

Applying for a National Teaching Fellowship This Year, Next Year or Sometime

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Since Mick was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) in 2000 and Ruth obtained hers in 2017, we have often been asked to mentor applicants, advise universities wanting to increase the number of successful applications, assessed NTF applications and run workshops on applying for a NTF. We have summarised below some of our suggestions for enhancing applications.

We recognise that there are many different approaches both to applying for a NTF and to supporting potential candidates; applying for a NTF is after all a very personal affair. What we have attempted to do is to distil some general points which potential candidates and universities may find worth considering. They are arranged under four headings:

1. Ten Hints on Increasing your Chance of a Successful Application for a National Teaching Fellowship
2. Ten Things to do to Help Prepare for Applying for a National Teaching Fellowship
3. Ten Ways in which Universities can Support and Develop Applicants for National Teaching Fellowships
4. Some guiding questions to support writing a letter of support for a NTF application

Applicants we have mentored and participants at workshops say they have found earlier versions helpful

<http://www.mickhealey.co.uk/workshops-offered/obtaining-professional-recognition/applying-for-a-national-teaching-fellowship>.

We are grateful for the positive feedback provided by colleagues on the SEDA and NTFS lists, when I circulated the first version. I have made a few minor additions. Gina Wisker (Brighton) added some important realism in commenting on the process of putting together an application:

“they think it’ll be easy; it’s very hard. They leave it all too late; it takes a lot of re-writing and close work.”

It is worth noting that submitting an application is a little like submitting a paper to a journal. In both there is an element of chance on who the reviewers are; the two NTF reviewers may like different aspects of the application and, if you are not successful, provide different advice on how it may be improved. If you re-apply in a later year, and many do so, your application may not go to the same reviewers, and hence you may receive different feedback! Peer review is a flawed system, but it is difficult to come up with a better one.

We have also added an appendix put together by Rayya Ghul (Canterbury Christ Church University) and Mick, which gives a proforma which can be used to provide feedback to potential applicants.

Please email us with additional or alternative suggestions and strategies for helping colleagues strengthen their applications and for universities to build the capacity and confidence of their staff to receive recognition for their teaching excellence.

Details on applying for a NTF in 2019 are available from: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/national-teaching-fellowship-scheme/NTF>

Good luck!

Mick and Ruth

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Ten Hints on Increasing your Chance of a Successful Application for a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF)

1. Try to tell an interesting story with an integrating argument. This is best expressed in the first person. To avoid over-description focus on critical incidents which have impacted on you and/or your students and colleagues. Be selective in what you include; it is not a job application; less is often more. Avoid your application reading like an annotated CV. Use diagrams and/or tables where they add value and summarise ideas succinctly. Imagine writing for three different colleagues, at least one of whom is outside your university and another from a different discipline. This will help you avoid institutional and discipline-specific language and acronyms.
2. Structure the application using the three criteria – individual excellence, raising the profile of excellence, and developing excellence. As the criteria are equally weighted all three sections should be approximately the same length. Where *relevant* reflect on your whole career and even beyond, including brief reference to activities and experiences outside HE *if* they contribute to meeting the criteria, and briefly where you see yourself going. Focus particularly on your experiences in the last few years.
3. Go beyond simply describing what you have achieved, give a rationale and indicate what difference(s) you have made; ideally how you have transformed the life of students and colleagues; this is not the place for modesty.
4. Use mostly recent examples, student feedback and evaluations, quotes, statistics, awards, invitations, and references (just name and date e.g. Brown, 2018). For 2019, for the first time there is space to list the references to evidence which do not count towards the word limit. Quotes should chime and relate to the assessment criteria.
5. Ask your colleagues, internal and external to the university, and past students to provide you with quotes. For ethical reasons avoid asking students you are currently teaching, though do consider using quotes from anonymous course evaluations and unsolicited emails. Only use quotes which indicate excellence; good is not good enough! If your institution does not provide you with a mentor(s) ask two or three colleagues, from within and external to your institution, to comment on how you could enhance your application.
6. Show awareness of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)/pedagogic research in your discipline and generally, which underpins your case for excellence; even better, if you have written about teaching and learning, indicate how you have contributed to the literature.
7. Your passion for teaching and learning should come through clearly. What is your ‘wow’ factor? Consider starting with a paragraph which catches the reader’s attention, including a statement about your teaching philosophy. This could go in the context section. End the application with a really strong quote about your excellence as a teacher.
8. Treat the application as a whole, including the institutional statement and CV. Avoid using the same evidence or quoting the same people more than once and ensure the application is self-contained. No appendices are allowed; and reviewers will not look at web sites or references.
9. The institutional statement should confirm the accuracy of your claim, give context, be effusive and add value e.g. keep some quotes for use there. It is not a job reference and the language used should promote your case rather than be measured and academic. To ensure alignment and to avoid unnecessary repetition, it would help if you are involved in its drafting.
10. Above all, enjoy reflecting on your career and celebrate that you have achieved so much already. If you are not successful this year, try not to take it too personally and consider applying the following year. Many nominees for NTFs are successful on only the second or third attempt. Remember it is an honour to be nominated by your institution and you should be proud of this and celebrate it; don’t wait for the final outcome.

Source: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

Ten Things to do to Help Prepare for Applying for a National Teaching Fellowship

These suggestions all involve developing the evidence base that meet the three criteria for NTF – individual excellence, raising the profile of excellence, and developing excellence – and can be acted upon one, two or more years before considering putting in an application.

1. Apply for Fellowship of Advance HE under UKPSF – preferably SF or PF levels.
2. Apply for a teaching fellowship or equivalent, if it exists at your institution. It is becoming an expectation that your institution should have recognised your excellence before putting you forward for a NTF. If this doesn't exist at your institution make it clear in your context
3. Develop networks of people within your institution, nationally and/or internationally, in the learning and teaching of your discipline/profession and in learning and teaching more generally. This will be helped by engaging in the following activities.
4. Participate in learning and teaching courses, workshops, writing groups, events and conferences in your institution, discipline/profession and/or nationally/internationally. Invite colleagues with interesting ideas to visit your institution to exchange practices and to run learning and teaching sessions. After all this may lead to you being invited back in return!
5. Apply for funding to undertake learning and teaching developmental and/or research projects in your institution, discipline/profession and/or nationally/internationally. Joining others inside and outside your institution in collaborative bids is a desirable and often necessary approach to obtain funding.
6. Try out innovative practices in your teaching, evaluate them and research into their impact and then give conference papers and workshops within your institution (e.g. at annual learning and teaching conferences), your discipline/professional conferences and/or at interdisciplinary learning and teaching conferences (e.g. Advance HE events; International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning).
7. Write and seek publication of reports, papers and chapters on learning and teaching initiatives and projects in which you are engaged; propose editing collections of papers and chapters on learning and teaching in your institution, discipline/profession and/or nationally/internationally.
8. Organise learning and teaching events in your institution, discipline/profession and/or nationally/internationally. Volunteer to join learning and teaching related initiatives and committees in your institution, discipline/profession and/or nationally/internationally; mentor colleagues; referee for learning and teaching journals; review learning and teaching books and resources; seek to join editorial boards of HE journals.
9. Seek feedback from students and colleagues when you undertake learning and teaching sessions, initiatives, workshops, projects, mentorships, advisorships etc and keep a note of these activities along with quotes about your excellence (a 'happy' file). It is easiest to do this immediately after the events rather than several months or years later.
10. Above all do things which you enjoy, don't take on things simply to enhance your evidence base!

Source: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

Ten Ways in which Universities can Support and Develop Applicants for National Teaching Fellowships

1. Recognise, reward and celebrate 'excellent' teaching and learning internally e.g. Institutional Teaching Fellow Scheme; Annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment Institutional and Faculty Conferences; and ensure promotion criteria are explicit about teaching excellence, scholarly teaching, and engagement in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). You cannot expect an applicant to receive a *national* award if they have not first received *institutional* recognition and awards for their excellence in learning and teaching.
2. Encourage staff to become Fellows under UKPSF scheme whether through direct application to Advance HE or through accredited procedures; e.g. the University of Reading states that "*From 2014-15 the normal expectation will be that the University nominees for the NTFs will be recognised at D3 (or equivalent)*" ie Senior Fellowship.
3. Support development of learner-centred approaches (e.g. PGCHE, CPD events, learning communities, reading and writing groups) and teaching and learning innovations. Recognise that most new practices need to be piloted and revised and may not always work well in the first year; ie encourage and support taking risks.
4. Provide opportunities for staff to undertake and publish SoTL/pedagogic research and development projects e.g. provide small grants; run grant bidding workshops and writing retreats; consider starting an in-house journal.
5. Support colleagues to bid for discipline/professional and nationally/internationally funded SoTL/pedagogic research and development projects and to present at national and international HE Conferences, including engagement with Advance HE networks and events.
6. Develop a culture where staff and students co-design, co-develop and co-investigate teaching and learning practices.
7. Encourage external networking, visiting speakers and fellows; applicants need to be outward facing and making a difference externally as well as internally; NTF applicants need to have at least a national profile.
8. Establish mentoring schemes not just for NTF applicants, but also for those who wish to put forward in 2/3+ years' time. Start the internal application process early so that applicants have time to draft and receive feedback.
9. Set quality standards for the above and benchmark practices against other similar institutions.
10. Celebrate all who are nominated, not just those who are successful, and support unsuccessful applicants to build their capacity and experience. Many nominees for NTFs are successful on only the second or third attempt. Some colleagues take lack of success in receiving a teaching award, much more personally than, say, adverse reviewer comments on their research. It is an honour to be chosen to be one of up to three institutional nominees for a NTF and this should be commended and added to their CV whatever the final outcome.

Source: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

Some guiding questions to support writing a letter of support for a NTF application

1. **How can you enthuse the assessors about the applicant?** This is not a reference for a job, it is about supporting the applicant by illustrating how they inspire yourself and others. What is the applicant's 'wow' factor? Does the letter demonstrate genuine knowledge of the person (rather than just a description of the application)? Does it demonstrate the wide range of ways the applicant has impacted positively on learning and teaching?
2. **What are the different ways in which you can support their application in the letter?** Have you confirmed the activities the candidate claims are accurate? Have you gone beyond just a summary of what is in the application? What value does your letter add to the application? How can you best emphasize the excellence of the individual (very good is not good enough)? Have you 'sold' the applicant (this is sometimes difficult for the individual to do themselves)? What transformative impact has the applicant had on the institution and elsewhere?
3. **How can you show that you are familiar with the criteria by which the applicant is being assessed?** What information do you need from the applicant to ensure you are writing supportive points in relation to the full criteria? Ensure they and you have enough time to do this by setting a deadline for a good draft of their application and other information to be with you before you start writing the letter of support.
4. **What key information in relation to the context of their role needs to be emphasized in the letter of support?** Can you structure the application around the criteria to emphasize the points in relation to each element of the criteria? Might you use subheadings to demonstrate this? Is it appropriate to highlight key points in bold?
5. **Have you included evidence to support your points?** Are there quotes from colleagues and students that you can use to bring your points to life? Are these quotes strong and enthusiastic, not just descriptive of the applicant's activities? Do they demonstrate significant impact of the applicant's work?
6. **Have you carefully checked that your letter of support meets with the requirements for the application?** (i.e. font, word count, page limit etc). Does it align with the applicant's application?

Source: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

NTFS Nomination Selection Pro-forma¹

Name of Assessor:

Name of Applicant:

Grade each criterion on a 1-5 scale and make a brief helpful comment *addressed to the applicant* which can be fed back directly to them. Also indicate whether you think the sub-criteria are met or not.²

| Criterion 1 | Individual excellence: Evidence of enhancing and transforming student outcomes and/or the teaching profession; demonstrating impact commensurate with the individual's context and the opportunities afforded by it. | Met | Not Met |
|-------------|--|-----|---------|
| | Clearly demonstrates engagement of students and a <i>transformative impact</i> on their learning | | |
| | The evidence to support this criterion is <i>wide ranging and outstanding</i> | | |
| | Clear that the nominees' teaching is not only informed by pedagogy but that they further shape these theories <i>with their own research</i> | | |
| | Demonstrates <i>inclusivity</i> | | |
| | <i>Creative</i> | | |

Grade:

Comment on strengths and how could be even stronger:

| Criterion 2 | Raising the profile of excellence: Evidence of supporting colleagues and influencing support for student learning and/or the teaching profession; demonstrating impact and engagement beyond the nominee's immediate academic or professional role. | Met | Not Met |
|-------------|---|-----|---------|
| | Evidence how they support student learning and influence change not only amongst colleagues within their institution but <i>also nationally and internationally, and if appropriate within their local communities</i> | | |
| | The examples are <i>well evidenced and underpinned by scholarship</i> | | |
| | The initiatives they put in place within their institutions are well-developed and evaluated in terms of their impact and <i>disseminated both nationally and internationally</i> through shared practice, education/teaching and learning committees, and at conferences | | |
| | Shows <i>leadership and/or influence</i> | | |

Grade:

Comment on strengths and how could be even stronger:

¹ Designed by Rayya Ghul (rayya.ghul@canterbury.ac.uk) and Mick Healey (mhealey@glos.ac.uk)

² These are unofficial. They come from comments in HE Academy reports on what assessors are looking for as they read applications and our own views on important aspects associated with successful applications. In an increasingly competitive environment it is expected that successful candidates will meet most, though not necessarily all of them.

| Criterion 3 | Developing excellence: Show the nominee's commitment to and impact of ongoing professional development with regard to teaching and learning and/or learning support. | Met | Not Met |
|--------------------|--|------------|----------------|
| | Demonstrates a continuous development of personal and professional practice and <i>looks to the future as well as the past</i> , using a wide range of evidence to underpin their claims | | |
| | Also <i>links this development to their practice</i> in the classroom/learning environment | | |
| | Clearly a <i>critical reflective practitioner</i> | | |
| | Demonstrates a <i>breadth and depth of engagement</i> with CPD and often takes advantage of both formal and informal learning and development opportunities | | |

Grade:

Comment on strengths and how could be even stronger:

| Overview | | Met | Not Met |
|-----------------|---|------------|----------------|
| | Exhibits passion and contains a 'wow' factor | | |
| | Tells a <i>consistent and compelling story</i> | | |
| | A clear <i>philosophy of teaching and learning</i> comes through the application | | |
| | Has at least a <i>national profile</i> in teaching and learning of discipline or generally | | |
| | Quotes from students and colleagues in the institution, nationally and desirably internationally <i>attest to your excellence not that you are just very good</i> | | |
| | All three <i>sections roughly the same length</i> | | |
| | <i>Clear and well-written</i> | | |
| | Submission, institutional statement and CV are <i>aligned and each contains new material</i> | | |

Overall grade:

Comment on the strengths of application overall and how could be even stronger:

Source: Ghul and Healey (2019) www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources

Applicants and institutional assessors are advised to look at Appendices 5 and 6 of the [NTFS 2019 - Nominee and HEP guidelines final.pdf](#) for the 2019 Scoring Profiles and Scoring Rubric

NTF workshop

Other Resources

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/Producing-the-National-Teaching-Fellows-of-the-future>

<https://sally-brown.net/?s=national+teaching+fellow&submit=Search>