

Invitation to Tender:

Teaching Excellence in the Humanities and Social Sciences

SUMMARY

The Academy wishes to begin to construct an evidence base to demonstrate excellence in the ways in which the humanities and social sciences are taught at universities in the UK. As part of this, the Academy will commission a series of case studies and analysis of teaching excellence across its disciplines.

BACKGROUND

This project forms part of the Academy's remit to promote the value of its disciplines, and to monitor the higher education ecosystem, policy developments, and appropriately evidence its representations to Government.

Much has been written about the relative quality and prestige of teaching versus research in UK universities, across disciplines. There is evidence that the humanities and social sciences particularly have been seen as 'soft' in relation to those university courses that are more clearly vocational or linked to labour market entry (such as engineering) or involve a high number of contact hours and expensive equipment (such as the natural sciences).

The recent Government Higher Education Green Paper *Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* starts from the assumption that 'teaching is the poor cousin to research'¹. Its proposal to develop a 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) is the major higher education policy issue facing the sector in 2016. Any definition of quality contained in these proposals must be applicable across the disciplinary spread. A degree of flexibility is needed within the definitions developed by Government to ensure that excellence within humanities and social sciences teaching is adequately recognised.

However, what constitutes teaching 'excellence' across our disciplines is not well understood or evidenced. There is demand, therefore, for a positive evidence base of what constitutes 'excellence' in HSS teaching.

In its recent responses to Government, including to the Higher Education Green Paper, the Academy made clear that its understanding of quality in humanities and social sciences teaching, includes 'proximity' to research:

"The best teaching generally follows the best research. Assuming a false dichotomy that pits research against teaching is unhelpful. What distinguishes Higher Education from schools is that teaching in universities is research-informed, and in

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474266/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choiceaccessible.pdf
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the best departments, research-led. Moreover, often the most innovative curriculum designs at universities come from those who are at the forefront of research in their disciplines. This is perhaps most keenly felt in postgraduate provision where teaching must necessarily be informed by cutting edge research.”²

Through this commission, the Academy would like to test this assertion.

Suggestions as to how to capture what teaching excellence looks like, and an understanding of what has thus far been measured and rewarded as excellent in the humanities and social sciences, would be welcome.

THE COMMISSION

The Academy is looking to commission a researcher or team of researchers to develop an analysis of ‘excellence’ in humanities and social sciences teaching, including between 10 and 15 case studies of courses or individuals (the unit of analysis for case studies should be decided by the researchers, and may vary across the case studies). These should be written with a non-expert audience in mind. Each case study should be a maximum of 1500 words and should include:

- Details of the course, subject, and level
- Curriculum design
- Pedagogical approach
- Any use of technology
- Relationship between the taught course and research
- Any metrics that are used by the institution to define ‘excellence’

It is expected that a majority of this research will be interview and desk-based, although we hope to develop this further with the successful team, particularly around the potential engagement with students as well as teachers. It is intended that the commission will begin in April 2016, with final case studies delivered to the Academy in July 2016.

The budget for the research is up to £20,000, half payable on commission, and half on completion. The Academy will cover all costs related to design and print.

CHOOSING THE CASE STUDIES SAMPLE

The methodological approach should be designed by the research team. However, prior to the case studies being written, the Academy would like to see first an exercise that examines how excellence has thus far been defined. A general sample could be developed using, for example, awards for teaching quality that universities have bestowed themselves. Other methods may be suggested, including how other stakeholders or bodies have defined excellence.

Following the general sample of ‘excellence’, the Academy would like to see a sample of between 10-15 case studies of teaching excellence that show:

- Roughly equal number of humanities and social sciences disciplines
- Examples from each of the nations of the UK

² The British Academy (2016), Response to Higher Education Green Paper, available online here: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/responsestogov.cfm>

- Examples from both research- and teaching- intensive universities
- Examples from both UGT and PGT.

A degree of analysis should be presented, which identifies common measures and characteristics of excellence across humanities and social sciences.

GOVERNANCE

The Academy will assemble a small working group for this project, and the successful researcher/ research team will report to that working group, in liaison with the Academy's Higher Education and Skills Policy team.

TO APPLY

We welcome tenders from a range of organisations and individuals, of no more than 2500 words, excluding CVs, setting out the following information:

- Initial thoughts regarding the commission and its recommended approach
- How you would gather the case studies and sample from UK courses
- Your methodological and disciplinary approach
- Details of the researchers that will be involved, including CVs
- Breakdown of costs including day rate for the researchers

The deadline for application is 5pm on Thursday 24th March 2016. Tenders should be submitted to:

Thomas Kohut
Policy Manger (HE and Skills)
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Applicants may be called for interview at the Academy.

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