



Best
PRACTICE
Report

INTRODUCTION

This report has been created using the supporting statements from all five hundred and fifteen nominations for USSA's Teaching Excellence Awards 2012. This gives us the opinions of over three hundred students, across all faculties.

Rather than focussing this report on the different award categories, we decided that it would be better to look at all statements together. We did this as we want to encourage teaching best practice in all areas. This guide is not scientific in its approach as we are only sharing the reasons why students nominated their teachers. It is our hope, however, that by sharing this information with you, we can help improve teaching across the University.

WHAT ARE THE TEA AWARDS?

The Teaching Excellence Awards, or TEA for short, began three years ago in an effort by USSA to celebrate teaching excellence. USSA wanted to give recognition to the teachers that went the extra mile for their students. We had heard through our colleagues at NUS Scotland that Edinburgh University's Students' Association had come up with a fantastic awards night that celebrated teaching, and we wanted to know more. Before long, the Higher Education Academy got involved and helped Students' Associations across Scotland to create their own award ceremonies.

After our first awards, the feedback we got from students and staff was overwhelming! Students were thankful that we were giving them a mechanism to give an appropriate thank you to their teachers; teaching staff were over the moon that finally, someone was recognising the hard work that they did; and USSA was getting students interested in Quality Enhancement! It was a win, win, win!

Since the first awards, the TEAs have continued to go from strength to strength. Every year, the number of teachers nominated goes up, as does the number of students submitting nominations.

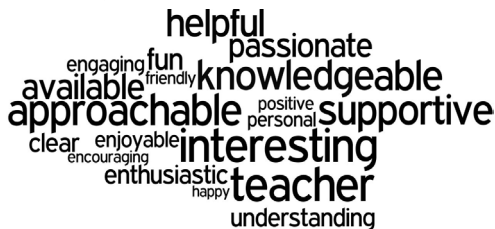
We feel that every teacher should have the experience of being nominated for an award, and that's why we made this guide. We hope that you will be able to take the information and make use of it. We hope to see you at the award ceremony next year.

WHAT GETS TEACHERS NOMINATED?

One of the first things we did was to try to get a sense of what type of teacher was being nominated for the awards. We took all of the supporting statements and fed them into a Wordle generator.

For those that are not familiar with Wordles, it's a piece of software that takes text and counts the number of words in it; once this is done, it displays the words in a picture – the bigger the word, the more times it has been mentioned.

Once this was done for our supporting statements, we removed all the names, titles and other unrelated words. We were left with the following:



Altogether, these words describe the perfect teacher for Strathclyde University students. These traits are considered to be important to the student body, and are traits which every teacher should be encouraged to display. But what do the above mean to students?

Helpful

Students defined helpful as a teacher who gives useful information or advice with or without students asking for it. This can be academic, pastoral or even how to raise an issue at an appropriate committee for it to be resolved.

Passionate

Passionate teachers to Strathclyde students are teachers who ensure that the love of their subject area comes clearly across, and rubs off onto the students that they teach.

Fun

Fun teachers are those that effortlessly use humour to aid learning – especially when dealing with “dry” subject areas.

Engaging

Engaging teachers are those whose teaching style makes students feel a part of their learning, rather than detached from it. This can be with or without assistive technology.

Friendly

Friendly teachers are teachers who are able to keep a professional relationship with students, without making them feel inferior. They will also, in general, know their students' names.

Knowledgeable

A knowledgeable teacher is a teacher who knows and is comfortable talking about their subject area. They also keep up to date with current developments in their field and will often turn these developments into class discussions.

Available

An available teacher is one who is always there for their students, and who will always make students feel they are the priority over their other commitments.

Approachable

An approachable teacher is a teacher that no student feels uncomfortable speaking with, be it about academic or personal issues.

Positive

Refers to a teacher that displays a positive attitude, or one who is able to encourage a positive attitude in their students.

Personal

A teacher who is personal is one that tailors their approach to each student, usually in pastoral situations.

Supportive

A supportive teacher is one who gives support to students academically and pastorally. They will do so via any communication means, and generally do so swiftly.

Clear

Clear refers to a teacher's communication style. Teachers who are described in this way are succinct in getting their views across in their classes.

Encouraging

An encouraging teacher is one who makes the student believe that they are capable of much more, even when the student doubts their own abilities.

Enjoyable

Enjoyable refers to the teaching style used. Teachers who have enjoyable classes will be those that ensure that students' minds are kept active and involved – with or without assistive technology (although note that most instances of this phrase referred to the use of some sort of assistive technology).

Interesting

This word was used in two ways by the students: to describe a teacher, and to describe their teaching style. In terms of the teacher, this describes someone who can give interesting facts about their subject and offer different avenues of thought for the students. In terms of teaching style, interesting applies to classes which are brought to life in some way – usually with assistive or SMART technology.

Enthusiastic

An enthusiastic teacher is one who is eager to teach and impart knowledge. This enthusiasm rubs off onto students and encourages them to seek out further learning.

Happy

A happy teacher is one who is never down or glum, and who never moans, but rather makes the class happy, even on cold, wet Monday mornings!

Understanding

An understanding teacher is one who shows compassion and empathy to the students that they teach. These are teachers that understand that being a student now is very difficult, and do their best to try not to add further stress to their students.

TEACHER

This was the highest ranked word in our wordle. It is the word which is used in almost every single supporting statement, usually with one of the above words in front of it. We know in some cases that being a teacher is a small part of your role, but to the students it's the most important part. According to our students, a teacher is all of the above.

One thing that we thought was interesting was the word counts used: the word "Teacher" was used four hundred and ninety-eight times in the supporting statements, whereas the word "Researcher" was used four times. Research, whilst being important to ensuring students get taught up-to-date information, is not something which students actively considered when nominating staff. From the nominations submitted, if you have a good balance between teaching and research, you would be more likely to be nominated for an award than if you are focused on research only

clear helpful enthusiastic
enjoyable supportive personal
approachable available positive
encouraging engaging teacher
passionate
friendly interesting
fantastic

WHAT MAKES A WINNER?

One of the things we wanted to know was what it was that was different about the nominations that were shortlisted. We specifically fed the supporting statements of those that had been shortlisted into the Wordle generator, and as before we removed all words which were names, titles and unrelated.

This left us with pretty much the same word list as those that had been nominated, although the importance of the words had changed. Being helpful and supportive were the most important traits for those that had been shortlisted.

From reading the nominations for those shortlisted more closely, it's clear that the shortlisted lecturers have made a significant impact on the University experience of the students, and it is that impact which comes across so well in the shortlisted nominations. These teachers went beyond the beyond in ensuring that their students were supported, and did everything in their power to be approachable and available to them.

The clear message that we have received from the shortlist supporting statements is that students value a teacher that can support them and listen and advise them on their concerns – academic or otherwise. They want teaching to be dynamic so that it grabs their interest and makes it easier to learn. They want positive teachers that fill them with enthusiasm and passion about their subject.

THE SUGGESTED DOS AND DON'TS

The Students' Association recognises that you wouldn't be doing what you do if you didn't enjoy teaching. But we also recognise that sometimes it's difficult to develop your teaching style, especially with the sometimes harsh time restraints that you have.

The suggested Dos and Don'ts below are here to try and share the students' views on what works and what does not. If stuck for inspiration, perhaps try and follow at least one - we're sure that you will see the benefits!

DO'S:

1. Be memorable – if your students are asked about a memorable teacher, you want to be that teacher. An easy way to do this is to build a layer of debate into your classes. This can be done by asking students what they think about a topic and encouraging a debate within the lecture itself. It's clear that those that were shortlisted love teaching and if you do, then you shouldn't have much to do to be memorable.

2. Students love interaction, both inside and outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, students love discussion and debate and the PRS response system! Outside they like doing extracurricular activities that help them to learn and better understand their studies.

3. Employability is a big concern for students. According to our data, students responded positively when teachers brought companies in and allowed students to work with companies to get experience whilst doing their dissertation – perhaps see if this is something you could incorporate into one of your courses if you haven't already.

4. Make yourself available as often as possible, and make sure that students know that you are available. Students have noted several instances of teachers reminding students of their availability, particularly when given difficult coursework. They appreciate that level of support. Also, be as prompt as possible in responding to emails – the nominating students rated prompt responses to communication very highly.

5. If you're comfortable doing so, try adding humour to what you teach. You don't have to be a stand-up comedian, but humour helps focus the class on the topic that you're teaching, especially if that subject is a little dry.

DONT'S:

1. Use chalk and a blackboard. We know that this is the traditional way of lecturing, but some of the students that you teach now have never seen a blackboard before. Same with OHPs and acetates. These methods can require too much standing in front and dictating and not enough interaction. Without interaction, it is less likely that what you teach will be remembered. PowerPoint is an interactive alternative. If you teach a subject that requires use of a blackboard, try to interact with the students throughout your lecture.

2. Read the information word for word from your slides. Students list this as near the top of their number one pet hates. Reading off the slides with no additional information is not interactive and won't engage students.

3. Fail to respond, or be dismissive of student enquiries. It often takes a lot of confidence for a student to come and ask for help; make sure that you respond in such a way that they will be happy to come back and ask for more help when they next need it.

4. Fail to be clear when giving feedback. Be as detailed as you can be. Feedback remains a very important development area for all universities in the UK.

5. Look disinterested when teaching classes. We know that a number of teaching staff have large research commitments, but for the hour that you are teaching, it pays to engage your students fully.

CONCLUSION

We hope that this report is of some use to teaching staff and gives an idea of what current students are looking for from their learning experience. Remember this is the collective views of over 500 students from all levels and all faculties.

The Students' Association wants to help wherever possible to ensure the best learning experience for the students that we represent. If you would like further information, do not hesitate to contact Rebecca Maxwell Stuart, the Vice-President Education, for further information.

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