit excellence …
- recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence at all three levels is found to be significantly different from corresponding practices normally used for research' (p 3) …
- 'Only such teaching as can produce excellent learning can lay claims to excellence'

How can teaching excellence be measured?

- Peer observation (but are the observers excellent too?)
- Student outcomes (but only one variable)
- Teacher statements & evidence against descriptors (eg UK Professional Standards Framework)
- Student satisfaction (a very general measure)
- Reputation surveys (unreliable)
- High fidelity awards (eg UK National Teaching Fellowships) with lots of evidence & judged by peer panel

What are the challenges in identifying teaching excellence?

- It is affected by expectations & perceptions
- The gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, culture, disability of teachers & those evaluating it may affect how teaching is regarded (Thomas & Chie 2013, Subtirelu 2015)
- Inequality also affects research excellence (Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel 2015)
- The lack of a clear definition of it & clear agreement in how to evaluate it
- The relationship between teaching excellence & innovation in teaching is blurred
- Can only those who are excellent judge others who may be excellent? Where do students fit in?

Why do there seem to be fewer pictures on the web of women teaching compared with men?

Gender, culture, ethnicity, disability can all affect how teachers are assessed

How is Excellence encouraged? Gibbs et al (2009), Case Studies: Excellence in Leadership of Teaching

- 2 outstanding departments in each of 11 research intensive universities in 8 countries (US, UK, Europe, Australia)
- Found only 2 cases where leadership didn't play major role in supporting teaching excellence
- 9 characteristics of leading teaching excellence usually found combined together
- HoDs either had high credibility as teachers or worked with those who did
- Entrepreneurial culture less conducive than Collegial one
- Change planned in Science Depts, emergent in Arts & Social Sciences

Gibbs et al (2009): Key Features of Excellence in Leadership of Teaching (p. 2)

- • Establishing credibility and trust.
- • Identifying teaching problems, turning them into opportunities.
- • Articulating a convincing rationale for change.
- • Devolving leadership.
- • Building a community of practice.
- • Recognising/rewarding excellent teaching
- • Marketing the department as a teaching success.
- • Supporting change and innovation.
- • Involving students

Is this what teachers deserve?

How can teaching excellence be rewarded?

- Promotion?
- Prizes? Give at graduation or ceremony?
- More institutional funding?
- Higher salary?
- Better teaching resources
- Better working conditions?
- Status?
- Extra holiday?

How does rewarding teaching excellence compare with rewarding research excellence?

- Research excellence usually has more money attached; teaching excellence often has token amounts
- Clearer agreement on how to evaluate research
- Research excellence initiatives often pay for future research, teaching initiatives reward past work
- External referees more prepared to comment on research excellence
- Research excellence exercises tend to cost more
- Rare for either type of exercise to be evaluated
- (Pruvot & Estermann 2014)

Teaching excellence initiatives & change

- Saunders (2015) talks about policy initiatives which try to enhance teaching notes different theories of change:
- Change by examples of good practice(NTFs in UK, Competition for Excellence in Teaching, Germany)
- Contagion – change is catching (CETLS)
- Resource driven – given money to change (Quality Pact for Teaching)
- Institutional rhetoric: values buy-in
- Professional imperative through collaboration (FDTL/HEFCE) but only affects those involved
- Technological determinism via web & information technology(not a panacea)
- Market driven pressure – league tables, student satisfaction or engagement e.g NSS in UK

Land and Gordon (2015) on Teaching Excellence Initiatives

- Teaching excellence at one end of a continuum which starts with assessing basic teaching competence
- High & low fidelity models of initiatives: e.g lots of evidence or student-nominated
- Not just about academics but administrators too
- Teaching excellence the poor relation of research excellence
- There are visible & invisible costs of teaching excellence initiatives
- They suggest a toolkit for framing excellence initiatives at different levels

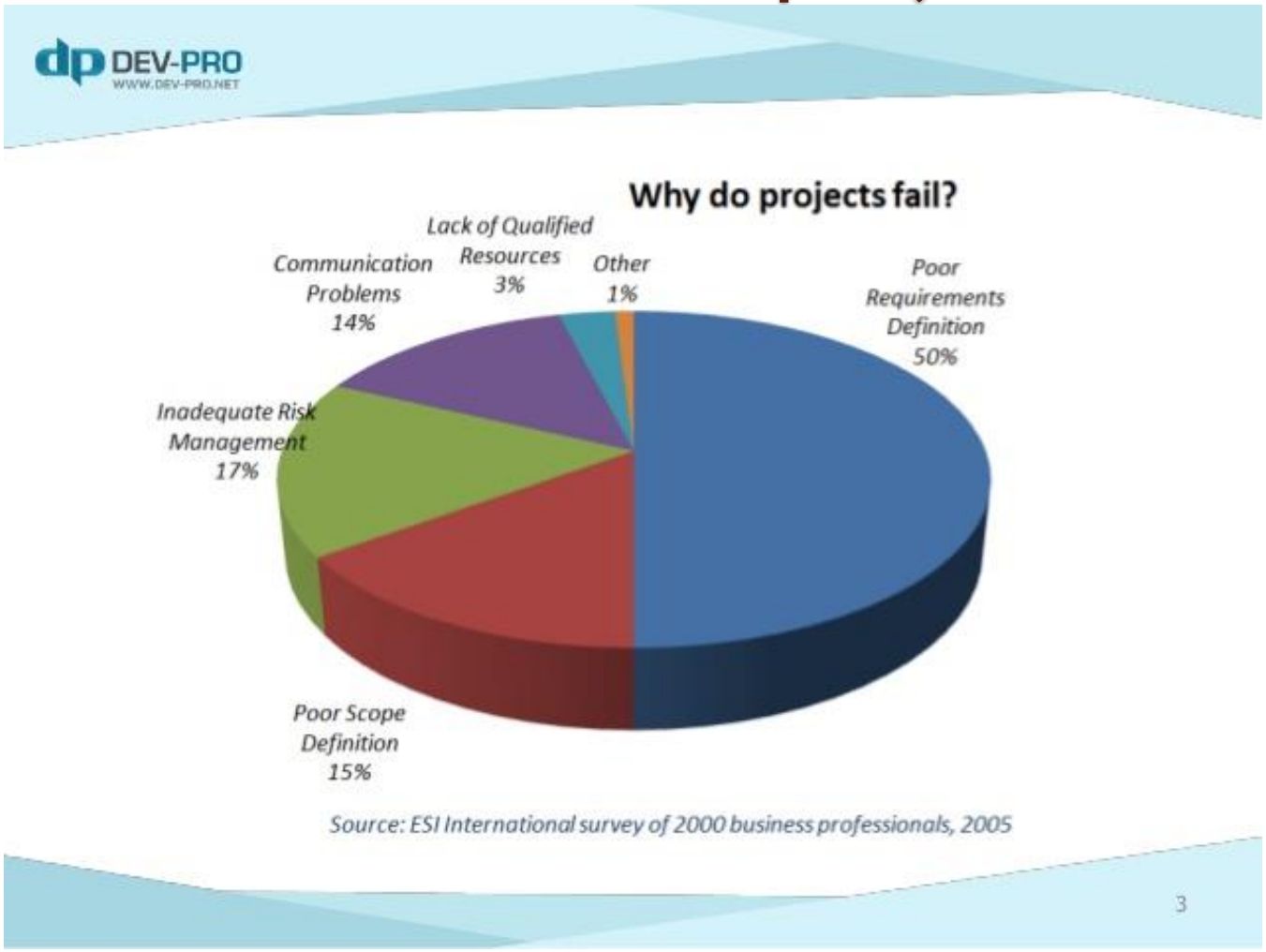
Germany 'Quality Pact for Teaching' initiative

- 2010-2020, 2 billion Euros, joint venture of Federal government & *Länder*,
- Competitive bids from higher education institutions
- Intended to improve:
- Staff/student ratios; more staff at all levels
- Qualifications of staff in teaching, mentoring & advisory services
- Institutions own development of teaching quality & professionalisation of teaching

UK teaching initiatives

- Since 1997 Dearing Report, all universities train early career academics to teach
- Courses accredited by Higher Education Academy lead to Associate/Fellow of HEA
- Can also apply for Senior or Principal Fellow by individual route
- All awards benchmarked against UK Professional Standards Framework
- National Teaching Fellowships from HEA annual competition
- HESA planning to publish %s who hold a teaching qualification

success and failure of projects



Failed UK Teaching initiatives

- Institute for Learning & Teaching in HE (membership organisation for those with HE teaching qualification) 2000-2004
- QAA teaching inspections England 1997-2002
- Learning & Teaching Support Network had 24 Subject Centres until 2004, then HEA ran them until 2011
- 74 Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) 2005-2010, £315million

Next Teaching initiative in the UK : a Teaching Excellence Framework?

- Mentioned in Conservative Election Manifesto 2015; ideologically driven
- Not clear what coercive power it will have
- Could rival costs of UK REF (Jump 2015)
- Most public money supporting teaching in HE has already been cut; could limit tuition fees charged?
- If trying to influence applicant choice, former polys will do better, not Russell Group
- Will the research intensives co-operate?

Shanghai Jiao Tong Ranking

Teaching Excellence and League Tables

- There are already attempts to feed teaching excellence into league tables
- But tend to rely on proxies e.g staff student ratios, student drop out rate, spend per student or university facilities
- Who is going to use teaching league tables? Students, parents, governments??
- May be an attempt to drive HE markets; will it work?

Teaching Excellence: some conclusions

- No-one can satisfactorily define excellence so how can we tell whether it leads to excellent learning?
- Occurs at lots of levels and may involve different categories of staff; leadership important too
- Contested methods of assessing it (low & high fidelity)
- Teaching Excellence initiatives often have ill-thought out models of change attached to them
- TEx initiatives rarely pay for teaching activity
- It may be that teaching excellence is less important than all-round teaching competence
- Unclear what effect including measures of teaching excellence in league tables would have & upon whom