
We recommend you cite the published version.
The publisher’s URL is: [http://www.drhea.ie/enhancement_symposium.php](http://www.drhea.ie/enhancement_symposium.php)

Refereed: No

(no note)

Disclaimer

UWE has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

UWE makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

UWE makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

UWE accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.
Professional standards and academic values: what does it mean to be a professional academic in a 21st century higher education institution?

Opening keynote address for the Inaugural Symposium of the Dublin Centre for Academic Development
Dublin City University, Friday 6 November 2009

Professor Rob Cuthbert
University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

Colleagues, it is a pleasure and a privilege for me to be asked to speak at your inaugural symposium. The new Dublin Centre for Academic Development is a great step forward for the promotion of professional standards and academic values in Dublin higher education, and I admire the vision of the proposers and the Higher Education Authority which has created the new Centre, especially in the present gloomy financial climate. I had planned to be gloomy at some length, but I watched the NTE TV news last night, with the debate about NAMA and preparations for today’s national day of action, and Paul Blackmore assures me that later he will be giving gloom further coverage, so I’ll try to be more optimistic.

These are the best of times, as well as the worst of times, for higher education. Global HE has never been bigger, more accessible, or more diverse and distributed. But it has never faced the scale of restrictions on public and private spending which the credit crunch and the recession have left behind. So we have a tale of two systems, and although we may not be facing deprivation on a Dickensian scale, we do apparently have a choice between Great Expectations and Hard Times.

Dickens was obviously the master of using polar opposites to tell a story. It’s a good trick. But sometimes we take it too far, and start polarising things that need to be joined together. The polarities I want to consider in particular today are the separation between professional and academic, and between research and teaching. And that will lead me to offer a few observations on the separation, or not, between Universities and Institutes of Technology.

Teaching and research have become much too separated in the academic consciousness. We have some wrong ideas about teaching, about higher education institutions, and about the links between teaching and research. That leads us to have wrong ideas about how to reward and recognise good teaching. In particular, we try to raise the status of teaching by emphasising its professionalism, but I will argue that this alone is insufficient, and what we should be doing is emphasising that teaching is an integral part of academic practice.

I’m asked by the symposium organisers to pose some introductory questions for the first group discussions, where the theme is Guiding Principles for Excellence in Teaching. So here are a few troublesome questions, which flow directly from our wrong ideas about teaching.

Why do most people say teaching is important, but think that most other people think research is more important? Why is it hard to find effective ways to reward people for good teaching? Why do some people who really want to be good teachers resist help from academic developers? Why is research funded at less than full economic cost thought of as ‘income generation’, while teaching that earns more than its full economic cost is not? Why is it hard to find evidence that teaching and research must go together to ensure the best higher education? And why, if we believe teaching and research must go together, do we allow most of our students to do HE courses in places where there is little or no research?
These questions have been extensively researched, but we are still short of good answers, partly because our conceptual framework blocks our thinking. We separate teaching and research as basic concepts – and then we agonise about the problems caused by the separation. To improve teaching, learning and how they are valued by academics, we need to change how we think about higher education as a whole. I’m going to suggest an alternative approach, which reintegrates teaching, learning, research and scholarship as the main constituents of academic practice. But first I want to talk about the ways that people have tried to improve teaching and learning.

**Making teaching and learning better**

What can we do to make teaching and learning better? There is no shortage of ideas. In the UK we’ve tried lots of things, and most of them have failed. Let me just mention a few. About ten years ago we established a national Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), which was supposed to support the professionalization of teaching in higher education. It failed, because although most teachers like to take a professional approach, they won’t pay a subscription to a generic professional body for teaching. They’re more than willing to pay subscriptions to their relevant subject bodies and professional associations, but another subscription to the ILT was a bridge too far for about 85% of all teachers. In my institution, most teachers wouldn’t join the ILT even when the University offered to pay the subscription. They just couldn’t see what they would get out of it. In contrast, the most successful innovation in the last ten years has been the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), a network of 25 subject centres dedicated to improving teaching and learning within their subject areas. They were successful because they were run by teachers, for teachers, instead of being an imposed national initiative to tackle the problem of promoting teaching excellence. DCAD, as another initiative by teachers for teachers, starts with a great advantage. So here’s another question for the groups to consider:

**How can we ensure that our efforts to improve teaching and learning stay close to the subjects and the professions which academics value most?**

Most of the UK’s unsuccessful experiments have been top-down solutions invented by small groups of enthusiasts or beneficiaries, with disappointingly little impact. In no particular order, we’ve had a national Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), a three-part national strategy supported by a Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF), a National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), a Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) and huge investment in e-learning through the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). We then merged the ILT, the LTSN and the HE Staff Development Agency (HESDA) in the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Then we put several hundred million pounds into 70 Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), and more into the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP).

So in our efforts to make teaching and learning better we’ve generated at least one major new acronym every year for the last ten years. What difference has all of this made to teaching and learning? Well, the formal evaluations say that most of the money invested in e-learning hasn’t been good value, at best the Higher Education Academy has had mixed success, and the 70 CETLs haven’t yet had much impact.

Academic commentators like Paul Trowler and Joelle Fanghanel have argued that all these initiatives have been so disjointed and incoherent that they have obstructed rather than complemented one another. Again, DCAD avoids this problem of confusion and profusion, being a single well-focused
unified programme. Trowler and Fanghanel also argue that most change efforts have focused either at the level of the individual course or at the organisational level, and we need a greater emphasis on the department.

So here’s another question for the groups:

**In trying to make teaching and learning better, which levels of intervention – system, institution, faculty, department, course, individual lecturer, individual student – are most important?**

The funding councils have emphasised teaching and learning strategy at the institutional level, and research strategy at the unit of assessment level. But units of assessment for research don’t correspond to departmental staff groups in most universities. So in most departments you have an institution-level strategy for teaching and a unit-level strategy for research, neither of which is designed to fit the department. To get funding and support, departmental academic practice has to be separated into teaching and research, then submitted to different authorities for different kinds of evaluation. It is not surprising that many academics in these circumstances feel alienated from the management of their institution.

But this alienation and the artificial separation of the elements of academic work is largely academics’ own fault. The way we think about higher education has failed to keep up with changes in what we do, and changes in why, where and how we do it. We need to think differently about the nature and the purposes of higher education. So I want to say a few things about how we can change our thinking.

**The idea of higher education**

Worldwide, the idea of higher education that still dominates policy can be traced back 200 years to a Prussian civil servant called Wilhelm von Humboldt. After Prussia had been humiliated in the Napoleonic Wars at the start of the 19th century von Humboldt wrote a very 21st century kind of memorandum, about how to restore national competitiveness by developing knowledge and skills through higher education. Von Humboldt proposed that research, teaching and scholarship should be developed together in academic practice to generate the skills and knowledge the nation needed. That idea of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus was put into practice in the mid-19th century at the University of Berlin. The idea of the nexus was at the heart of Cardinal Newman’s tract on the idea of the university, heavily influenced by his time as Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland, what is now University College, Dublin. The nexus idea was further developed by the Webbs in the foundation of the London School of Economics, and articulated in the Robbins Report on higher education to the British Government in 1963, which included a famously lyrical statement about the purposes of higher education – the ‘development of the general powers of the mind’ and so on.

In 1974 Martin Trow set out his model of the development of higher education systems, in stages from elite through mass to universal, and he coupled it with the idea of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus as the defining characteristic of the university. Those ideas have shaped higher education policy thinking for the last 50 years. They have framed how we think about how to teach and how students learn. We idealised an institutional mix of research and teaching which could be afforded only by a handful of institutions, and so we have had endless arguments about the links between teaching and research, based on an idea which was too narrow, because it was invented 150 years earlier for a completely different context. And in any case, the research-teaching-scholarship nexus idea is something of a fantasy. As Peter Scott, Vice-Chancellor of Kingston
University, has said: ‘the idea of being taught by great scholars is empty’. In most research-intensive universities, it is graduate students who do a lot of the teaching.

But academics keep searching for the evidence that research and teaching must be linked to create high quality higher education. At the same time commercial companies in the pharmaceutical industry, companies and charities in medical and genetic research, are doing groundbreaking research in places where there is no teaching. And universities have validated many perfectly acceptable higher education courses in places where there is little or no research. **We are looking at the issue in the wrong way.**

We’ve lost sight of the purposes of higher education. Teaching and research are the primary activities in any university, but not its primary purpose. Teaching and research are the means to a higher purpose. Ideas about the purpose of higher education will always vary – the pursuit of truth or of knowledge for its own sake, the development of human potential or high level skills for employment, the promotion of economic development or social justice. Whatever our view, we need to pay more attention to purpose, and that would remind us that what matters is the whole of academic practice, not the subdivisions within it.

The separation of teaching and research in the academic consciousness has led us to mistake what we do for the reasons why we do it. We need to think differently if we want to join up research and teaching.

**How do we join up research and teaching?**

Most academics believe research brings greater rewards than teaching, even in institutions which consistently promote more people for teaching achievement than for research. That belief is buried deep in academic culture and it reflects the differences between teaching and research. Rewards for research are extrinsic, public and personal, but rewards for teaching are more often intrinsic, private and collective. Attempts to improve reward and recognition for teaching have had limited success. Awards for individual teaching fellows in Oscar-style ceremonies go against the grain. A lot of people don’t like the idea of individual teaching awards. The UK’s National Teaching Fellows hardly ever have any strategic influence on their own institution’s teaching and learning.

This is understandable. There is a strong culture of openness and collaboration in teaching, which naturally resists attempts to give a few individuals the rewards for what is a collaborative effort. But the question remains: how can we improve the rewards for those institutions, departments and staff who are truly excellent at promoting student learning?

Teaching and research have an asymmetrical relationship. Teaching, however good it is, does nothing for academic reputation. Research, on the other hand, creates academic fame and fortune. The asymmetry is a problem everywhere in the world. You make it worse if, like the UK, you invent separate funding streams for teaching and research or, like Ireland and most of the rest of the world, you have a binary policy which divides higher education institutions into different types.

These divisions encourage academics to fall into the trap of seeing teaching and research in competition with one another, instead of being interwoven. The division between teaching and research gets mistakenly laid on top of the divisions between types of institution, or between types of funding. The consequence is a system that in mathematical terms is **overdetermined** – it does not have enough degrees of freedom to perform as it should.
We have oversimplified the divisions between institutions, because we have assumed that there is only one way for research and teaching to be connected, which is the Humboldtian nexus. But at the same time we contradict ourselves by accepting that there can be good research without teaching in some contexts, and good teaching without research in others. The way to resolve the contradiction is to let go of the narrow idea of the nexus.

At a system level, research, teaching and scholarship are inevitably connected in what we might call a macro-nexus. But that does not mean that every institution, every department, every unit should also be a micro-nexus in the same way. On the contrary, in an era of liquid modernity, with accessible institutions, mobile staff and internet communication truly creating a global village, it would be very strange if we insisted that the arrangements which might have been necessary in 19th century Germany were still the only acceptable mode of academic practice.

Instead we should acknowledge that there is a spectrum across which the mix of teaching and research in academic practice may vary all the way from 100% teaching to 100% research. But every academic at every point on the spectrum must be a scholar. As Emerson put it in *The American Scholar*:

“The scholar is that man who must take into himself all the ability of time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges.”

Academics must be informed about research which advances knowledge. And equally, they must be informed about teaching and professional practice which also advances knowledge, because we have learnt that the traditional Mode 1 linear model of knowledge production through research and dissemination through teaching sits alongside Mode 2 knowledge co-production, a messy process of collaboration and exchange involving academics, students, practitioners and many others. Good research depends on engagement with practice, as much as good teaching depends on engagement with research. So all academics must be scholars, acquainted with the whole range of academic practice however they spend their time, whether they do research, teaching, consultancy, knowledge exchange, public service or something else. It is scholarship that preserves the integrity of academic practice across a wide range of different contexts. So here is another question for groups to consider:

**How can we support and promote scholarship to underpin excellent teaching?**

In a recent article Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas argue that academic experience and academic identity is much messier than the official divisions between teaching, research, administration, knowledge exchange and so on, which structure what they call management ‘fabrications’ such as workload allocation models. They argue, and I agree, that the first priority in making sense of higher education is, as they put it, to ‘reassemble’ academic work from these artificial distinctions within what they describe as the core of academic work: ‘purposive disciplinary practice’.

So we need to find within that ‘purposive disciplinary practice’ the means of reintegrating our thinking. And once we start to think in these terms, we can see that there are indeed things which bind us together. Anne Scott’s splendid introduction today suggested three core values we would all endorse: respect, integrity and excellence. And there are other integrative academic values such as openness to challenge, rigour, and our ready acceptance of the falsifiability of knowledge in the pursuit of truth or the search for understanding.

These were the kind of values which von Humboldt identified as essential and which led him to argue that academic freedom was a necessary condition for successful academic practice. His
formulation was what the American philosopher John Searle later characterised as the ‘special theory’ of academic freedom, the need for academics to have certain rights of freedom of inquiry and expression which might not be available to every member of a repressive society. Searle, writing at the end of the 1960s, contrasted this with what he called the ‘general theory’ in which academic freedoms became indistinguishable from the general freedoms for every member of a modern democratic state.

But in the 21st century we are perhaps less certain about the extent of societal freedoms, as we see democratic Governments imprisoning people for years without trial, increasing levels of surveillance for citizens innocent of any crime, and increasing encroachment on the freedom of knowledge, with private companies claiming even the human genome as their intellectual property.

We need to reconsider the idea of academic freedom as a special liberty, to be exercised only by those who can show an academic purpose which requires it. Academic freedom should be exercised only in defined contexts. Some contexts are licensed by universities as sites for teaching or research, but some commercial contexts are now in effect licensed by Government. We have teaching and research in public universities, colleges of HE and FE colleges. But we also have teaching and research in private universities like Kaplan, Phoenix, and BPP, and we have private research laboratories.

We need to think about the kinds of academic freedom you need in each of those contexts. That would help us appreciate the full range of contexts where academics and students pursue ideas and search for understanding. The nature of academic practice varies between contexts, but everyone needs certain freedoms if they are to provide effective higher education in their context.

We need to work on the idea of academic freedom, to understand its dimensions and its range. Nowadays we are so illiterate in terms of academic freedom that some academics think they have a right to make controversial statements on anything, whether or not it falls within their field of expertise. And others think they can censor research and comment just because they find it objectionable or politically incorrect, even though it is legal.

We need a 21st century idea of academic freedom. That is more important than deciding where and how to draw the boundary between teaching and research, where to draw the boundaries between different kinds of scholarship, or where to draw the boundaries between different kinds of university. We need new ways of seeing the higher education world. I suggest we focus on the interplay between four ideas: academic practice; academic purpose; academic freedom; and academic context.

The narrowest freedom is associated with the narrowest purpose. In a commercial context where the purpose is high-level professional training, all you need is the freedom to draw on the results of other people’s research to instruct trainees in developing work-related skills.

In an industrial research laboratory, where the purpose is commercial problem-solving or new product development, the freedom to conduct applied research and development means closer working relationships and exchange between university and industry academics, with correspondingly greater freedoms for the commercial researchers.

In a college or Institute which offers higher education courses the broader purpose of education for individual development calls for the freedom for teachers to express controversial opinions without fear of retribution.
And in a university, where academic practice covers all kinds of research as well as teaching, academics can still claim the widest kind of academic freedom, to teach, research and publish in a spirit of untrammelled intellectual enquiry.

Conclusion

Back to those troublesome questions, this time with some suggested answers.

Why do most people say teaching is important, but think that most other people think research is more important? Because we live with reward systems which differentiate between the two instead of rewarding a balanced contribution to academic practice.

Why is it so hard to find effective ways to reward people for good teaching? Because our reward mechanisms are too far removed from the department, the only place where tacit knowledge about teaching performance can be understood and applied.

Why do some people who really want to be good teachers resist help from educational developers? Because some educational development is framed in an alienating structure disconnected from the realities of departmental academic practice.

Why is research funded at less than full economic cost thought of as ‘income generation’, while teaching that earns more than its full economic cost is not? Because preserving the R-T-S nexus as the gold standard incites most institutions to do more research, inhibiting broader ideas about the kind of academic practice needed in different contexts.

Why is it so hard to find evidence that teaching and research must go together to ensure the best higher education? Because contexts vary, and academic practice varies accordingly; there is no one best way.

And why, if we believe teaching and research must go together, do we allow hundreds of thousands of students to do HE courses in places where there is little or no research? Because we know that those students do get a good educational experience, but we cannot square that knowledge with our inadequate conception of a good higher education.

The dominant idea of the research-intensive university and the consequent separateness of teaching have made us concentrate too much on what we teach, and on how we teach, in a technical sense. That drives an understandable concern for the professionalization of teaching. But behind the drive for professionalization of teaching lies the bigger problem of the undervaluing of teaching in relation to research, and the undervaluing of institutions that do less research. Here’s one view of that problem of the valuation of teaching

“The series of oppositions that have grown up between teaching and research, and the increased funding gaps between research rich and poor institutions, have led to the association of mass education and widening participation with teaching-only, vocational, employability and lesser-status institutions, whereas research has become associated with high status, the imperative towards economic competitiveness, and the idea of ‘world-class universities. ... The invention of academic development as being primarily concerned with improving and valorising teaching only makes sense when viewed in this relatively recent context.”

We need to make sure that wherever this is an issue, it can be addressed, because if we don’t deal with it, it becomes the elephant in the sitting room. Academic development to make teaching better is obviously a good thing, but on its own it can’t compensate for the kind of inequalities which Sue Clegg’s comment highlights. Professionalising teaching is necessary, for the integrity of our own academic practice, but it is not sufficient to remedy those disparate valuations. Professionalization cannot overcome that problem, because the problem is rooted in the unnatural separation of teaching and research. Academic values are and should be paramount. We need therefore to pay less attention to what and how we teach, and more attention to why and where we conduct our academic practice. And we must pay more attention to how we do it, in the sense not of technical proficiency but of moral proficiency – what our values are, and how we exercise our academic freedom responsibly. We need to replace the research-teaching-scholarship nexus with a broader idea of higher education which recognises the range of academic practice and the necessity of academic freedom, conditioned by purpose and context. If we can’t manage to frame our discussion of teaching in this way, I believe we will fall short of excellence in teaching, because we will not be true to our academic values by maintaining the messy integrity of academic practice.

So let me conclude with some more suggested questions for the group discussion which comes next:

What are the academic purposes associated with the range of institutions within the Centre?

What range of academic contexts is represented within the Centre: what kind of academic practice, what mix of teaching, research and other activities, is characteristic of those contexts?

How has academic practice evolved, and how is it evolving, to support the achievement of different academic purposes?

What kind of academic freedom do we need for excellent teaching in these contexts, for these purposes?

References

Saunders M et al (2008) 2005-2010 Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning programme Formative evaluation report to HEFCE by the Centre for Study in Education and Training/Institution of Educational Technology: Professor Murray Saunders, Dr Joan Machell, Dr Sadie Williams, Dave Allaway, Abby Spencer, Dr Paul Ashwin, Professor Paul Trowler, Dr Joelle Fanghanel, Dr LesleyAnn
Morgan and Dr Anne McKee. September 2008  Bristol: HEFCE
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/evaluation/

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/rdreports/2005/rd23_05/rd23_05.doc
