



Dimensions of excellence in university teaching

Lewis Elton

To cite this article: Lewis Elton (1998) Dimensions of excellence in university teaching, International Journal for Academic Development, 3:1, 3-11

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144980030102>



Published online: 09 Jul 2006.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 235



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 20 View citing articles [↗](#)

Dimensions of excellence in university teaching

Lewis Elton,
*Higher Education Research and
Development Unit, University College
London*

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the concept of 'teaching excellence' and attempts to give it precision. In the process, it is found that the lack of precision is due essentially to the multidimensionality of the concept, which has led to serious confusion in any attempt to reduce its dimensions to a single one. The dimensions are of two kinds; first, classificatory, distinguishing the three levels of institution, department and individual, and second, substantive, describing the different ways in which each of the three levels can exhibit excellence. Ways of recognizing and rewarding individual excellence in its different dimensions are then discussed and recommendations are made for action. It is argued that under present circumstances, excellence at institutional and departmental levels are almost unattainable, but that this is not so at individual level. Finally, it is noteworthy that recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence at all three levels is found to be significantly different from corresponding practices normally used for research.

Introduction

'Teaching excellence' is not a simple concept and, as a concept, lacks precision. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the concept and to attempt to give it some precision. In the process it will be found that the lack of precision is due essentially to the multidimensionality of the concept, which leads to serious confusion in any attempt to reduce its dimensions to a single one. Once clarification of the multidimensionality of teaching excellence has been achieved, the paper turns to practical ways of recognizing and rewarding it. Some of the considerations presented in this paper had their origins in a recent book by Aylett and Gregory (1996). The desire to reduce multidimensional entities to single dimensions arises largely from a demand for ranking orders and classifications. Examples are the classification of university degrees, the universities league tables and the ranking of competitors in a gymnastic competition. But while the conflation of the several dimensions of a gymnastic competition into a single ranking order is carried out according to strict and publicly known rules, nothing comparable exists for the two examples from higher education. The obvious conclusion is that, where ranking orders are necessary, strict and publicly known conflation rules are essential, but that where they are not

necessary, conflation should probably rarely if ever be attempted. The dimensions of teaching excellence are of two kinds; first, classificatory, distinguishing the three levels of institution, department and individual, and second, substantive, describing the different ways in which each of the three levels can exhibit excellence. The three dimensions of the first kind relate to such different organizational aspects of an institution that the concept of 'teaching excellence' must be considered separately for each of them. On the other hand, dimensions of the second kind, which occur within any one of the dimensions of the first kind, frequently require conflation and rules for it must be established. What provides a basic unification to all the dimensions of teaching excellence is that the purpose of teaching is to engender learning. Looked at from the learner's point of view, only such teaching as can produce excellent learning can lay claims to excellence. This consideration may be helpful, but it is not universally accepted in higher education. There are academics who are of the opinion that it is their task to profess their discipline, in the main through lecturing, and that that is the reason for them being called professors or lecturers and not teachers. Their opinion is that it is their students' task to learn as best they can. This opinion will not be considered further.

Dimensions of the first kind

The concept of teaching excellence is applied to individual teachers, to departments and to institutions. An example of the first is the distinguished teacher awards scheme that has been popular in the United States for many years and has more recently come also to Britain (see e.g. Thomas, 1993). An example of the second is the Teaching Quality Assessment scheme of the Funding Councils. An example of the third might be the mission statement of a university which lays claims to the excellence of the teaching that it provides.

One might think that these three types of teaching excellence are cumulative, i.e. that they build on each other. However, this is not so. Excellence, by definition, is a normative concept, i.e. not everyone can be excellent. Thus a department which is rated as excellent will not only contain staff whose teaching quality is usually normally distributed, with the mean being rated as 'excellent', but will provide through its course teams a corporate excellence. In fact, if a department consisted entirely of teachers who were individually excellent, but who were not working as a course team, e.g. if the individual excellences were of the kind that frequently leads to Excellent Teacher Awards, students might receive a less than digestible learning experience. (For a more earthy description of this situation, see Elton (1996a), p. 34.) If, as may be hoped, the average overall standard of teaching in higher education rises, largely through increasingly available staff development activities, what was previously excellent may become the norm and what is then considered excellent will exceed that norm. The situation for whole institutions is somewhat different. An excellent university could in principle consist of departments, all of which were excellent, although this is clearly a counsel of perfection. Even so, it will be argued that this might not be enough to make it an excellent institution.

Dimensions of the second kind

Dimensions of the second kind are substantive, and they are different for the institution, the department and the individual, as will become apparent. However, there is one thing that they have in common, namely that excellence criteria, whatever else they may be, must relate to the learning objectives which the teaching aims to

achieve. Even this is more complicated than appears at first sight, for different learning objectives frequently relate to different philosophies of learning, i.e. the relevant issues are not solely pedagogical. A good example of different philosophies of learning, which stress different dimensions of teaching, is the current controversy in schools between 'trendy' teaching and 'back to basics'. It would be quite wrong to think of this controversy as one between different methods which have the same objectives; the controversy is between differences – some of them philosophical – in the objectives. However, in higher education, institutions, departments and individual teachers still have the academic freedom to define their philosophies of learning, although it is of course highly desirable, but not always the case, that there are no essential contradictions between the philosophies as expressed at the different levels. Hence, teaching excellence should be defined in terms of a declared philosophy of learning and the objectives of student learning resulting from it.

Dimensions of the second kind: the department

The department will be considered first, since a single step up or down will then make it possible to deal with institutions and individuals respectively. A department is responsible for the courses which it offers, and it is the courses that are to be judged for excellence. This cannot be done by simply summing the judgments made on individual teachers, important though these are. Each course is taught by a number of teachers and they should cooperate and form a team. It is here that the criterion of judging teaching in terms of the student learning experience most obviously applies, for the simple reason that students primarily take whole courses. Hence the most important dimension is that of the excellence of the work of the course team, and I would contend that the absence of team work in most universities makes it virtually impossible at present for any department in any university to lay claims to teaching excellence. The major exception is the Open University which works through course teams and so at least in principle may be able to make a claim for departmental teaching excellence. Since the Funding Councils have found many traditional university departments to be excellent, it would be interesting to know, what weight was given to the existence of course teams.

Unfortunately, such information cannot be extracted from its published accounts.

The situation is somewhat different for modular degrees, where course teams clearly can only be responsible for individual modules. But there the student experience argument leads to an additional demand, not easily met, namely that modular offerings should be coordinated and that staff should cooperate across modules, if students are not to get a disjointed – and hence less than excellent – learning experience. However, in a constantly changing situation, teaching excellence requires not only that the current tasks be carried out excellently, but that a department is constantly aware of the need for change and innovation, if excellence is to be maintained. Planning for future excellence, which again should involve course teams, is therefore another dimension of departmental excellence. The existence of course teams, the coordination and cooperation across modules in modular degrees, and the planning for change, all require management and leadership skills that are not easy to insert into the traditional individualistic culture of universities. But inserted they must be if departments want to lay claims to teaching excellence. This is even more important in interdisciplinary degrees, where course teams must be interdisciplinary. It is, therefore, course teams and not individual teachers that should be considered as the unit of teaching that leads to the student learning experience and it is the dimensions of excellence, as they apply to course teams, which provide the main criteria for excellence at departmental level.

Dimensions of the second kind: the institution

Since a course team, usually departmental, provides directly the basic unit of teaching, the institution's role has to be less direct. It has to be largely facilitative, i.e. it should not contribute directly to teaching, although it most emphatically should contribute to learning. It should do so through the provision of resources, e.g.: teaching and learning spaces, equipment and through relevant management processes, e.g.: organizational infrastructure and management of the human capital. This last includes a major responsibility for the well being and effective work of all those engaged in the teaching task, which should include: the initial training of all staff concerned with teaching, in its broadest sense; continuing training and development

opportunities for staff at all levels; appropriate career progression and promotion procedures. The last two points are the most important if an institution is to achieve teaching excellence. They are also the ones at present most neglected. Until staff training and continuing professional development in the teaching area become a normal professional activity for all staff concerned with teaching, institutional teaching excellence will largely remain a distant hope. It is therefore significant that the 'New Compact' between the stake holders in higher education proposed by Dearing (1997) includes 'commitment to developing and supporting staff' as an institutional component of the Compact. However, it would be wrong to delay the measures outlined in this paper until academic staff training and continuing professional development is fully established, for without the pressure for teaching excellence it will never happen. The two must go hand in hand. In order to encourage staff to want to be trained in the area of teaching, appropriate career and promotion paths must be provided for them. This should not necessarily mean that staff will have to specialize as 'teachers' or 'researchers' with everyone sharing the 'chores' of academic service; all or most can continue to be engaged in all three activities. What it should mean is that staff should be allowed to negotiate the proportions of their time that they will devote to teaching, research and academic service, and that whatever proportions have been agreed after negotiation, usually in connection with staff appraisal, should allow staff equal opportunities for career advancement and promotion. I have argued (Elton, 1996b) that this partial specialization of tasks could be the key to giving reality to any claim of individual teaching excellence. The proportions of staff who after negotiation give priority to any one of the three main academic tasks must of course be in agreement with the institutional mission. Incidentally, such partial specialization should lead to a much more efficient use of academic staff. Academic services should probably not constitute a separate category, since such services support either research or teaching. However, within either, the proportion allocated to such services should be individually negotiable. It is noteworthy that so far neither the Funding Councils' quality assessments nor the Quality Council's quality audits have seriously addressed these issues.

Dimensions of the second kind: the individual

In the end, the excellence of institutions and their departments must build on the excellence of the individual members of the institutions. For that reason the latter will be discussed at greater length. At the level of the individual, it is important to distinguish between teaching competence and teaching excellence. Students do not expect uniform excellence in all their teachers, but they do expect and have a right to expect competence – which has been defined as a ‘unique combination of knowledge, i.e. knowing what, how, when and why, and skill, i.e. being able actually to perform specific operations’ (Kirschner et al., 1997) – from all of them. Students repeatedly complain of the great variability of the teaching which they receive, which ranges from excellent to incompetent (see e.g. Tobin, 1996), a situation which has not been significantly changed by the Funding Councils’ quality assessments. Academic staff develop from probationer via lecturer and senior lecturer to perhaps professor, and the criteria for competence and excellence grow with their developing roles. Thus, for probationers one would look in the main for competence, with excellence being defined for them as competence to a high degree. A list of competences basic to overall competence might include:

- Organization: Planning, preparation, use of time, meeting objectives
- Presentation: Clarity, subject knowledge, presentation skills, enthusiasm for subject
- Relationships: Empathy with students, involvement of students, sense of humour
- Assessment: Matching objectives, encouraging learning
- Evaluation: Self-reflection, responsiveness to feedback, peer evaluation.

The list could easily be extended. What it illustrates is that competent teaching has many dimensions. None of these competences refer to a particular form of teaching; they can be exhibited in lecturing, tutoring, writing self-instructional materials etc. Teachers should be competent in a number of these, but not necessarily all. Neither should one think of competences as fixed; they should develop as the teacher develops and an experienced teacher should exhibit them at a higher level than a probationer.

Increasingly, they might also include

competences in the services that support teaching, e.g. acting as departmental tutor. An argument – although not necessarily a convincing one – can be presented that competences should be criterion referenced in terms of a national standard, but because of the many different ways that a performance can be excellent, such an approach should be resisted at the level of excellence. How then should teaching excellence be identified and judged? Eisner (1984) has argued that quality in education should in general be judged not on the basis of explicit criteria, but through what he calls ‘connoisseurship’, i.e. a judgment performed by acknowledged experts. Eisner compares it to the judgment of the quality of a musical performance. However, a better analogy, used earlier in this paper, might be the judgment exercised in a gymnastic competition, where professionally trained judges assess qualitatively on several defined dimensions and then turn these into numbers. The need for professionally trained judges for teachers in higher education cannot be overemphasized, for at present the majority of those who judge the teaching excellence of their colleagues have undergone little if any professional development as teachers and none as assessors of excellence. While teachers who are primarily oriented towards research in their discipline may be satisfied – as teachers – with being increasingly competent but no more, others will want to achieve teaching excellence. Clearly, an excellent teacher must be competent to a high degree, but beyond probation, competence is only one of the dimensions of individual excellence. In the light of traditionally held views, it cannot be stressed too strongly that being excellent merely in the dimension of competence is not adequate for teaching excellence. Such limited excellence is often identified by students and alumni in connection with a teaching prize or accolade and in this connection it has its place. Other dimensions of individual excellence are:

- Being a reflective practitioner (putting self-reflection systematically into practice)
- Being an innovator
- Designing curricula
- Providing a teaching service to the community
- Researching into the teaching of one’s discipline
- Conducting pedagogic research
- Being a scholar in one’s discipline.

At the level of excellence, academic services involve academic management and leadership, which

justifies treating them along separate dimensions. These are also the dimensions which are needed for excellence at departmental and institutional levels. Possible dimensions are:

- Management of others
- Management of resources
- Development of other staff
- Development, management and review of courses
- Promoting, leading and supporting change etc.

Excellent teachers are likely to be excellent along a number of the dimensions of individual excellence and of management and leadership, but they should not be expected to excel in all of them. They might, however, be expected to have in some of them a national and even international reputation.

Finally, attention should be drawn to the work of Boyer (1987, 1990), Rice (1991) and Elton (1992) on the different forms of scholarship which support different academic activities, such as pure research, applied research and development, problem oriented research, and teaching, as well as creative management. The presence of scholarship to support all that an academic does is an important indicator of excellence.

Recognition of and rewards for teaching excellence

Dimensions of teaching excellence having been identified, it is now possible to turn to the issue of recognition of and rewards for teaching excellence. These will be very different for the three dimensions of the first kind, previously listed. Attention will be concentrated on the level of the individual, since unless teaching excellence at this level is recognized and rewarded, excellences at the higher levels cannot possibly happen. However, on the assumption that there is recognition and reward at the individual level, means for recognition and reward at the higher levels will be briefly discussed.

Institutional level

There has been no attempt so far in practice to reward teaching excellence at the institutional level. In the light of the earlier analysis, it would be reasonable to conclude that at this level, financial incentives should be used not to reward excellence,

but to remedy legitimate deficiencies. These might relate to the underlying provisions for teaching or to staff training and development. Whatever they are, financial means to remedy them must be closely linked to agreed plans, the success of which would be stringently evaluated. An accolade of excellence would then go to those who needed least financial support!

Departmental level

At departmental level, the Higher Education Funding Council for England has rewarded excellence in two ways: through larger allocations of student numbers and through preferential treatment in the current Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL). The allocation of extra student numbers is unlikely to be an effective incentive to successful departments; its real role is to direct students preferentially to departments where they are likely to have a better learning experience than in corresponding departments elsewhere. It is doubtful whether this measure has, particularly in comparison with the incentives available for research excellence, had any significant effect on the teaching quality of departments. What has had an effect has been the public declaration of excellence of a department, in other words, the labelling of excellence as a consumer report kite mark. Because of this effect, it is extremely important that the Funding Councils' judgments should be well founded and the criteria and processes in their derivation be publicly available. As the latter has not been the case, it is impossible to verify the former. The FDTL fund can in principle be a way of rewarding teaching excellence. However, to serve its purpose best, it must reward potential future excellence, i.e. evidence for effective planning for change and innovation, possibly but not necessarily aimed at solving identified teaching quality problems. The resulting actions to be rigorously evaluated. The situation here is very different from that for research, where the Research Assessment Exercise rewards past research excellence on the not unreasonable assumption that it will continue into future research excellence, even though in the longer run such a principle is likely to discourage innovations. In teaching, such discouragement of innovation would be immediate, since the effort which has to be put into teaching innovations competes directly with efforts in research, whether innovative or not, and all experience shows that

under those circumstances the effort that has to be put into teaching innovations inevitably loses out.

Individual level: detailed criteria

Detailed criteria for individual teaching excellence can be attached to all the dimensions suggested earlier and many lists of such criteria exist (see e.g. Prosser, 1980 or Elton and Partington, 1993). A possible list, based on these earlier ones, is given in the Appendix. A far more difficult problem is that of determining the standard at which a particular activity can be deemed to be excellent. Inevitably, in a largely untrained profession, excellence is likely to be extremely rare. Until it becomes normal for those who opt to devote themselves primarily to teaching to undergo substantial training and continuing professional development, it will in general not be possible to apply criteria at a standard that might be considered equivalent to one normal for research (Gibbs, 1995a, b). On the other hand, staff who opt for this route at present take a considerable academic risk, and that must be taken into account in establishing the standards. At the same time it would be reasonable to expect such staff to commit themselves to substantial training and continuing professional development as part of their claim for excellence. Only in this way will it be possible to move forward to a situation where the standards for teaching and research can be comparable. While this situation should be acceptable as a comparatively temporary measure at the level of promotion to senior lecturer, it is unacceptable at the professor level, where the title represents an internationally recognized standard. Fortunately, such a temporary relaxation of standards is not needed there, for the criteria for a professorial promotion will inevitably involve criteria similar to those for research in general. They will be in the area of disciplinary teaching, pedagogy, etc., although a greater stress is likely to be placed on developmental work than is usual in research. There are additional criteria – relating to teaching performance – which may not be applicable to research, as will be clear from the list in the Appendix.

Individual level: documentation

Judgments on claims to excellence must be based on a documented 'teaching record' (see e.g. Diamond, 1995). All too often in the past, claims to teaching excellence have been based on verbal and

impressionistic recommendations, usually from a head of department, that had to be taken on trust and could not be verified by an appointing committee. For most of the criteria listed under promotion to a professorship – and similar considerations apply at senior lecturer level – the need for documentation presents no difficulty in principle, although if the documentation was not collected at the appropriate time, it could be difficult to produce when needed. So it is important that staff who wish in due course to be considered for promotion on the basis of their teaching must collect evidence over a number of years, usually in the form of a teaching portfolio, for the assembly of which staff may need some training. However, if a promotion scheme is to get off the ground without undue delay, its first year or two must rely in the main on recent documentation. The documentation referred to so far is based on activities. In addition, there may be the documentation of formal training, such as an advanced diploma, which in due course may even become compulsory, as is beginning to be the case in the Netherlands (Keesen et al., 1996). Teaching portfolios should also form the basis for appraisal discussions, but the documentation that is eventually assembled for promotion should be the candidate's own and chosen on the basis that it is relevant to the case for promotion. Applications for promotion should normally have the support of the appraiser, although the appraiser may well warn candidates that there are matters to report to the promotion committee which are unfavourable to them. Appraisers should not be allowed to make confidential reports to promotion committees without obtaining the agreement of the candidate, as these may contain matters known from earlier appraisals that are unfavourable to the promotion candidate. Such a practice would breach the confidentiality of appraisal.

Individual level: who should make the judgments?

In order for promotion committees to be able to make reliable decisions on teaching excellence, they will need some training (see, e.g. Diamond, 1994). Even then they will probably not be able to make direct judgments on the documentation itself. (This is in no way different from the situation for research.) Instead they should act on the basis of reports from expert referees. Such reports could be qualitative, but in the end it is probably better if they have a quantitative

component. A possible rating scale might be (adapted from Gibbs, 1995c):

- Level below that acceptable for probation
- Level associated with successful completion of probation
- Level associated with an experienced lecturer
- Level associated with promotion to senior lecturer
- Level associated with an experienced and effective senior lecturer
- Level associated with conferment of a professorship.

Such ratings, which should ideally be made by trained experts, should be given independently for both teaching and research. They should then be conflated, with the weights attached to them being provided by the weights previously agreed at appraisal for the way each candidate divides his/her work. These are the 'strict rules', referred to in the Introduction. Inevitably, under present circumstances, excellence in both research and teaching are currently judged at least in part on the basis of external judgment; research through the Research Assessment Exercise and teaching through the Teaching Quality Assessment Exercise, a separation of teaching from research which has turned out to disadvantage teaching (Elton, 1995). For research, the normal method is to use peer review by a mixture of internal and external peers. In view of the long experience in the use of peer judgment in research and the extensive training that academics receive in research, this is probably the best method available, whether for external or internal assessment, in spite of the research evidence of the fallibility of peer judgment and the essential conservatism of the procedure. All of the disadvantages, but few if any of the advantages, of peer review apply to teaching, where academics are essentially untrained and their only expertise is in their discipline, a fact which has cast some doubt on the reliability of current teaching quality assessments (see HEFCE, 1997, paras 57–58). The first step towards the solution of this problem is to develop a group of academic staff who are trained in the areas of teaching and the evaluation of teaching. Together with similarly trained external peers, as well as both external and internal peers who are subject specialists, these can then form the teams who will judge the quality of teaching and the claims to excellence of individual teachers. Ideally, those trained in the area of teaching should also be

specialists in the disciplines of those being judged, but it will be some time before this will be universally possible.

Teaching excellence and academic staff development

Throughout this paper, we have referred to the need for academic staff development at all levels, if teaching excellence is to be achieved and if it is to be recognized. There could be a great developmental value in such staff development, if it related to the process of analysing teaching excellence, in a given discipline, department or institutions, on the basis of the framework provided here. Such an approach to staff development would face most existing staff development units with new and exciting tasks, for which they will however need adequate resourcing. How to achieve and recognize teaching excellence may even come to provide a basis for courses and other forms of development and support for academic staff.

Conclusion

The argument presented in this paper is in five parts:

1. Teaching excellence is a multidimensional concept and its different dimensions call for different forms of recognition and reward.
2. If teaching quality is to be maintained and enhanced, teaching excellence must be recognized and rewarded.
3. The criteria for individual teaching excellence are no more difficult to enunciate and to evaluate than those for research excellence. They are however considerably more sophisticated than is appreciated by traditional academics, and they cannot be applied fairly as long as those who judge excellence lack the training for their task.
4. A prerequisite for real teaching excellence at the individual level is a trained teaching profession. A way forward, which links staff development directly to the process of analysing teaching excellence, has been indicated.
5. Individual teaching excellence is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for an excellent student learning experience.

In addition there must be excellences at departmental and institutional levels. These have been outlined in the paper and it is apparent that in the majority of universities they would be exceedingly difficult to attain at present. They can however be developed on the foundation of individual excellence. The five parts of the argument are inter related; indeed any one without the other four is useless. The time has come to accept all five and to proceed to action.

Appendix

Appropriate criteria for individual excellence in teaching and in management and leadership might be the following:

Teaching

- Research, innovations and scholarly work published in refereed journals and books
- Research and development grants
- Production of textbooks and teaching materials
- Production of self-study learning materials
- Products of student learning, e.g. reports, theses, artefacts etc, particularly in innovative situations
- Professional advisory and consultancy work
- Service as an external examiner, quality auditor or quality assessor
- Service as editor or paper referee of an appropriate learning journal or as referee for funding proposals for teaching innovations, development and research
- Fellowship and offices of responsibility in relevant learned societies or professional bodies
- Invited contributions to conferences and papers to learned societies
- Service at national or international level
- Invitations to work abroad
- Evaluation of all aspects of own teaching, based on self-evaluation, external examiners' reports, and feedback from current and past students, peers and the employers of graduates
- Supervision of research students
- Activities in staff and curriculum development.

Management and Leadership

- Management of others in course teams etc
- Development, management and review of courses
- Development of staff
- Departmental leadership in the teaching area

- Acting as manager and editor for writing teams of learning materials
- Promoting, leading and supporting change.

It is apparent that 'management and leadership' covers far more than what is normally understood as 'administration' or 'academic service'. The latter deals essentially with more routine matters which, important as they are, are clearly subsidiary to teaching and research. They should be included under these categories although clearly identified. It must be stressed that excellence does not have to be exhibited in all of these activities.

Acknowledgments

My thanks are due to Professor Graham Gibbs; this paper owes a great deal to my discussions with him.

References

- Aylett, R. and Gregory, K. (Eds.). (1996). *Evaluating teacher quality in higher education*. London: Falmer Press.
- Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: the undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Dearing, R. F. (1997). *Higher education in the learning society*. Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report). London: HMSO.
- Diamond, R. M. (1994). *Serving on promotion and tenure committees*. Bolton: Anker.
- Diamond, R. M. (1995). *Preparing for promotion and tenure review*. Bolton: Anker.
- Eisner, E. W. (1984). *The art of educational evaluation*. London: Falmer Press.
- Elton, L. (1992). Research, teaching and scholarship in an expanding higher education system. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 46, 252-268.
- Elton L. (1995). Effect of funding council policies on teaching quality. In Smith, B. & Brown, S. (Eds.), *Research, teaching and learning in higher education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Elton, L. (1996a). Criteria for teaching competence and teaching excellence in higher education. In Aylett, R. & Gregory, K. (Eds.).
- Elton, L. (1996b). Task differentiation in universities: Towards a new collegiality, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 2, 138-145.
- Elton, L. & Partington, P. (1993). *Teaching standards and excellence in higher education*, 2nd ed. Sheffield: USDU.

- Gibbs, G. (1995a). How can promoting excellent teachers promote excellent teaching?. *Innovations in Education and Training International*, 32, 74–85.
- Gibbs, G. (1995b). Promoting excellent teaching is harder than you'd think, *Change*, 27, 3, 17–20.
- Gibbs, G. (1995c). Guidelines for the review of teaching, research and academic effectiveness for promotion to principal lecturer, private communication.
- HEFCE. (1997). *Report on quality assessment 1995–1996*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Keesen, F., Wubbles, T., van Tartwijk, J. & Bouhuijs, P. (1996). Preparing university teachers in the Netherlands: Issues and trends. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 1, 10–16.
- Kirschner, P., Van Vilsteren, P., Hummel, H., & Wigman, M. (1997). The design of a study environment for acquiring academic and professional competence. *Studies in Higher Education*, 22, 151–171.
- Prosser, A. (1980). Promotion through teaching. *HERDSA News*, 2, 2, 8–10.
- Rice, R. E. (1991). Towards a broader conception of scholarship: the American context. In Whiston, T. G. and Geiger, R. L. (Eds.), *Research and higher education*. Buckingham: SRHE/OU.
- Thomas, E. (1993). The first distinguished teaching award in the United Kingdom. In Ellis, R. (Ed.), *Quality assurance for university teaching*. Buckingham: SRHE/OU.
- Tobin, A. (1996). Couldn't teach a dog to sit. *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 26 July, p. 11.

The author

Lewis Elton is Professor of Higher Education, University College London and Professor Emeritus of Higher Education, University of Surrey. He is a Fellow of the American Institute of Physics and of the Society for Research into Higher Education, an Honorary Life Member of the Staff and Educational Development Association, and a Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) of the University of Kent at Canterbury. His recent work has included evaluating the Quality Assessment programme of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and developing a Postgraduate course on 'Research and Development in Higher Education' for experienced academic teachers.

Address: Higher Education Research and Development Unit, University College London, 1–19 Torrington Place, London WC1E 6BT, Britain.
Tel: +44 171 390 1674; Fax: +44 171 390 1715;
e-mail: l.elton@ucl.ac.uk