**Education Excellence Awards**

**A GUIDE TO EVIDENCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

1. **Introduction**

Education Excellence Awards are intended retrospectively to recognise, celebrate and share the work of individuals and teams in the Tooting-based education community undertaken over the last year or more.

When judging the awards, we are looking for examples of educational excellence that demonstrate high quality and inclusive educational activities that have had a demonstrable impact on students and/or colleagues. This means that in your application for the award, the evidence you provide to the panel is more than a description of your role or the activity for which you have been nominated (Smith & Hubbard, 2023). Your application should include:

* an account of what you did
* a rationale for the activity (why you did what you did)
* evidence of the impact of the activity

When making an application for an Educational Excellence Award you are asked to evidence equally all the criteria (Table 1).

Table 1 Criteria for the Educational Excellence Award

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| **Criterion** | **Description** |
| 1. Undertake activities that enable an excellent student educational experience
 | In your application you should provide an account of the activity you have been nominated for and why the activity is of value. This is normally by showing that you have identified and successfully addressed a gap, need or a problem that has impacted negatively on or will enhance the student educational experience. The activity can be a one-off event or initiative or a more sustained piece of work. |
| 1. Demonstrate inclusive practice
 | Equality, diversity and inclusivity are fundamental to our educational approach and should be explicitly demonstrated in your application. This can be a result of having deliberately addressed an issue that disproportionately affects or excludes underrepresented groups. Alternatively, it may be by evidencing that the activity you have been nominated for is inclusive and not unintentionally targeting or excluding specific groups. |
| 1. Evidence of effectiveness in the student educational experience
 | Your application should be supported by evidence that supports your claims of effectiveness. This evidence should be specific and demonstrate what has changed as a result of your activity. This evidence can be quantitative and/or qualitative. |
| 1. Demonstrate effective collaboration (Collaborative award only)
 | For collaborative awards only, we also ask applicants to reflect on and explain how they have worked together, potentially across roles, time and geographic location, to achieve their outcome collectively. |

This brief guide is designed to explain how you can collate, analyse and present your evidence to help you build a strong application for an award with specific reference to the third criterion of the Education Excellence Awards (Evidence). As the awards recognise contributions to the student educational experience made by those working in academic, clinical and professional services, not all of the types of evidence we discuss in this guide may be relevant to your setting or activity, but *all applications should be supported with evidence to support a claim of effectiveness*.

1. **What is evidence of effectiveness?**

There are several things to keep in mind when it comes to making a claim of educational effectiveness.

*Evidence is not the same thing as data*

It is only by **analysing** data that you have collected or that has been generated because of your activities that you create your evidence (Austen & Jones Devitt, 2020). When presenting your evidence, you should always **provide a context for the data**. This may include information on how you collected the data (e.g. survey, unsolicited email, focus group), who was asked to provide the data (e.g. number of respondents sent a survey, invited to attend a focus group), the response rate that your claims are based on (e.g. what proportion of your surveyed participants responded), how the data was analysed and what the limitations of your data might be (e.g. nonresponse bias in your survey, mode of collection).

*Be cautious about making claims*

The quality of a student’s educational experience is the outcome of many factors, only some of which may be under your influence in the university. This means that you may only ever be able to make **tentative claims about a direct causal relationship** between your activities and outcomes (that this action led to this improved result). This is the reality of evidencing your impact in a complex environment like a university. Using a range of data sources, however, can make your claims stronger but acknowledging gaps in your data or what you do not know is also part of claiming excellence.

*Think about what your data actually evidences*

The awards recognise many ways in which individuals and teams can influence and **enhance the student educational experience directly and indirectly**. The nature of the evidence you use will reflect these differences but should focus on ultimately demonstrating how your actions have impacted on students’ learning or wider educational experience or outcomes.

A widely used model for evaluation of courses or training activities is the Kirkpatrick model. While it has limitations, this hierarchical model distinguishes between the different levels of an evaluation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Kirkpatrick's hierarchy of evaluation (Adapted from the five-level development of the model in Tavakol et al., 2010)



The most common types of evidence we can collect are often based on engagement data, for example, how many people attended an event, downloaded a resource, enrolled on a MOOC or used the service. Likewise, reaction data is also frequently used to support a claim for educational excellence. This is usually the type of data collected by student surveys such as SOLTS or NSS. However, these types of data also tell us a limited amount of information, often only the self-reported or short-term value of an activity.

Conversely, **using** **evidence that demonstrates learning or change in behaviour as the result of an activity**, such as applying new knowledge or skills in practice, can be valuable in showing your impact but can be much more challenging to collect. The highest level of the hierarchy relates to the long-term outcomes of your activity often at scale such as, for example, evidence that employers prioritise applicants from a course or that a workforce is upskilled leading to improved patient care. This level of evaluation may contribute to evidence of significant impact but is also the most difficult to collect. It may not be feasible, therefore, for you to collect data at the highest level of the hierarchy.

Making sure you collect and use data that shows learning or transfer to practice has occurred as a result of your activity, however, will strengthen your claim of educational excellence.

*Be cautious about using outputs to claim impact*

Sharing your activities to a wider audience through, for example, blogs, LinkedIn posts or other social media posts, conferences, papers or other events are all concrete deliverables from your work but are not the same as evidence of impact. If using outputs to evidence your work focus on how your outputs might evidence your sphere of influence or your reach to colleagues or others interested in your work and how engagement with your outputs is leading to change in other contexts. However, invitations to share work internally or externally are evidence of peer esteem and recognition for work that show your sphere of influence.

*Consider using a range of sources and types of data*

Evidence can be based on the analysis of either **quantitative (numbers) or qualitative (words, visual) data** or a mixture of the two. Personal testimonials from students or colleagues may provide an insight into how your work has inspired or engaged individuals. Evidence can be purposefully collected or can be informal and ad hoc. However, you should aim to use any data you have systematically to demonstrate the breadth and depth of your influence beyond a very small number of individuals. There can be a **range of sources of data** and you should consider how you might be able to draw on different sources in writing your application to evidence the effectiveness and value of your work.

While not exhaustive, sources and types of evidence for effectiveness might include the following examples summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Typical examples of evidence that may be used in an application for an Educational Excellence Award

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| **Source of feedback** | **Example evidence** |
| *Student/alumni feedback* | * Summative evaluation feedback (e.g., SOLTS, SES, NSS, PTES, PRES)
* Pre- and post-activity evaluation feedback
* Workplace or clinical placement surveys
* Formative evaluation or user surveys
* Unsolicited written student feedback (e.g., UNITU, email)
* Student interview or focus group feedback
* Alumni surveys
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| *Peer or colleague feedback* | * Peer Observation and Review of Teaching, including of instructional or curriculum design
* Solicited or unsolicited feedback or user surveys related to the activity
* External Examiner reports
* Feedback from employers or practitioners on placement students or graduates performance
* Internal or external reviewer commentary for validation, periodic review or PSRB accreditation
* Other internal or external awards, prizes or commendations
* Teaching and learning-related funding or grants
* Requests to speak about or share your educational activities in some internal or external forum
* Formal or informal feedback on contribution to an internal or external event
* Case studies of use of your activity in other settings
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| *Measures of student learning or outcomes* | * Improved assessment outcomes (e.g. average grade, pass rates)
* Other standardised internal or external pre- and/or post-learning tests
* Improved enrolment, retention, progression or completion rates or other monitoring data for specific groups
* Reductions in appeals, complaints, extension requests
* Improved data against key performance indicators
* Improved Careers Registration or Graduate Outcomes Survey employment data
* Summaries of formative classroom assessment techniques (e.g., quizzes, cases, simulations, concept maps, confidence logs) to evidence improved learning
* Student presentations of work externally, or awarding of prizes, scholarships, funding, progression to further study
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| *Scholarship or sector practice used as the basis for activity or wider dissemination* | * Scholarship or examples of sector practice that informed the identification of need or the design and development of nominated activity
* Benchmarking relevant to your activity against university, other institutions or wider sector
* Outputs from the activity including invited blogs, opinion pieces, website posts, professional magazine or academic peer-reviewed articles, resources, case studies to educational publications
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| *Engagement or usage* | * Improved service usage data
* Student or colleague uptake of activities, initiatives or resources
* Canvas learning analytics
* Website views or number of downloads
* MOOC enrolment and completion data
* Registration/enrolment data for events or activities
* Downloads or views of related articles, chapters, blogs, case studies, resources, textbooks
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1. **How to present your application**

How you make your claim in your application is important. Grimwood and McHanwell (2024) recommend that a claim for excellence in education should:

* use active rather than passive sentences to explain the activity. For example, “I/we initiated”, “I/we produced”, “I/we influenced” or “I/we led”, rather than “a project was initiated”, “a report was produced” etc.
* in cases where “we” refers to a team or colleagues, particularly in the case of Individual Awards, be explicit about the contributions made by individuals.
* be assertive about the contribution made using verbs that convey action and decision-making. For example, avoid vague phrasing such as “ensured that” or “enabled” and instead be clear about the actions taken.

While the Educational Excellence Awards are competitive, the main reason some applications are not awarded is because they rely too much on a descriptive account of the nominated activity without fully explaining the rationale for the activity and supporting the claims of effectiveness or impact in relation to the award criteria.

A useful model for writing about practice using evidence to demonstrate impact of your work has been developed by Knight (2021). This recommends a structure for writing your application using the acronym DRIVE:

**D** Describe your activities or initiatives. What did you do?

**R** Provide a Rationale for the actions or initiative.  What were you trying to achieve?

**I** State the Impact of your activities.  What changed as a result?

**V/E** Provide Verification or Evidence for the impact. How do we know what changed?

Example 1 and Example 2 show how a weaker claim for, respectively, teaching and wider educational experience activities can be developed using the DRIVE approach.

Example 1

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| **Example text** | **Commentary** |
| *Version 1*We redesigned the module to increase opportunities for self-directed learning and embed more formative assessment to enhance student engagement and feedback. The redesign led to improvement in the student experience, to better engagement with the module and increased numbers of students passing the summative assessment. | While this summarises key aspects of the student experience that have been seen to improve there is a lack of evidence to support these claims including an indicator of the scale of the activity or rationale for the change. |
| *Version 2*We redesigned the module to increase opportunities for self-directed learning and embed more formative assessment to enhance student engagement and feedback. In the module SOLTS in 2023, 82% of the students felt engaged in the module. One student commented “The online self-directed learning resources for the module were helpful. The formative quizzes were particularly good because they helped me assess my understanding and focus my revision”. | This includes some relevant quantitative data from SOLTS and a positive example of qualitative feedback from students identifying aspects of the module that supported learning. However, it is not clear how representative the SOLTS data is (i.e. what is the response rate for SOLTS?). The student qualitative quote gives more insight into what may be valued by students and how this has contributed to their learning. However, a single quote does not provide the strongest evidence for your claim. Is the quote representative of the cohort experience or has it been selected just because it is positive? |
| *Version 3*We redesigned the module to increase opportunities for self-directed learning and embed more formative assessment to enhance student engagement. The module SOLTS in 2023 indicated that 82% of the students positively rated their engagement based on a 30% response rate (18 responses out of 30 surveyed). This was also 10% higher than other modules for the course taught this semester. We also saw a 4% increase in average student grade for the module in 2023 compared to the module’s previous three years’ average grade. Canvas data indicated that 60% of the cohort attempted the new formative assessment quiz at least once prior to the summative assessment. A third of students completing SOLTS also identified the quizzes as valuable for their learning. For example, “The online self-directed learning resources for the module were helpful. The formative quizzes were particularly good because they helped me assess my understanding and focus my revision”. | This version increases the range of evidence provided to support the claim that the module redesign has improved student engagement and outcomes. The provided quantitative data from SOLTS includes a response rate so it is possible to judge how representative the data is for the cohort. The comparison data with other modules is useful especially if the same students are asked the same question across different modules. Comparative year on year data should be dealt with more cautiously given you will be comparing different students. For example, other factors may have affected the grade average. However, alongside the quantitative and qualitative student survey data and Canvas analytics for use of the formative quiz you can start to be more confident that you have evidence of enhancement. There is no discussion here to evidence an impact in relation to inclusivity. More account of the benefits of formative feedback and scaffolding of self-directed learning linked to relevant literature could help provide a rationale for the change. |

Example 2

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| **Example submission** | **Comments** |
| *Version 1*The recent refurbishment of the university's teaching rooms, bringing together colleagues from estates, IT and the Disability Service, has significantly improved the overall user experience for both educators and students. The refurbishment included the upgrading of audiovisual equipment, improvement to room accessibility and, through the use of moveable partitions, created greater flexibility and customisation of the rooms. Feedback from educators using the new rooms shows their appreciation of the multifunctional spaces which allow diverse teaching approaches. | This version again summarises clearly the actions that have been taken and some account of the results of these changes. It lacks, however, information on the rationale for the activity or further evidence to support the claims that the improvements are well-received and have achieved their objectives. |
| *Version 2*In response to both NSS and UNITU student feedback on room accessibility, poor quality wifi and lack of power sockets, we refurbished 4 large university teaching rooms, bringing together colleagues from estates, IT and the Disability Service. The refurbishment included the upgrading of audiovisual equipment, improvement to room accessibility and, through the use of moveable partitions, created greater flexibility and customisation of the rooms. This has significantly improved the overall user experience for both educators and students. 90% of surveyed educators reported increased satisfaction with the functionality of the refurbished rooms in a survey of 12 lecturers during piloting and based on 10 responses. One lecturer stated: “The increased options for flexible seating and improved integration of technology means I can now facilitate more interactive learning activities, and this really fostered student engagement and collaboration”. We also surveyed the students using the new rooms and 94% of students reported improved accessibility based on a 60% response rate (120 responses out of 200). There is also a 23% improved efficiency as measured by reduced room setup time between teaching sessions.  | This version provides further data to support the claims including clear explanation of the rationale for the development work and specific data to support the claim of impact. This includes data from both staff and students as well as some explanation of how the data has been collected. |

**References and further reading**

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