

Solving the conundrum

Teaching and learning at British universities

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His many other activities include being on the First World War Centenary Culture Committee, established by the Culture Secretary in 2013, and governor of The Royal Shakespeare Company.

PREFACE: THE CONUNDRUM

What is the conundrum concerning teaching at universities in Britain? Put simply, it is how to enhance, professionalise and make more consistent the quality of teaching at British universities for undergraduates and postgraduates, without burdening universities with a heavy bureaucracy which will take excessive time and money, and run the risk of resulting in drab, formulaic teaching.

Why is change necessary? Because while much teaching is excellent, much could be improved; because universities are higher education, and education doesn't just happen—it needs serious thought and work; because too little is known about where the excellent and poor teaching is in universities today, and the quality of leadership from the top on teaching in universities is inconsistent; because the recent focus on research has tipped the balance, always precarious, from teaching to research; because solving the conundrum is not difficult if pursued the right way, as laid out here.

I am passionate about teaching, which is both an art and a science. I had some outstanding teaching at school and at Oxford, and some that was unacceptably poor because some teachers didn't know what they were doing and no one held them to account. After my doctorate at LSE, and some time as a research fellow there, I trained as a schoolteacher and was awarded the Teacher of the Year prize at King's College, London.

I was drawn to the subject of this booklet because of my own career spanning both schools and higher education. At both levels, I have very deliberately put the interests of the students first, which is key to solving the conundrum, and I believe that the best teachers in both schools and universities do exactly the same. I worked in schools for

thirty years—for nearly twenty years as head of two very fast improving institutions, Brighton College and Wellington College. Both are independent schools, though with considerable involvement in the state sector. For most of the time I was a head, I inspected schools for the Independent Schools Inspectorate, which used proven teachers practising in schools to inspect other institutions. I have spent much of the last thirty years working with university academics as editor of their work, both for journals and books, and as founder and first director of a research institution now at King's College, London—The Institute of Contemporary British History. I am now one of a very small number who have crossed over from running schools to heading a university, a small one admittedly, albeit the university which came top in the 2015/16 table on teaching quality produced by The Times and The Sunday Times. I believe that much teaching in British universities of all varieties is excellent, and that the academics I know mostly share a passion to teach their students as well as they can. Many are frustrated at the lack of priority given to teaching. There is considerable scope for greater professionalisation, sharing and learning within higher education, and between HE and schools.

The material presented here draws upon detailed questionnaires that I sent to twenty-five senior academics, a small number of whom wished to remain anonymous, the rest of whom are cited in the notes which follow. The booklet also draws upon the views of heads of sixth forms in schools, some one hundred of whom returned a questionnaire, sixty per cent of whom were from state schools, seventy per cent of whom said they were in contact with their former students after they joined university, and twelve per cent of whom said that they were in regular contact. It draws also on my own experience as a former head, sending several thousand students on to HE, and finally as a parent of three children who went through five British universities.

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Jo Johnson delivered his Green Paper called Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice in November 2015. One of the recommendations that has generated most interest was his proposal for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In a speech preceding the Green Paper, Jo Johnson said, “There must be recognition of excellent teaching—and clear incentives to make ‘good’ teaching even better. It is striking that while we have a set of measures to reward high quality research, backed by substantial funding (the Research Excellence Framework), there is nothing equivalent to drive up standards in teaching”.³ The minister has shown imagination and courage in making teaching such a prominent part of his programme, building upon the work of his predecessor, David Willetts. The Green Paper set out his proposals to reward excellent teaching with reputational and financial incentives. In his introduction to the Green Paper, Jo Johnson stated that the new Teaching Excellence Framework “will hard-wire incentives for excellent teaching” and give students “much more information” about the type of teaching they can expect.⁴ He is absolutely right to have given the question of teaching quality such a high priority.

Objections to the TEF can very broadly be separated into two kinds. When drawing up this list of objections, the questionnaires for this booklet were a major source of information.

Less substantial Objections

1. *It is impossible to distinguish meaningfully between high and low grade teaching.*

This is not true. Top quality teaching may be difficult to define to the satisfaction of all parties; the same can be true of

quality in research. We should not let the difficulties of achieving unanimous agreement obscure the need for defining and promoting excellence.

2. *Universities and academics are primarily for research; teaching is secondary.*

This statement might describe with some truth the reality of what happens today; Lord Rees of Ludlow, former President of the Royal Society, put it starkly, “Teaching is not given adequate weight in universities in Britain due to the perverse incentive of government pressure via the REF”.⁵ Demis Hassabis agrees: “What most academics want to do is not teach but to get on with their own research.”⁶ Research might well matter more for the career development of academics, and the league table standing of the universities; but teaching is certainly not secondary for students, nor is it for many academics who have felt their commitment to professional teaching has too often been marginalised.

3. *The Green Paper is trying to separate teaching and research.*

There was a groundswell of discontent from research-intensive universities in January 2016 that the Green Paper was trying to separate teaching and research. It would be a regressive step were this to happen, although we need to understand much more clearly what the links mean. Both should be mutually reinforcing. The final government proposals need to emphasise this.

4. *Highlighting teaching could bring real reputational damage to individual institutions and to the international standing of the sector as a whole.*

This is a weak objection. Transparency per se, and on such a vital aspect of universities as teaching, is not the problem. Having international students returning home complaining of

inadequate teaching is a far more legitimate worry. Visibility is one of the most powerful known drivers of enhanced performance.

5. *Attempts to enhance teaching are unwarranted encroachments upon the autonomy of individual institutions.*

But had HEIs been doing a better job on teaching across the board, the present intervention on TEF would not have been needed. Anyway, the proposals in this booklet will greatly enhance, not damage, university autonomy.

6. *The quality of teaching at universities is not amenable to improvement.*

Some believe that teaching is far too subtle and individual a process, and too personal to the individual academic, to be intruded upon by third parties. But the evidence clearly shows that where the academic is willing to learn, their teaching will improve.

7. *Teaching at university is of second-rate importance.*

Several respondents on the questionnaire commented how they had seen their own promotion prospects and that of others suffer by devoting too much time to teaching rather than research; “It generally hindered my career by taking part in activities such as acting as course leader that reduced available research time”, wrote Rebecca Allen, Director of Education Datalab.⁷ University lecturers have not considered themselves as teachers in the same way as have professionals in schools.

8. *The heterogeneity of the HEI sector.*

The lack of homogeneity of the sector indeed militates against any general programme to improve teaching quality. The

Russell Group is dominant and its voice carries particular weight with government. Steve West, Vice-Chancellor of the University of The West of England, put it thus: “Governments have tended to focus their attention on the highly selective universities, which fails to recognise the significant diversity of HE in the UK for student choice”.⁸ A widespread belief is that these top universities have to think less about what excellent teaching entails than less academic and more vocational institutions, yet it is these top institutions which carry the weight with government.

9. *It will increase workload.*

Some systems of enhancing teaching quality undoubtedly can be very time consuming. But as Stephanie Marshall, chief executive of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), has written, “If done properly, the TEF shouldn’t add to workload. It is about changing behaviours and culture to one based on continuous improvement and professional development”.⁹

10. *Students care greatly about research and benefit richly from it.*

Students certainly choose their universities largely on the basis of their reputation, and this reputation is based far more heavily upon research than on teaching. Universities eagerly promote their research stars on their websites and literature, but as Dylan Wiliam has observed, “The fact is most undergraduates rarely, if ever, get much teaching from the research stars. Yet students seem to accept this because they focus more on the qualification they will earn rather than what they will learn”. Students do care about the quality of their teaching. They would much sooner have somebody with a scant publication record who brings the subject to life rather than a Nobel Prize winner who can’t communicate. The HEPI/HEA survey last year asked a question about how greatly students value the research, teaching and enterprise

experience of their lecturers. Students replied that they value teaching first, enterprise second, and research consistently last.

More Legitimate Objections:

1. *Excellent teaching at university is more difficult to rate than excellent teaching at schools.* There is truth in this objection, because of the complexity of teaching at universities. Damage has also been done in schools to individual and imaginative teaching by insensitive compliance with supposedly objective measures of assessment.
2. *The complexity of any overly bureaucratic exercise distorts the quality of teaching and learning.* It is certainly true that the observer changes the observed when it comes to assessing teaching; although this problem can be mitigated, it is always present.
3. *The measures for excellent teaching in the TEF, with the focus upon proxies, do not measure the real quality of teaching.* The TEF can straightforwardly be developed to adopt more direct methods of assessing teaching as described below, without becoming intrusive or overly bureaucratic
4. *Inappropriate metrics will drive perverse incentives and damage high-quality teaching.* This has indeed happened to schools with overly regimented and insensitively applied inspections. Proxies for good teaching are inherently flawed—e.g. first-class degrees are not equivalent across the sector, and their proliferation has justifiably been criticised. Students can obtain Firsts with poor teaching. Putting too much stress on such “proxies” will lead to further inflation in top degrees.

Student satisfaction surveys as currently constituted are also flawed, and could be far more ambitious.

5. *Standards of excellence in teaching and lecturing are not widely agreed, and are not part of the TEF process.* This is a serious omission. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has carried out a number of teaching quality assessments subsequently termed “subject-reviews” of university departments with an associated grade or mark. But they have lacked rigorous assessment of actual teaching and lecturing quality and focus instead on compliance with quality assurance policies, which contribute little. “None of this or any subsequent institutional audit carried out by the QAA could be described as an initiative to improve the quality of teaching”, writes Paul Glaister of the University of Reading.¹⁰ But standards of what constitutes excellence can be created and agreed, and the lack of them remains a block to progress. The HEA’s National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), for example, does measure individual teaching excellence. The parameters were determined collaboratively over ten years ago and have been amended slightly through consultation over the years.
6. *One size cannot possibly fit all.* Teaching and learning at university can be segmented in three main ways, as discussed below. Lecturing is thus a very different activity to running a lab practical or supervising a doctorate. Teaching and learning, moreover, is different between and within the main fields of study—STEM, social sciences, humanities, and professional degrees. Finally, the range of HEIs and their teaching objectives differ widely—from research-intensive universities to others devoted primarily to teaching, with a mission to widen participation, increase social mobility, and advance practical employment skills. Some institutions,

notably in London, are highly specialised, e.g. music colleges, while others outside the capital can have very different and local missions. As Sean Harford, National Director for Ofsted put it, “It is a different job to educating students with three A ‘stars’ at A-Level with considerable social capital to educating students with qualifications such as BTEC with no family experience of university. The sector is multi-dimensional in its heterogeneity”.¹¹ Nevertheless, universal standards of excellence can be found even in the highly diverse university sector.

7. *The TEF will lead to the creation of 'factory' universities, trotting out dull and formulaic degree programmes.* An insensitive and inflexible system would indeed damage the rich quality and diversity of education that universities provide. In schools, the tendency to provide a 'factory' education has always been there, and was written about 160 years ago by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*. The focus on metrics has at worst accentuated this trend, and so could it at university if badly engineered. As Peter Scott has written, “It would lead to the growth of a new profession” of TEF managers skilled at “gaming” the new system.¹²
8. *The TEF will lead to an obsession with minimum standards.* Bodies which oversee quality in the NHS, social services, and beyond, have allowed themselves to become overly dominated by the requirement to meet minimum standards. While understandable, the obsession with the minimum can be, but need not be, at the cost of identifying and driving up top-level performance. The TEF will need to work with the quality assurance system to ensure that baseline standards are met, whilst also encouraging institutions to aim far above them.

Particular concern has arisen over the proposal to link increases in fees to performance on TEF. This is a fraught debate with merits on both sides of the argument. Advocates argue that only a linkage to fees will give the “teeth” that the proposals need for universities to take them seriously. Equally, outcomes on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) are tied to increases and decreases in income, so it would signal that teaching was considered less important if research continued to be tied to income but teaching was not. The other argument is that it can be unwarranted, intrusive and undignified to have greater professionalisation of teaching linked to fees when it should be an intrinsic part of what a university does. It would be quite wrong for universities only to care about teaching for reasons of extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation. On the subject of fees, the booklet argues that the enhanced and much more accurate information that students will receive on teaching if the proposals in the booklet are implemented will be a much better stimulus to enhance competition between universities. Greater numbers will want to join those universities ranked for teaching better, which will hence receive more revenue. It will give a huge injection of competition and choice.

The most hotly contested point is whether there is in fact any problem with teaching at universities that needs fixing, and whether Jo Johnson has thus sparked off an unnecessary debate. The model isn't broken, many believe, and doesn't need fixing. It is this fraught question, which is the subject of the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 2: BUT IS THERE A PROBLEM?

If universities are doing an excellent job on teaching already, and if accusations that they are not are mischievous and ill-informed, then there is no need for the TEF, and the debate that has ensued can only be damaging to the status of British universities. Many university leaders and academics believe this. I have certainly been accused of being hyper-critical of teaching—whistle blowing even—as have some others who have made the same case, as discussed below. I have consistently argued that much university teaching is excellent across the diversity of the UK higher education sector, although we do lack reliable data to give us an accurate picture, which is a core part of the problem. To say across the board, however, that teaching does not need to be improved is, I believe, complacent. Some Vice Chancellors have given outstanding leads on teaching, especially in the last ten to fifteen years, though it would be refreshing if more adopted the leadership approach of Derek Bok when President at Harvard. He was frank in his criticism of the quality and shortcomings of the teaching he found, made it clear he would not tolerate negligence, and invested in the Centre for Teaching and Learning.¹³

In the school sector there is a widespread assumption that the elite—especially the grammar schools and top public schools—are delivering excellent teaching purely because they achieve outstanding exam results. In my experience, the best teaching can often be found at those schools near the bottom of the league table, and the same may well be true in the university sector. The truth though is that we simply do not know, and therein lies the rub.

The discussion is in danger of becoming too heated and polarised. At worst, grandstanding and defensiveness is evident from the advocates at both ends of the argument. Some argue that it is a

dangerous assault on the liberty of universities and of academics to interfere in any way with their teaching or to suggest that it is less than wholly satisfactory. Among the more reasoned voices, Andrew Hamilton, the former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, has said that misguided attempts to improve the quality of teaching at university could damage the international standing of British universities. His successor, Louise Richardson, has criticised the proposals; “I very much worry about the bureaucratic burden it will impose on us universities, already weighed down with regulatory compliance”.¹⁴ Peter Scott, former editor of the THE, has written that “there is plenty of evidence to suggest that teaching is in a good state; high levels of student satisfaction, a rising proportion of students graduating with ‘good’ degrees, the attractiveness of UK higher education to international students, the high standing of UK higher education, and more. Punitive meddling by politicians will only damage this”.¹⁵

On the other side of the argument, voices say that the quality of teaching, even at the established Russell Group end of the market, is often not good enough, and that such universities think too much of their own international rankings which are based upon research, and too little on the learning experience of their students. Ann Mroz, another former editor of the THE, writes, “For academia, it’s all about the research. Universities value research because it’s what they are measured by... and academics value research because it’s what they are judged by. Teaching for many years failed to get much of a look-in, with lecturers repeatedly spurning attempts to give them compulsory training in how to teach. Why would you need training when you have deep subject knowledge (and when you can palm off teaching duties on your postgraduate students)?”¹⁶ Her predecessor as editor of the THE, Gerard Kelly, said: “Teaching at university would benefit from a much more professional approach: too often it is not good enough”.¹⁷ Tellingly, both Mroz and Kelly went on to edit the Times Education Supplement, where they saw first-hand the precision and rigour that goes into teaching in schools.

Research into what constitutes excellence in teaching and learning in schools has been extensive over the last twenty-five years. Research by New Zealander John Hattie on “visible learning” and his meta-analyses of effective teaching, and Dylan Wiliam of the Institute of Education on formative assessment, for example, have done much to enhance the quality of teaching in schools.¹⁸ Every head teacher sees themselves as the leader of teaching and learning, and should know in detail about the teaching quality of all their departments across the institution. Had the leadership of higher education been as determined and committed to improving the quality of education in their institutions in the last twenty-five years, this debate today about how to improve the quality of university teaching might not be happening.

Those who believe that teaching needs dramatic improvement find it hard, in the absence of reliable evidence, to prove that teaching is uneven and often not satisfactory. Jo Johnson, when challenged at the Business, Innovation, and Skills Committee in the House of Commons on 8 December 2015 for describing some university teaching as “lamentable”, cited the findings of the National Student Survey (NSS), the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) / Higher Education Academy (HEA) survey of students, as well as drop-out rates in support of his arguments¹⁹ (which defenders of the status quo argue demonstrate the opposite). Bahram Bekhradnia, HEPI President, when addressing the Royal Society, has similarly stated that universities are “not very good at teaching”²⁰, but did not produce clinching evidence in support of his case. Game, set, and match to the status quo? Some certainly think so. But those who believe that teaching is good enough are equally unable to provide the telling evidence that shuts down the debate. The mud being slung in each direction is lacking in substance. We simply do not know with any reasonable degree of accuracy whether teaching and learning at university is good enough, and which universities and departments

are excelling, and which are unsatisfactory. This is itself a core reason why change is needed.

The crucial piece of evidence that the status quo keeps citing as evidence that all is well with teaching is the finding in the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2015 that 86% of students studying in the UK are “satisfied” with the quality of their course. But I would argue that that is a relatively poor metric on which to base any kind of evaluation of the quality of teaching at university. This is not because student feedback is unreliable – the model I advocate in chapter five relies heavily on it – but because this particular response is remarkably woolly. “Fairly satisfied” as Graham Gibbs notes, “seems a pretty lukewarm judgment about three years of one’s life accumulating heavy debts. If the material was presented in a different way, with ‘very satisfied’ presented on its own, or a composite score that included the ‘fairly’ and ‘very dissatisfied’ ratings, the picture would look far less rosy. Anyway, ‘satisfaction’ bears a weak and unclear relationship to good teaching”.[i] The system is awash with bizarre examples of satisfaction performance shooting up or down at different universities, which cannot be explained by the quality of teaching changing as dramatically. Students are given very little information before and during their studies on what constitutes excellence in teaching. The NSS claims a reasonable level of reliability (in that students agree with each other) but it has not been demonstrated that it is valid: that it measures what it claims to measure. We should be sceptical about drawing any firm conclusions on the quality of teaching from the NSS as currently constituted, which is partly why it is being revised from 2017.

The word “universities” is derived from the Latin word “universitas”, denoting a community of teachers and scholars. From the very beginning of universities, teaching was at the core of the university experience. Throughout their existence, teaching and research have gone side by side. But in the last twenty-five years, research has

taken precedence in academics' promotion prospects, funding, and ranking of universities. While some universities have maintained an honourable commitment to taking their teaching seriously and professionally, others have not. For some academics, teaching is not a vital part of their daily life, but is an inconvenience. The sense of continuity between school and university, which existed from medieval times when students proceeded to university when they had completed their study of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, has weakened considerably. As my survey of heads of Sixth Form shows, schools no longer believe that universities have much interest in the education that goes on within them, and do not see themselves as part of the continuum.²¹

Universities should be every bit as much about the interests of the student as the academics. Yet it is abundantly clear in too many universities today that the leadership and the academics care far more about their research than about the quality of the learning experience of their students. This is the elephant in the room. There was a widespread if never fully thought-through expectation that increased competition between universities would benefit the student experience, including the quality of teaching. The introduction of student fees, equally, was intended in part to make students more discerning. Well, competitive forces have led to a greater focus on teaching quality, certainly, with some universities becoming leaders in the field. The Higher Education Academy, set up in 2003 to enhance teaching, has made a positive impact in bringing greater focus into teaching. But there can be little doubt that in some institutions and departments the commitment to teaching remains perfunctory. In part this is because students appear to give scant regard to measures of teaching quality when deciding their university choice. Would that it were different; my own institution—The University of Buckingham—was designated top in Britain for teaching quality, yet has to compete/work hard for every student it recruits.. As Alison Goddard (editor of HE) has written, “The most selective institutions don’t

compete for students; rather students compete for university places. Others recruit locally and are better shielded from competitive pressures”.²²

The heads of sixth forms polled in the survey say, by a ratio of 2:1, that the teaching is better now than when they were undergraduates. When asked which are the best subject areas for teaching at university, sixty-five per cent say it is in professional degrees, e.g. medicine and law, thirty per cent say in STEM subjects, five per cent in arts and humanities courses, and none in social sciences. This is a startling piece of evidence and merits serious reflection, even if the sample is relatively small. The heads of sixth form further believe that the volume of work is sufficient in professional degrees and STEM subjects, but believe by a ratio of almost 3:1 that it is insufficient in both humanities and social science degrees.²³

The research for this booklet, from the questionnaires and countless conversations, suggest that there is a real appetite for treating teaching more professionally, especially among academics themselves, but it meets resistance from leadership, especially at some of the research-intensive universities. Lynette Ryals, Pro Vice Chancellor-Education at Cranfield University, wrote, “UK universities pride themselves on the excellence of their teaching, and there is a lack of consensus that there really is a problem”.²⁴

This booklet is sympathetic to the concerns of UUK, GuildHE, the NUS, and others, to the proposals suggested. But the booklet is more impressed by the interests of students at large, and by the great majority of academics, who want to work in institutions which value professional teaching far higher than at present. This booklet thus produces a set of proposals which would transform the quality of teaching and learning at British universities and leave universities with more autonomy than they had before. Everyone would gain from

the proposals here—students, academics, universities and the country.

CHAPTER 3: PRACTICAL STEPS TO TACKLE THE FINANCIAL CAPABILITY CHALLENGE

Universities over the next ten to fifteen years will face fundamental challenges from digitalisation. They will need to adapt not only to online lectures and seminars, tutoring, and assessments, but also to the changed employment and societal requirements that the digital world will bring about. No longer will students be content with dull lectures when they can listen to the best lecturers in the world at the click of a button. Nor with dull seminars. As Demis Hassabis has said, “digitalisation is opening up the possibility of a whole new model for higher education”.²⁵ What students require from academics in this new world is to be actively engaged in active learning and stimulating exchanges. This will require a rethinking about the whole way that we go about higher education. Digitalisation will thus not only necessitate a new kind of approach to teaching, but also the requirement for constant updating and continuous professional development.

Further reasons for treating teaching at university more professionally are as follows:

1. *Teaching quality is currently uneven and could be improved:* We have already established that too little is known about the actual quality of teaching in universities. Far too much of the debate on

both sides has been anecdotal, or based upon unsatisfactory data. However, to assert, as I do, that teaching is uneven, does not mean that much teaching is not good or excellent. It would be a very brave person who would assert that teaching is currently good enough, consistent enough, and does not require attention; brave and wrong.

2. *Because the status quo and the voice of conservatism might sink any attempt at reform.* The risk is that senior figures in the Russell Group and other established institutions might succeed in defeating or delaying almost indefinitely Jo Johnson's lead on teaching, largely on the grounds that there is no suitable method for assessing teaching quality, and that attempts to compare institutions based upon sub-standard information will be unfair, misleading, and quite possibly damaging to those institutions, as well as to the sector as a whole. The concern is perfectly understandable and reasonable. The problem lies not in the Green Paper's intent but in its methodology. This booklet proposes alternative methods.
3. *The proposals in the Green Paper are top-down and out of sympathy with the tradition of university autonomy.* It is indeed ironic for a Conservative government, ideologically committed as conservatives are to a smaller state, to be introducing top-down governmental initiatives. Rather, the government should be encouraging institutional responsibility and self-improving universities, who are themselves fundamentally driving their own improvements in teaching. The proposals outlined in this booklet are thus bottom-up rather than the reverse.
4. *Imbalance between research and teaching:* Universities are institutions of Higher Education. Their concern should be with both research and teaching. It is hard to deny, though, that the odds are unfairly stacked in the interests of research. Many V-Cs, especially

of the older institutions, would say that they prioritise research above teaching because that is how their institutions, as well as their own performances, are ultimately judged. But research is not more important than teaching. They should be equally important, and currently they are not. Paul Blackmore, Professor of Higher Education at King's College London, has written recently, "There can be a tension between activity that gains prestige for the institution and activity that is cost-effective and efficient". He notes that research is always valued more highly than teaching, in both pre- and post-1992 institutions, and asks, "What happens when the glittering prizes of research excellence are set alongside the need to teach students well?"²⁶

5. *Academics can be trained to teach better:* Doing so considerably enhances the job satisfaction of the academic in their capacity as a teacher, and it enhances the experience and learning of the student. It is naïve to imagine that just because some academics can naturally pick up how to teach and lecture to a high standard, that all can do so without training. At the heart of enhancing teaching is self-reflection. The aim in this booklet is to motivate the academic intrinsically, so that they want to develop their own motivation to improve their teaching over the course of their careers, rather than extrinsically, i.e. fear of falling foul of those in authority.
6. *Undergraduates care more about good teaching than research.* Undergraduates, notably those who are more academic, can be delighted and inspired when the lecturing and teaching offers insights into cutting edge research conducted by the academic themselves or their department. They might well be swept up by the excitement of being close to the frontiers of knowledge, and inspired themselves to consider undertaking their own research degree. But for many students—a majority no doubt—cutting-edge research is not primarily what they care about. The digital

revolution means that they can now read about state-of-the-art research on the internet, and listen to the leading world figures on their subject give lectures on YouTube. What students want is at best excellent, and at worst competent, teaching and structuring of their course material.²⁷ Too much emphasis in undergraduate courses upon the latest research by the academic—while maybe fascinating and rewarding to the academic—can be at the expense of students understanding the wider breadth of the subject. It might well be an error to assume that most students are more interested in hearing about the micro research of the academic teaching them than in engaging with the whole wealth and breadth of what the greatest minds in the subject have thought and written over the years.

7. *Students are paying for their courses.* Tuition fees were first introduced across the UK in 1998. The level was increased in 2004, with further increases being permitted from 2012. Tuition fees, one might reasonably assert, heighten the expectation of the student to receive good teaching. But where they are not paying fees, as they no longer do in Scotland, students still have the entitlement to the best possible teaching.
8. *Technological developments.* Academics are in danger of becoming out of step with the digital lives of their students unless they keep up with the latest technological advances. Systems like Panopto allow lectures to be routinely recorded, notes captured, and shared with students. Feedback to students is enhanced by online learning environments such as Moodle, and Blackboard, which allow academics to monitor the take-up. As Alison Goddard has written, “These new technologies mean that tutors who fail to support their tutees can be readily identified, motivating those who needed a nudge to do more for their students”.²⁸ Artificial Intelligence (AI) learning will be the next big education sea-change at universities over the next horizon, as I describe in my

forthcoming *Fourth Education Revolution*,²⁹ and as Rose Luckin has written about in her *Mainstreaming Innovation in Educational Technology*.³⁰ But already, technology just in the last decade has transformed teaching. The availability of lectures and talks on the internet will make even more impact upon lecturing than they have currently. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and distance learning, video conferencing, Skype, and the rest, are powerful teaching and learning tools when used well by academic and student.

- 9.** *Universities have not led uniformly strongly on teaching.* Had Vice-Chancellors provided uniformly strong leadership on teaching over the last two decades, the TEF may not have been needed. All Vice-Chancellors must be champions of excellent education, specifically teaching. “Vice-Chancellors”, Sir David Bell, V-C of Reading, has said, “have to show leadership by words and deed when it comes to leading the improvement of teaching and learning. They should not be doing so because of TEF / more money / higher reputation, but simply because it is the right thing to do”.³¹ Well said, and brave too. The V-C is the executive leader, and, with respect to their lead on teaching, should ensure that they report to governors on teaching quality and performance. Vice-Chancellors are responsible for the culture of their organisation, and they should be engendering cultures where their whole university is committed to improving teaching and learning. Given the complexity and size of most universities, and the short tenure of many V-Cs, in practice, much of the detailed work on driving improvements in teaching will come from heads of faculty. When appointing them, the skills of leading improvements in teaching need to be ranked very highly.
- 10.** *The current procedures and metrics currently in place need reform.* The QAA has provided regulatory oversight for quality assurance of teaching in higher education, and performs a function in maintaining baseline standards. But the QAA does not adequately

oversee teaching quality at university. It is altogether inadequate as a body trying to drive up teaching standards. Universities engineer their quality assurance processes on teaching quality to satisfy QAA, but it is a very unambitious and uninspiring system to enhance teaching quality. It does not work on peer review, and fails to be sufficiently challenging or encouraging to those universities who enhance their own systems to drive up standards. The QAA's authority, for all the good work it does, has to some extent been undermined by its bureaucracy, its failure to prevent degree classification inflation, or to do a better job ensuring comparability of degree standards between universities teaching the same subject. All this has led to criticism, not the least by parliament. Professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), have played a more important role in ensuring quality and consistency of teaching. The HEA equally plays a part in trying to enhance teaching quality, at both individual and strategic level. But many V-Cs pay only lip-service to the HEA, and it has lacked the funding and the teeth to ensure that V-Cs take their responsibility for teaching more seriously. The work of the HEA has been further undermined by the unwillingness of senior reviewers and panel members to become involved in their work. As Steve West has written, "there is concern that panels often lack the experience and understanding of modern approaches to learning and teaching, and tend to focus instead on rather simplistic models and audit trail".³² Student feedback data equally needs to be changed. The status given in Britain to student feedback is a consequence of the inadequate quality of the data that is being currently collected, rather than the potential quality of student feedback per se as an objective and reliable guide. It is patronising and wrong to imagine that students cannot be trusted to make fair and well-informed judgments about the quality of the teaching that they are receiving; but the process needs to be set up in the right way, as explained below.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING?

Teaching at university varies as it does at schools, though at the latter it is a more uniform exercise. Schools may deal with a wider age range than universities—dealing with students aged 3-18—but all follow, more or less, a national curriculum, and are on track for the taking of uniform national exams at the ages of sixteen and eighteen. School teaching takes place mostly in classrooms, occasionally in laboratories, studios or outside, and almost always to groups varying in size between ten and thirty.

Academics at university, in contrast, find themselves involved in five very different exercises:

1. **Lectures**, given often to large numbers, with interaction generally left to the end when there may or may not be questions.
2. **Seminars**, which are generally academic-led, and which might take place in groups typically between five and thirty in number, and which most resemble the teaching experience in the school classroom. The academic is the dominant figure in the seminar room, and guides content and use of time. Student interactions are frequent. Assignments may well be set and feedback given individually or collectively.

3. **Tutorials**, which are classically one-on-one, or one on two/three. This form of learning is common still at Oxbridge, with the student or students presenting their assignments and the academic commenting upon them. Such tutorials tend to be more common in the humanities and social sciences than in STEM subjects.
4. **Research supervision**, which again requires a very different range of skills from the academic. It occurs most commonly in supervision of higher degrees (MPhil/DPhil, research Master's), but similar skills are required from the academic overseeing undergraduate dissertations.
5. **Science, IT, and other practical sessions**. Here the academic may be using IT to deliver some or all of their programme to the student. IT is, as we have seen, transforming lecturing, seminar giving, tutorials, and research supervision, as well as assessment at university, and the gulf in understanding of the new technology and its possibilities can become wide between students and academics. Practical sessions occur principally but not exclusively in lab classes in science degrees, with professional courses, creative subjects, and physical education. The skills of running an acting class, a sports practice or a medical simulation require very individual skills.

Teaching is further different at university to school in the five main fields that universities cover:

1. **STEM subjects**. Academics aim to bring undergraduates by the end of the course to the frontiers of knowledge in the subject studied, e.g. in Physics. But even within STEM, the skills required of, say, a Mathematics academic are very different from those of an academic teaching Biological Sciences. As science has such a vast body of knowledge to convey, the set-piece lecture is a particularly important device for the conveying this solid body of knowledge.

2. **Social Sciences.** The teaching methodology has similarities with that of STEM, with some of the individual subjects quantifiable, but the role of opinion and subjectivity is far higher in the social sciences and the evidence often less verifiable.
3. **Humanities.** Here the academics aim to inspire their students to understand and resonate with the work of the best minds in each discipline. Methods of achieving this, and assessing the quality of students' work, are very different to STEM and social sciences.
4. **Professional subjects,** including Medicine, Law, and Accountancy. Here, the professional bodies responsible for overseeing quality in each dictate much of what is taught and the way it is taught at university. There is a considerable body of knowledge to be assimilated for each subject, which students need to master before passing on to the next level. The teaching is less open-ended, and has more in common with training. The best university teaching engages the students intellectually and actively.
5. **Performance and visual subjects,** e.g. Music, Dance, Art, and Sport. Teaching in this area again requires very different skills including often a commanding physical presence, physical stamina and high-level practical skills.

Finally, assessing teaching quality at university is further complicated because of the very different natures and purposes of the institutions. Many of the older public universities are research-intensive, such as Oxford and Cambridge, and have very little in common with newer universities across the country, which may be deeply embedded in their local economies and societies, and in preparing students for work. Most universities are HEFCE funded, although they are autonomous, and are heavily involved with private industry. Amongst the alternative providers, some are "not for profit", like Regent's and Buckingham, which runs humanities courses and conducts research,

and has a medical school, while most other private universities are offering professional qualifications, e.g. BPP University in London, which offers law, business, health and other programmes. Most universities teach both undergraduate and postgraduate level, though some, e.g. Cranfield, exist just for postgraduates. Britain does not yet have a tradition of outstanding teaching-only universities, as in the USA, e.g. Amherst.

Is Teaching a Profession?

Teaching at university is not currently regarded as a profession, in that it lacks uniform registration, regulation and professional oversight. At schools, it is much closer to being a profession, albeit resisted by the independent sector which believes that formalised registration and initial training should not be imposed, and that learning may be best done on the job, which underpins the approach of Teach First, School Direct, and other school-led training schemes. Formal qualifications anyway are no guarantee of quality at school as at university: some of the poorest teachers may have several degrees and qualifications in leadership. Schools are mainly about teaching, whereas university in contrast is about much more – above all, research. What might be appropriate for teaching in schools in terms of professional qualifications is thus not necessarily appropriate at university.

The HEA has worked hard to enhance the professionalism of university teaching. Stephanie Marshall, its chief executive, is very clear: “Teaching is a profession (although it is not yet properly recognised as such) and is underpinned by the HEA’s Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)”.³³ Thirty per cent indeed of teaching staff at universities are accredited against this standard. She believes the next step is to bring about a chartered membership body, as in professions such as law and medicine, which would require regular monitoring to ensure that academics “remained in good standing”. As one of her HEA colleagues has said,

In all other areas of professional practice, a professional body that helps to establish, develop and maintain standards is seen as a positive benefit. In HE, it is seen as an imposition on institutional autonomy. There is an odd mentality at play here. Ultimately, if the sector does not self-regulate to improve standards (as professions self-regulate through professional bodies) it will have an external body mechanism forced upon it.³⁴

HEA has undoubtedly raised the prominence of teaching at university. It is not without its detractors, however, some of whom believe that it is too easy for academics to become accredited teachers without sufficient rigour or monitoring or assessment of the quality of their actual delivery to students.

Further questions about whether university teaching is a profession arise because there is no agreed body of knowledge in teaching akin to law or medicine, nor mechanisms of research accumulation to produce such a body of knowledge, and no shared language of description.³⁵ A more fundamental concern is whether it would be appropriate to have an external body enforcing standards. Being an academic may be akin to belonging to a profession, but how can, critics assert, the profession apply to just one half of the job, the teaching side, and not to the other, the research role? The model advocated in this booklet is one of self-improving institutions, developing their own standards of excellence and assessment at teaching within agreed frameworks.³⁶

It may thus be inappropriate and unnecessary, as well as perhaps unachievable, to make teaching at university into a profession, with close regulation and monitoring. But that does not mean that teaching at university cannot be treated much more *professionally*. The continuation of the “talented amateur” approach, where somehow we

imagine that the academic will pick up the craft of teaching as they go along, flies in the face of the evidence that suggests that the quality of teaching and the learning experience can be dramatically improved by serious application. The quality of reflectiveness, powerfully described by Donald Schon of MIT in his book *The Reflective Practitioner*, is a core ingredient of taking teaching professionally.³⁷ Philosopher Harry Brighouse, formerly at the Institute of Education and now at UW-Madison in the USA is clear that teaching needs to be taken more seriously at university. He deplores how “typically, actual, well informed, high quality, training in teaching is a low priority... it should be a higher priority, and we could do it better (the training, and the teaching)”. His discourse, “Teaching’s not exactly brain surgery, is it?” distils much of the wisdom for taking university teaching seriously.³⁸ Every university needs to take its responsibility for teaching its academics to teach professionally with far higher priority than is the case today, Brighouse argues, whether they are research-intensive universities, or not. When we have the same rigour applied to the identification and nurturing of excellent teaching, as we have today in excellent research, real progress will have been made.

I conclude on the moral responsibility of university leaders. The neglect by some universities of their responsibilities for leading teaching quality has resulted in the experience of many students being diminished. We will never know the numbers who have left university with their minds and imaginations underdeveloped because of lacklustre and uninspiring teaching. The moral responsibility for the university in teaching to the very best of its ability is profound and it goes far beyond the turning out of young people prepared for the job market. But it is also academics themselves who have suffered and had their careers distorted by the cavalier neglect of professional teaching in too many university departments. Too many academics, lacking proper training, have felt avoidably uncomfortable in front of students and have opted instead for expensive early retirement

schemes. Had these academics been properly led in their teaching, they would have enjoyed more fulfilling and longer careers.

Is teaching more difficult to assess than research?

Excellent teaching might ultimately be impossible to define objectively to the satisfaction of all parties. But I have argued above that it is no more impossible to identify than excellent research, which is also ultimately subjective and conditional. We have allowed ourselves to fall into a trap of believing that the difficulty of defining and assessing excellent teaching means that the whole process is impossible, while not applying the same rigour as has taken place in evaluating the quality of research. True, research becomes public for all to see, whereas teaching remains private between the academic and the student (although the internet now means that all academics' lectures and classes are potentially available for all to see). One might assume, nevertheless, that the very visibility of research means that it is easier to establish reliable judgments of quality. But it is equally important to the student that they are taught well, and each university has a profound moral responsibility to ensure that the teaching is as good as it can possibly be, and this will only happen with defined standards of excellence against which the teaching can be measured.³⁹

Must research quality suffer with a new emphasis upon teaching?

It is widely believed that research quality will suffer if teaching is to be taken more seriously and professionally. But is this true? Rebecca Allen “found teaching useful in forcing me to keep abreast of developments in literature beyond my own research specialism”.⁴⁰ Sir David Bell believes there is “an important symbiosis between teaching

and research which can only help both”.⁴¹ Andrew George is concerned that the Green Paper (as well as the Nurse Review of research councils) might create an artificial distinction between teaching and research, which should both be interlinked.⁴² Paul Glaister argues that placing a higher emphasis upon teaching quality should have no impact upon research; any lecturer who is passionate about research has much to gain by fully engaging in the process of delivering high quality teaching.⁴³ Peter Scott agrees: “Research and teaching are both aspects of critical / scientific enquiry. There should be no competition between teaching and research”. Clearly, some young academics are encouraged by heads of department to focus upon their research for the sake of their careers. Many academics worry that if they give too much time to teaching they will no longer have the time to do their research properly. But one of the many boons of learning how to teach properly is that academics learn how to teach smartly and effectively, which is time-efficient. The induction training for new academics should also focus upon how they can most usefully integrate their research into their teaching, and how teaching can best inform their research. If academics learnt how to explain their subject better to students, their powers of communication in their research writing, and their understanding of the breadth of their subject, would be immeasurably enhanced. As Dylan Wiliam says, “The continued pressure to explain my ideas to students in accessible ways forces me to become clearer about my ideas. I couldn’t research if I did not teach”.⁴⁴ Philosopher Anthony O’Hear agrees: “My teaching has not infrequently led me to develop my thinking, make it more precise, subtle and sophisticated, and even to change my mind. All this suggests a continuum between research and teaching”.⁴⁵

It’s instructive that the heads of sixth forms believed overwhelmingly that research has priority above teaching at universities, with over eighty per cent of those who expressed an opinion believing that universities were not treating teaching with sufficient seriousness.⁴⁶

Can academics be taught to teacher better?

HEA have examined the extent to which enhanced pedagogy at university enhances the learning of students, with inconclusive results. Professor Rose Luckin of the UCL Institute of Education, concludes, “The evidence is currently opaque”.⁴⁷ The evidence from schools, however, is clear that teaching can be improved if the individual concerned has the will to learn.⁴⁸ This belief, even without solid evidence, is equally strong in many universities, which underlies the substantial infrastructure at many universities focused upon improving teaching quality. The motivation of the individual academic to improving their teaching is key. Most academics are keen to take their educational role seriously and to understand how to improve both teaching and lecturing. But for a proportion of academics, the motivation and perhaps self-belief is not present, or the belief has taken root that teaching is not for them, and that their career and reputation will be built upon the quality of their research and writing. The solution is partly the use of incentives, and partly the skills of the leaders. But there needs to be also an honest admission that, in the final analysis, some academics, like some aspirant school teachers, are simply unsuited to the job of teaching. It is equally true, as at schools, that some of the best teachers at universities have never been formally trained, while some of the worst have managed to pass through various accreditations, e.g. by HEA, even with flying colours. Some universities run strict teacher training courses which have to be passed as a requirement for probation and tenure.⁴⁹ But Huxley and Peacey argue that any such teacher training at university will be less important than the encouragement of a *culture* which respects and values good teaching.⁵⁰ Rapid changes in technology, which will continue over at least the next decade, also make some form of teacher-training vital. Learning about the “flipped” classroom, (where the students absorb the course material in their own time, and seminars are then devoted to discussions led by the teacher, based on the material studied) or “blended learning” (where students learn

through digital and online media alongside traditional academic teaching), simulations and other digital advances all require new pedagogical understandings from the teachers.⁵¹ Academics setting out on their careers have much to learn about how to structure material, ask challenging questions, use their voice and presence, design modules, and how to set and mark formative and summative assessment. Learning how to use your voice well is a skill all academics need to learn. William Richardson sums it up, “The transition from doctoral/post-doctoral research to the responsibilities of full lectureship can be very daunting and disorientating”.⁵² Hence the need for structured learning.

Can anything be learnt from schools?

The questionnaires from heads of sixth forms indicate that they are not very impressed by the degree of learning from, and interaction with, schools. It consists often in little more than universities making visits to market themselves to sixth formers. Two thirds of those who responded said that they believe that universities were “not very interested” in what goes on in schools and colleges, especially about the curriculum, learning, and teaching methods. Twenty-five per cent said that universities were “quite interested”, two per cent “very interested”, and seven per cent “not interested at all”. Eighty-seven per cent of heads of sixth form said that universities “have much to learn from schools”, and thirteen per cent said that they didn’t know.⁵³ It may well be that there is an increased readiness to engage amongst the younger generation of university leaders, although the evidence is inconclusive. There is still too much separation between both levels – schools are as much to blame as universities. Some old-style university academics appear still to consider themselves “above” schools, and, if they were willing to be open, would admit that they find schools rather uninteresting. This truth was encapsulated when I asked the Universities Minister about the poor take-up from universities for the Sunday Times Festival of Education, which

covered both schools and universities, when I began in 2010. His reply was as disarming as it was direct: “You have to understand that most universities don’t really like coming into schools, but they will not tell you that”.⁵⁴

Several of the respondents on the university questionnaire replied that there was not much that could be learnt because universities are about “independent study”, and schools are not. This view is doubly incorrect. At best, much teaching in the sixth form, and sometimes below it, is encouraging students to study independently. The existence of extended essays, mandatory in the International Baccalaureate (IB), and common at A-Level, is an aspect of this ambition. Too many universities, in my own experience of twenty years as a head, remain ignorant about the IB, as well as what was happening in sixth forms in general. Additionally, it is naïve and wrong to say that university life is about independent study. It should be far more than it is at present. Too much learning by undergraduates at university is very far from independent study. The expansion of HE has made undergraduate life much more akin to the school sixth form than before: “Universities have more in common with sixth forms than they may realise”, as Alan Smithers put it.⁵⁵

Universities at best are certainly much more concerned than schools with the development of questioning and inquisitive minds. But this is the culmination, not a qualitatively different exercise, of the teaching and learning that has taken place at schools from primary level onwards. University academics, and school teachers, have much to gain from regular meetings to discuss subjects of mutual interest, in particular curriculum, teaching styles, assessment, and modes of learning. More radically, I propose academics be seconded to spend short periods in schools, and suitable schoolteachers be seconded to spend time observing, and yes, doing some teaching, to undergraduates. Academics might well be surprised by the academic calibre of schoolteachers, as well as by the research and evidence-

driven thought put into teaching in the classroom, the widespread use of performance and tracking data to improve student and teacher performance, the use of formative and summative assessment, the eagerness of schoolteachers to learn and improve, and their commitment to professional development. Andrew George writes, “There is at present remarkably little mutual understanding between both sectors, though many schools and universities are now working to overcome it”.⁵⁶ Recognition that teachers at schools and at universities are both part of a common endeavour would be a mutual gain.

The most common remarks that came forward from heads of sixth forms in the survey were that the quality of teaching varies very considerably between and within universities, there is insufficient contact-time with students, school students need more help with the transition to their university, HEIs should focus less upon marketing and more upon education, they should do more to heed the students’ demand for “value for money”, and the quality of teaching is heavily dependent upon the individual academic, above all.⁵⁷

CHAPTER 5: TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

The conundrum revisited

This booklet opened talking about a conundrum—how to enhance and professionalise the often excellent teaching at university without creating an excessive bureaucracy that would suck in resources, distract universities from their core tasks, and result in dull and formulaic teaching. The ten recommendations below show how the conundrum can be solved. These ten recommendations emerge out of the preceding five chapters. They are in approximately descending order of importance, though some cannot meaningfully be weighed against others.

It is important to clarify what this booklet is *not* recommending:

1. It is not recommending top-down and inflexible regulations to which all universities must comply for teaching. Doing so would be severely damaging to the autonomy and the individuality of universities in Britain. Universities in Germany and France, and in the Far East, are overly regulated and are given insufficient freedom and autonomy. Ultimately, if the TEF proposals are too inflexible, they will lose credibility amongst universities, and universities will opt out.
2. It is not recommending “an Ofsted for Higher Education”, composed of “teaching experts” who descend for periodic visitations upon universities. Ofsted has done much overall to improve the quality of the education experience of young people at

school, and to improve poor performance by teachers. But such a body would not be in sympathy with the traditions of independence in higher education, nor does it respect the traditions and work on teacher excellence in our universities. The learning experience from schools is that the emphasis should be placed on self-assessment and self-improvement rather than on reliance on external bodies.

3. It is not recommending a one-size-fits-all framework. Universities are vastly different bodies, as is the nature of the education that goes on within them.
4. It is not recommending revolutionary change. The proposals listed below are organic evolutions rather than a revolution. They seek to make general what the best universities, best Vice-Chancellors, and best departments, are already doing. They are based upon the assumption that however good the teaching in a university might be, it can be improved by systematic and regular attention.
5. It is not recommending that teaching becomes more important than research. “The ambition of placing teaching on an equal footing with research is a long standing one”, writes Bill Rammell,⁵⁸ dating back to the Robbins report of 1963 and before. The argument throughout this booklet has been that teaching should be as important as research. Because this has transparently not been achieved in too many universities today, further changes have to be made.
6. It is not recommending that “proxies” be used to measure teaching quality, e.g. results, retention rates, and employability. Rather, the spotlight is put squarely on performance in the seminar room, lecture hall, studio, and laboratory. The quality of teaching and lecturing needs to be assessed when it is being delivered, rather than indirectly, for a whole variety of reasons which the booklet

has explained. Degree results, retention rates and employability should all be assessed and listed for public consumption, but separately from teaching. In the school sector, some schools at the bottom of league tables with the poorest A-Level results have the best teaching, and some at the top can have the most complacent teaching. Essentially, the ablest students will get the best results even if taught by those with little aptitude for teaching.

7. It is not recommending a link between performance to fees. If teaching becomes properly assessed, as described in this booklet, this will be competitive stimulus enough to ensure that universities, individual departments, and teachers improve their teaching quality, without the need to have a linkage to fees.
8. It does not recommend assessing teaching quality by “learning gain”, which can be defined as “the improvement in knowledge, skills, work-readiness, and personal development made by students during their time spent in higher education”.⁵⁹ This is not because it is unimportant that learning gain is measured; the improvement in students during their time at the university is obviously a vital measure of the added value that the university has provided. But in practice, it is impossible to say how much of any learning gain is down to an individual teacher. Therefore, learning gain should be a measure of the performance of the university as a whole, but not be part of the assessment of teaching.

A new model for assessing teaching

Vastly different though teaching thus is across different subjects, universities and departments, all excellent teaching will face the following ten characteristics, which I term the “Big Ten”. Producing such a list is not easy, and a word of caution is appropriate. Dylan William, having immersed himself in the literature on teaching, says “I’d struggle to find anything, any single thing, that is an essential

single ingredient of good teaching at university, or elsewhere”.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, I would venture, based upon my own lifetime immersed in education, that all good teaching exhibits these following ingredients, which I term “the Big Ten”.

1. Engagement of all students. In the digital age, it is more vital than ever that teachers learn how to actively engage the attention of their students.
2. Deep teacher subject knowledge, informed by the latest research / scholarship. Digitalisation means that students more than ever before can have access to information in real-time. Teachers need, as never before, to be on top of their fields, and to have a depth of understanding, in order to set the ubiquitous information into context.
3. Clarity of teacher exposition / organisation, and understanding of course requirements. Far too often, teachers can be unclear in their communication, or can fail to spread the material to be studied out over the time available in a balanced way. Students need to feel complete confidence that their teacher understands what they need to learn, and the pace at which learning is to take place.
4. Forging of positive relations, and a genuine and felt desire to see students make progress. Students learn better when they have a good relationship with their teacher. Students have a right to feel that their teachers have a positive interest in their academic development.
5. Willingness and skill at engaging in discussion and debate, and asking challenging questions. The best teachers know how to pose the questions that make the

students think. Great teachers let the students work out the answers, rather than tell them the answers themselves.

6. Highest expectations which stretch all students. The best teachers know exactly how high each student can aspire, and helps them to achieve at that level.
7. Setting and assessment of purposeful and relevant assignments. Assignments are vital as a way of testing understanding, and consolidated learning. Assessment by the teacher needs to show the student what they need to do to improve.
8. Ability to communicate in a differentiated way appropriate to the capabilities and potential of students. Classes are made up of students of vastly different capabilities and needs. The great teacher understands each individual student and addresses them appropriately. Learning is the end, and the best teachers help the student to become autonomous learners.
9. Promotion and achievement of independent learning, recognising that most learning will take place away from the academic.
10. Technical mastery, e.g. a voice that projects well and is audible, and mastery of technology. There is no point in having teachers, however brilliant and empathetic, if they cannot be heard clearly, or if they can't use technology appropriately.

The five levels

Teachers should be confidentially assessed by two methods discussed below, under these ten headings, in a five-point criteria based roughly on the levels used in the REF.

Four stars	The teaching succeeds to an outstanding degree in achieving the criteria in the Big Ten. The teaching ranks among the very best in the university.
Three stars	The teaching quality is a very good standard, but exhibits aspects for improvement.
Two stars	The teaching is generally good, allowing the students to make progress in their learning. But it is not inspiring or notably motivating.
One star	The teaching is acceptable only. Students make progress but patchily and at too low a level.
Unclassified	The teaching quality is unacceptable. Students do not make progress and lack full confidence in the quality of the teacher.

It is important to re-emphasise that teaching and learning are *different*. Much of the learning that undergraduates - and postgraduates - benefit from while at universities will be divorced from the formal teaching experience. Academics should celebrate and encourage this fact as part of their mission to develop independent learning. Students should be helped to learn on their own as a deliberate policy rather than haphazardly. Students should not have to

resort to independent learning only when the teaching is inadequate. In my own case, my highest mark in my PPE finals at Oxford in 1976 was on the paper on which I relied almost exclusively on my A-Level notes.

The ten recommendations

1. *Vice-Chancellors become squarely responsible for leading the quality of the teaching and learning experience within their institutions.* Leadership from the Vice-Chancellor is sine qua non if we are to see a step-change in the quality of teaching. Some Vice-Chancellors fulfil this task with gusto, emulating the example of Derek Bok at Harvard. All V-Cs must be seen to take a visible and highly professionally-informed lead on the quality of teaching and learning in his or her institution. In different institutions, according to their constitutions and structures, some responsibility for oversight of this role will fall on governing bodies, councils and senates. It is essential that heads of faculty and departments are seen to provide visible leadership of the teaching by academics who they oversee. In an ideal world, V-Cs and other senior leaders themselves would teach, as is the practice in some US universities, including Princeton and Yale, but practicalities can militate against this. University departments should place their philosophy and approach to teaching on their website for prospective and current students to view.
2. *Responsibility for improving teaching quality is placed upon each university to be a self-improving institution, and upon academics' intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation.* The TEF should strengthen, not undermine, universities' autonomy and sense of professional responsibility. That means the onus should be placed on universities to devise and monitor their own proposals within a common framework based upon self-evaluation. Every academic entering universities should understand their responsibility and commitment to continual professional development of the quality

of their teaching, and that it is a core part of their job. Every teaching academic should produce a self-assessment of their teaching at the end of each academic year, based on the Big Ten, and should discuss their evaluation with a more experienced colleague within their department. By making motivation intrinsic, rather than external and heavy-handed, resistance is reduced and genuine commitment to good teaching enhanced. Good teachers, after all, are trying to instil intrinsic motivation of learning in their students, rather than allowing the extrinsic motivations of good results and good jobs to be all important.

- 3.** *Each teaching academic should be assessed on the quality of their teaching under specific headings devised by the university (modelled on the “Big Ten”).* Every teaching academic will have their teaching assessed every three years. Evaluation will be based upon two equally weighted measures, according to how well the teacher performs on the Five Level scale, as set out in this chapter. First, experienced academics with proven records of excellent teaching should “peer review” the teaching by fellow academics within their institution, taking significantly into account the academics’ own annual self-evaluations. Second, students assess the teaching of the academics from whom they are learning. Once the university has drawn up its own criteria of teaching excellence, based on the Big Ten, they should be made known to students early in their university careers. Understanding these criteria will assist students in comprehending better how learning takes place, and how to recognise and value it. Even undergraduates as young as eighteen are mature and responsible enough to rate their teachers fairly and accurately. Validation of the internally assessed grades takes place by outsiders, and is similar to the validation by external examiners with awards of degree grades. The external validators will be made up of academics from other universities with a proven track-record of outstanding teaching and evaluation of others, and the process should be overseen by the HEA. HEA

already runs processes to assess individual academics using panels of peer reviewers, including NTFS but also accreditation. The HEA should continue to offer its fellowships in competition with similar awards being made by the universities themselves.⁶¹

4. *Teaching at university needs to be treated by university leaders much more professionally.* Each university should ensure that its teaching academics all have continuous improvement, initial teacher training, regular monitoring of quality, and a commitment to continuous professional development. Universities should also ensure that teaching academics conform to a clear code of responsibility to students. Each university should design its own professional code of teaching, where not in existence already. The ranking of individual teachers on the Five Levels should remain confidential to heads of department and senior management, but the aggregate score for the university and the departments within should become public knowledge.⁶²
5. *More recognition needs to be given to learning and institutional culture.* Culture is all important. Where it does not already exist, with a widespread commitment across the universities to taking teaching and learning seriously and professionally, the V-C and senior staff need to establish and then maintain it. Every university should have zero tolerance of poor teaching, including turning up late, and not returning work promptly and diligently. Much of the most valuable learning at university takes place by students independently—in libraries, in informal groups, on the internet, in students' own rooms. Support staff have a vital role in assisting learning. Andrew George writes, "Teaching is an important part of the education of our students. But it is only one part of it".⁶³ Heads of faculty and senior leaders need to be trained to become more skilful at performance management and identifying unsatisfactory teaching, dealing effectively with poor performance, and helping all teachers to improve. But vital though learning is in all its wider

senses, it should not be assessed as part of the TEF. Admittedly, a limitation of this approach is that the booklet isn't able to embrace assessing teaching and learning more broadly, as advocated by Andrew George of Brunel University, which provides an excellent example of good practice in its attention to the wider aspects of education. These include, at Brunel, an innovation hub that helps students form their own companies, sandwich courses (in which the work placement forms part of the degree), and mentorship programmes to certain groups of students—for example, female engineering students, in order to encourage more women to undertake postgraduate programmes in engineering. George argues that a proper assessment of the educational achievement of Brunel should consider services such as these.⁶⁴

6. *All universities should devise and run their own Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme, bespoke to the university and to the different departments, drawing on those universities which run excellent schemes already. Most universities have initial teaching training programmes, the vast majority of which are now accredited by the HEA. Academics should be exposed to all five of the different kinds of teaching (from lecturing to thesis supervision). Learning how to teach better needs to be taken seriously, and to consist of study, teaching observations by peers, and the observation of others. Universities must only grant a licence to teach once the academic reaches at least the two-star level, based on the Five Levels. Teaching will be regularly observed, with feedback given, and appropriate continuous professional development required as part of the appraisal and career development of each academic involved in teaching.⁶⁵ Universities should be free to decide to have just “research academics”, who would not be involved in this teaching system, though it is desirable that all academics teach because of the benefit to their research that teaching brings. Postgraduates should not as a rule be let loose on teaching undergraduates,*

outside the supervision of lab classes, with the exception of when they are proven to be capable of delivering high quality teaching. It would be far better for universities to adopt the option of bringing in retired school teachers, properly selected to ensure that they are fully abreast of all developments in their subjects, than have untrained and unwilling postgraduates teaching students. It is often overlooked that many school teachers have research degrees, as well as being recipients of first-class degrees or top 2.1s.

7. *Student feedback systems should be completely remodelled.* The NSS, currently completed by final-year undergraduates, has helped make universities take teaching and student feedback more seriously. The mixed standing of the NSS is not a criticism of student feedback per se, but merely of the current methodology. Students need to be educated from their first week on the Big Ten (or the university's own variant of it) on good teaching. It is a vital part of the learning experience of every student to understand how they themselves learn, what the nature of the learning and teaching philosophy is in the department, and how they can assess the contribution of their teacher to that learning. Even at school level, students as young as eleven to thirteen can discriminate in very mature ways, and make shrewd, fair, and accurate assessments of the quality and commitment of their teaching staff. Uncoupling the assessment of teaching from exam grades, and putting the emphasis on this process, will reduce the criticism, which is as strong in the United States as in the UK, that students reward and can "bribe" their teaching staff. To argue, as some do, that students merely praise those who award them good marks rather than taking into account other factors, is to belittle students. My experience of a lifetime in schools is that if you treat students with respect, and give them tools of assessment, they behave in very mature ways.

8. *Technology designed to enhance teaching and learning at university needs to be embraced in a far more uniform and dynamic way, or the gulf between the learning experience of students, and that of the academics trying to teach them, will grow still wider. Heads of faculty and department have particular responsibilities for mastering the latest enhancements in technology and how their colleagues should be best integrating these into their teaching, while recognising that the teaching style of some academics will always be light on technology. Academics need to be taught during their ITT about the use of technology, and be given regular CPD updates.*

9. *Teaching is to be celebrated in all university departments on an equal footing with research. Career pathways in all universities should be developed for those academics who want to specialise primarily in teaching, as currently happens in the best universities today. Distinction at research and writing, or a proven track record at administration, should no longer be the only pathways to reward and status within universities.⁶⁶ Teaching informed by research excellence should be recognised and rewarded specifically. Graham Gibbs writes, “The lack of career salary and status incentive for academics to commit themselves to teaching, excel at it, and become leaders of teaching, remains a major problem thirty years after the first conferences and publications on the subject”. Thirty years is too long. It must remain a problem no longer.⁶⁷*

10. *Meaningful interactions between universities and schools become regularised, and the mile-wide gap between school and university for students needs to be bridged. Universities need to understand that, while the education experience they offer might be different, it is equally part of the continuum in the learning of content and skills, which begins when the child first enters formal education. The survey of sixth form heads clearly shows patchy current*

understanding by universities of what actually happens in schools.⁶⁸ The student experience at both university and schools will be much enhanced if there is a greater understanding between both. Students while at school need to be prepared much better for university life and study. More information on the needs of students should be shared, including pastoral information, where relevant and conducive to that student's learning and welfare. Indeed, learning how to look after students' welfare better, recognising that welfare and learning cannot be separated, is one of many areas in which universities could learn more from schools.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Paul Glaister, University of Reading and Chair of the Joint Mathematical Council of the UK (JMC)
- ² See, in particular, his chapter “Teaching” in “Response to the Higher Education Green Paper”, HEPI Report 81, January 2016, page 11-25
- ³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/teaching-at-the-heart-of-the-system>
- ⁴ Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Fulfilling Our Potential, November 2015, p. 8
- ⁵ Discussion with Lord Rees of Ludlow 21.01.2016
- ⁶ Interview Demis Hassabis, 07.04.16
- ⁷ Booklet Questionnaire, Rebecca Allen, 27.12.16
- ⁸ Booklet Questionnaire, Steve West, 06.01.16
- ⁹ Booklet Questionnaire, Stephanie Marshall, 27.12.15
- ¹⁰ Booklet Questionnaire, Paul Glaister, 20.12.15
- ¹¹ Booklet Questionnaire, Sean Harford, 30.12.15
- ¹² Booklet Questionnaire, Peter Scott, 3.1.16
- ¹³ Booklet Questionnaire, Graham Gibbs, 21.12.15
- ¹⁴ Louise Richardson, Daily Telegraph, 16.01.16
- ¹⁵ Booklet Questionnaire, Peter Scott, 03.01.16
- ¹⁶ <https://www.tes.com/article.aspx?storycode=6436195>
- ¹⁷ Interview with Gerard Kelly, 07.04.14
- ¹⁸ J Hattie, Visible Learning, Routledge 2008. D Wiliam, Embedded Formative Assessment, Solution Tree Press 2011
- ¹⁹ THE, 08.12.15
- ²⁰ THE 14.12.15
- ²¹ Survey of teaching excellence, heads of sixth form, January 2016, University of Buckingham
- ²² Booklet Questionnaire, Alison Goddard, 06.01.16
- ²³ Survey of teaching excellence, heads of sixth form, January 2016, University of Buckingham
- ²⁴ Reference: Booklet Questionnaire, Lynette Ryals, 22.01.16
- ²⁵ Interview Demis Hassabis, 07.04.16
- ²⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/mar/29/universities-vie-for-the-metric-that-cannot-be-measured-prestige>

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- ²⁹ Due in 2017
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- ³¹ Booklet Questionnaire, Sir David Bell, 27.12.2015
- ³² Booklet Questionnaire, Steve West, 06.01.16
- ³³ Booklet Questionnaire, Stephanie Marshall, 27.12.15
- ³⁴ Email to author, 2016
- ³⁵ Booklet Questionnaire, Dylan Wiliam, 27.12.17
- ³⁶ Glaister, P. and Glaister, E. (2013) Standards of university teaching. *MSOR Connections*, 13 (2), pp. 61-65.
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/standards-university-teaching>. See also
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<https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/msor/article/view/252>
- ³⁷ D Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner*, Temple Smith 1983.
- ³⁸ Harry Brighouse, “Out of the Crooked Timber”, UW-Madison, 10.09.15
- ³⁹ Glaister, P. and Glaister, E. (2013) Standards of university teaching. *MSOR Connections*, 13 (2), pp. 61-65.
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- ⁴⁰ Booklet Questionnaire, Rebecca Allen, 27.12.16
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- ⁴² Booklet Questionnaire, Andrew George, 21.12.15
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- ⁴⁶ Survey of teaching excellence, heads of sixth form, January 2016, University of Buckingham
- ⁴⁷ Email, Rose Luckin to author, 22.01.16
- ⁴⁸ Booklet Questionnaire, Dylan Wiliam, 27.12.17
- ⁴⁹ Booklet Questionnaire, Graham Gibbs, 21.12.15
- ⁵⁰ Booklet Questionnaire, Gervas Huxley and Mike Peacey, 08.01.15
- ⁵¹ Booklet Questionnaire, Stephanie Marshall, 04.01.2016
- ⁵² Email, William Richardson to author, January 2016
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- ⁵⁴ David Willetts to author, June 2011
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- ⁵⁸ Bill Rammell, THE, 11.02.16
- ⁵⁹ HEFCE website, Learning Gain, p. 1
- ⁶⁰ Booklet Questionnaire, Dylan Wiliam, 27.12.17
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