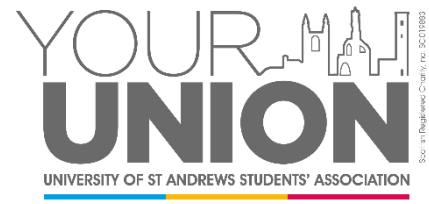


University of St Andrews  
Students' Association



“Defining and promoting teaching excellence:  
Analysis of the nominations for the Teaching  
Awards 2021/2”

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# 1. Introduction

This paper provides analysis of the nominations made by students for the Teaching Awards 2021/2 carried out by the University of St Andrews. **The paper aims to explore the qualities, attitudes and practices of teachers which students regard as exemplary of excellent teaching.** A further aim of the paper is to translate the main findings into suggestions that teachers can be reflect upon and student representatives can use in their advocacy to improve teaching. The paper is the outcome of a qualitative thematic analysis of the nominations.

On top of providing students with an opportunity to reward their most outstanding teachers, the Teaching Awards also generate a substantial set of data describing student-identified best teaching practices and approaches. As a part of writing a nomination, students were requested to submit a 200-500 words free form written comment answering the question: “*Why does your nominee deserve a Teaching Award in the selected category?*” The guidelines were kept broad to allow students to express themselves and to reflect only on those aspects of teaching which they deemed important. As a result, the written responses were diverse in terms of style and content. The paper analyses the free form responses to distinguish some common patterns, which have been presented as **Themes**.

Three main themes have been identified and discussed in the following sections of this paper:

- I. **Individual care and caring attitude**
- II. **Students as collaborators and contributors**
- III. **Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities**

The prevalence of each of these themes in the 2021/22 nominations is significant. Teaching Awards nominations suggest that a caring and democratic approach underlines majority of values associated with teaching. Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities add a practical nuance to this argument: students note the time and effort dedicated to provision of an engaging learning environment and see that as a sign of dedication to the discipline and to the University community.

In addition, the paper explores students’ reflections on **inclusivity and diversity** and **online/hybrid teaching**. These themes have been singled out as worthy of additional analysis due to their topical and timely nature. Inclusivity and diversity are the among the main core values of the University, and the paper explores what students regard as their exemplary implementation. Additionally, as the University starts the transition back to the pre-pandemic teaching, this round of Teaching Awards represented the last opportunity to explore the perceptions of excellent online/hybrid teaching that have been formed in the last three academic years.

The final section of the paper discusses **additional practical steps** which have been commented upon in the nominations but not addressed in any of the previous sections in depth.

Apart from this last section, each theme is presented with an **introduction**, followed by **main findings** and a more **in-depth analysis**. Each section also includes a list of **practical steps**, which provide suggestions and examples of how certain approaches which were regarded as the most outstanding by the students can be implemented into teaching.

The University of St Andrews recognises the importance and the value of student input into teaching. The team behind this paper would like to thank all students who submitted their Teaching Awards nominations for their contribution to continuous development of excellent teaching. This project was proposed by Alice Rickless, Academic Representation Intern (2021/2) and funded by the St Andrews Enhancement Teams. The project was administered and supervised by Chase Greenfield, Academic Representation Co-Ordinator. The data analysis and the writing up of the report were carried out by Evgeniya Pakhomova (PhD candidate, Department of Social Anthropology).

## 2. Methodology

This paper analyses the nominations made by students for the Teaching Awards 2021/2. The categories of 'Outstanding Teacher' (in both Arts/Divinity and Science/Medicine) and 'Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity' have been assessed as a part of the project. Combined, this project reviews 186 out of the 318 nominations that were submitted for all awards pathways this year.

<sup>1</sup>

The analysis behind this paper was carried out predominantly with the use of qualitative methods, with thematic analysis being the core method. Nominations have been coded and compared with the use of NVivo. The items that were coded included attitudes of a teacher (e.g., helpful, engaging, encouraging), types of environments fostered by a teacher (e.g., welcoming, respectful, collaborative), and certain 'practices', or particular actions or approaches of a teacher that have been noted by students (e.g., 'responsive to emails', 'provided literature recommendations', 'reflected on issues of gender'). These were compared to each other to analyse, for example, which practices made students feel comfortable in a class, or which approaches were found to be particularly engaging. Such focus on the intersections of different codes formulated the main themes of this paper and generated deeper questions about what, from the perspective of the students, constitutes outstanding teaching – and why. Coding was done broadly to ensure the preservation of context.

Since the aims of the paper included both a description of general attitudes and a degree of practical applicability of the findings, it should be acknowledged that the formulation of themes was informed by these goals. The team behind this research focused on the most prominent themes which, to the best of our judgement, might be curious to the readers or might inform or inspire enhancements to the teaching practices at the University, on micro and macro levels.

All code statistics were rounded to the nearest percent. The charts and graphs on frequency of mentions of certain themes/codes are not intended to give a precise quantitative analysis as it was up to the researcher to determine what fell within their scopes. All statistics in this paper are intended to indicate the general frequency of certain themes and patterns rather than to provide strong quantitative analysis. For the same reason, proportionate review of different categories was not carried out. The overview of all codes used in analysis is provided in the appendix.

In the charts that analyse the frequency of the overlap of certain codes, there are two sets of columns included – blue and orange. The blue columns represent a '*direct connection*', meaning that a nomination contains references to two codes in the same fragment of the text. For example, a sentence "The engaging approach of this teacher helped me to stay motivated" would have been coded as both an example of an engaging and a motivating attitude. The orange columns show the number of occasions in which two codes are '*indirectly mentioned*' in the same nomination without overlapping in the same fragment of text. For example, if a student first talked about the engaging attitude of their teacher and then later talked about how that teacher was also motivating, this would be a case of two codes 'appearing' in the same nomination.

All nominations have been anonymised for this research, as advertised to the students during the nomination submission process. Names of students and teachers have been omitted; different nominations are referred to by numbers in order of submission from latest to earliest across all categories. The direct quotes have been slightly edited to maintain anonymisation and grammatic coherence while preserving the meaning as much as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> One nomination for the 'Outstanding Teacher' category was excluded from analysis as an identical copy of it was submitted for the 'Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity' category

### 3. Theme I: Individual care and caring attitude

The biggest finding of this research project concerns the importance of individual care signified in the nominations for the Teaching Awards. Discussion, advice, and support provided by teachers on a personal level constitute one of the two most frequently discussed themes found in the nominations. Among the multitude of characteristics and actions that students saw as worthy of a Teaching Award, the descriptions of acts of care and of compassionate, understanding approach appeared most frequently. The nominations also clearly show how much of an impact teachers can have on not only the academic performance, but also the university experience of a student in general. On multiple occasions, acts of care were described as influential in changing one's whole view of their academic potential as well as their professional and personal future.

The scope and impact of care make it the ideal theme to start this paper. The nominations for Teaching Awards show that a personable attitude and a willingness to be a good listener are highly thought-out qualities in teachers. Teaching excellence was primarily evaluated through this lens. Other perspectives, such as the ones emphasising knowledge or expertise of a teacher, were far less prominent – and usually accompanied by a further focus on how a teacher communicated such knowledge in a caring way.

For the purposes of this paper, any help or support that a student has received in a one-on-one setting with a teacher is analysed as **individual care**. The exact examples vary, from academical to more pastoral help (sometimes as simple as listening attentively to student's problem, sometimes as complex as making significant changes to a module to accommodate individual needs). It seems important to reiterate here that examples of individual care that fall drastically outside of the usual responsibilities of a teacher (for example, extensive contact outside of office hours or during the weekends) are not discussed in this section. Such cases were rare and fell outside the scope of both the analysis and, often, the Teaching Awards criteria, regardless of their undoubtedly significant impact on a student's experience.

There were also general mentions of **caring attitude** that were not connected to concrete examples.

The time constraints of this study did not allow to further examine the correlation between the mentions of care and the gender of the nominees. A majority of examples used in this section refer to female staff (judged by the pronouns used in the nominations). This poses a question about the gendered nature of different values that students assign to teaching. Are students more likely to interpret the attitude of female staff as caring, or is care more frequently expected from the female staff? This may present an opportunity for further research.

Individual care and/or a general caring attitude were mentioned in nominations for the Outstanding Teacher (Art/Divinity and Science/Medicine) and the Commitment to Academic Inclusivity categories. Overall, these themes were found in 152 out of 186 nominations (82%).

## 3.1 Main findings

This study separates care into two sub-themes: **individual care** and **caring attitudes**. Individual care is the biggest theme observed in the nominations, spanning across 130 (70%) of all nominations. More generic descriptions of a caring attitude of a teacher were noted in 99 (53%) of all nominations. Only 34 of all nominations (18%) mentioned neither.

The theme of individual care includes examples of particular acts of care that students have experienced from a tutor: responsiveness to emails, detailed/useful feedback that went beyond expectations, individual reading suggestions and discussions of ideas, support for students in difficult circumstances. Analysis of this theme suggests that acts of individual care can have long-spanning effects that go far beyond receiving an answer to a question or other practical considerations. An insightful conversation about one's academic interest or a check-up with a struggling student can go as far as changing the course of one's university life. In less revelatory cases, they inspire students to achieve their best and to see themselves as valuable members of the University.

Individual care was further categorised into sub-themes, including responsiveness to emails, detailed/useful feedback, individual suggestions of further resources, support for students in difficult circumstances, and discussion of individual ideas.

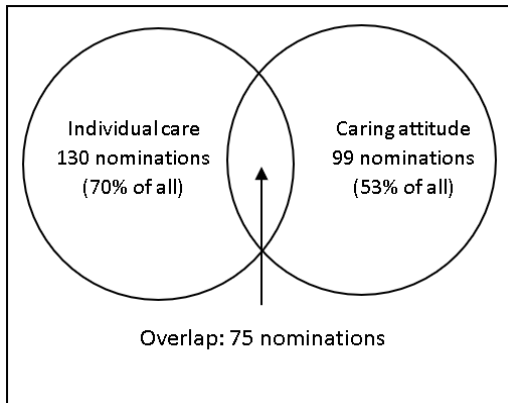
The theme of a caring attitude is revealing due to its intersection with other themes, such as 'inspiration' and 'passion'. On a broad descriptive level these three attributes of a teacher were frequently seen as interrelated and described as the hallmark of excellent teaching.

The difference between individual care and caring attitude potentially suggests that students might understand the criteria for Teaching Awards differently, being unsure of whether it is the quality or the quantity of the nominations that matters. Thus, some students added more examples to their nominations while others limited themselves to broad descriptions only. However, taken together the two themes show that a personable approach and a willingness to be available for one-on-one discussions are a crucial factor in how students evaluate teaching.

Due to its frequency and its impact, care illuminates all other themes and sub-themes of this study. As mentioned later on a few occasions, it strongly relates to the next major theme, 'Students as contributors and collaborators', and even finds its way into discussion of knowledgeability of teachers. Overall, it was impossible to separate care from the rest of the facets of the data, and the following sections frequently return to this first theme.

## 3.2 What constitutes acts of care and caring attitude – and what makes these exemplary of excellent teaching?

### Difference between ‘individual care’ and ‘caring attitude’



Students wrote their nominations for the Teaching Awards with a different degree of depth. This was reflected in how the categories for analysis were formulated.

**Individual care** in this paper refers to particular acts of care that students have experienced from a tutor: extended feedback, discussions of questions/ ideas during office hours, check-ups, support with assignments, etc. The nominations included into this theme usually provided quite detailed examples of particular acts of care.

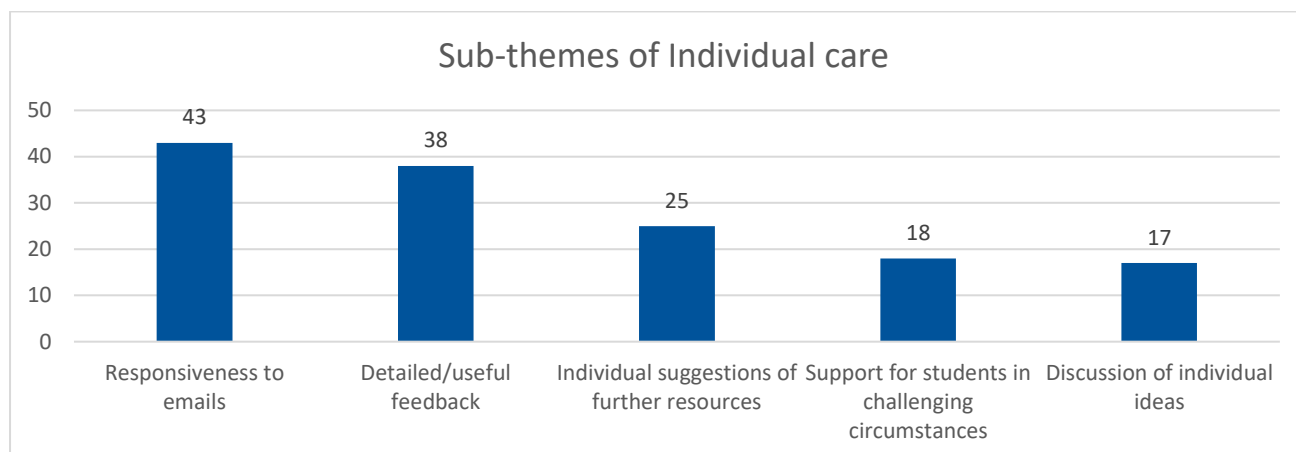
‘**Caring attitude**’ theme refers to nominations that described a certain teacher as helpful, supportive, empathetic, caring, etc. in general terms, not necessarily related to any examples of care that those students in particular have received. Thus, the applicability of this theme is broader.

The themes of individual care and caring attitude only partially overlap. On the one hand, some students mentioned a general caring atmosphere created by a certain teacher without going into much detail – these were coded as ‘caring attitude’ only. On the other hand, some students described at length how a certain teacher provided them with a lot of one-on-one advice without describing this as ‘caring’ (and choosing to focus on other contributions/characteristics of the said teacher) – these were coded as ‘individual care’ only.

Although thematically ‘individual care’ and ‘caring attitude’ are quite similar, the distinction between these themes is important to maintain, since it shows how students interpret the criteria for Teaching Awards differently. A significant portion of nominations only described the impact of teachers in broad statements. Some students even expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed minimal length for a nomination. Other nominations went at a far greater length and depth. Thus, the difference between the themes of individual care and caring attitude highlights an observation which can be made in regard to all nominations: it seems that students are unsure about whether it is the quantity or the quality of nominations that matters. The criteria for the 2021-22 Awards included space for both individual impact (quality) and a teacher’s impact on larger groups (quantity) without preference toward one or the other.

A focus on the themes of individual care and caring attitude together allows to analyse how often different examples and mentions of care are present in the nominations. Even though students chose to speak about caring attitudes and practices to a different extent, an overwhelming majority saw it as a theme which is important to mention even if only in passing. 152 nominations (82%) have mentioned care in some capacity.

## Individual care: sub-themes



The following paragraphs provide a description of the most prominent sub-themes that have been observed within the individual care theme. In total, individual care was mentioned in 130 nominations (70%). It is the most prominent sub-theme of this study overall – no other factor was as frequently described in the nominations.

The most frequently mentioned factor was **responsiveness to emails**. 43 out of 130 students who mentioned individual care (33%) spoke about responsiveness as one of the reasons for the nomination. Students highly appreciate when they can easily reach their teacher by email and receive a timely response. The types of queries that students had for their teachers were varying, from arranging a one-on-one meeting to discuss personal challenges to questions about the material. Students often commented on how **timely responses to emails from their teachers helped to reduce anxiety and stress about upcoming deadlines and personal concerns**.

Responsiveness to emails is strongly tied to personable and collaborative approaches. A clear line of communication and encouragement of students to actively use it is something that students interpret as a sign of keen interest in students and of a democratic environment. This is further analysed in the next section, 'Students as collaborators and contributors'.

The next in terms of the frequency of mentions are the comments on **detailed and/or useful feedback** on assignments or class activities. Such comments were made by 38 out of 130 students who spoke about individual care (29%). Those students who chose to highlight excellent feedback often focused on how their teachers were positively encouraging them to improve and to achieve their best potential. 14 students who have commented on feedback have also described their teachers as motivating or inspiring. The particular aspects of feedback that were regarded as exemplary of excellent teaching were the overall encouraging tone, practical applicability of advice given in feedback, and in-depth analysis of areas that can be improved.

**Individual suggestions of further resources** were highlighted by 25 out of 130 students who spoke about individual care (19%). Students appreciated the extra time that teachers put into suggesting further literature or helpful instruments which matched the students' personal interests in the subject or the topics of their assignments. The nominations highlighted how students believed that teacher did not *have* to go in-depth with reading suggestions but *chose* to.

The previous sub-theme is strongly tied to another one, **discussion of individual ideas**. 17 out of 130 students who spoke about individual care (13%) mentioned how their teachers helped them to develop new and raw ideas into coherent essays, projects, or future plans. The reason why students



saw such discussions as exemplary of excellent teaching slightly varied. Some students talked about how they had an idea that they wanted to pursue and develop in the module but did not know how to proceed with it before speaking to their nominee. Other students mentioning this sub-theme explained how the module was challenging for them for various reasons, and their nominees helped them to achieve clarity with regards to how to complete an assignment. Thus, discussion of individual ideas was seen as excellent by students if it helped them to push forward or to deal with the already covered materials.

18 out of 130 students who spoke of the individual care provided by their teachers (14%) noted that this support came in response to particularly **challenging circumstances** that these students have experienced. While this sub-theme is not especially prominent, it is important to discuss in more detail.

Some students have highlighted personal challenges that they were going through during the academic year and pointed out how the care provided by their nominees at that time was exceptional – sometimes going as far as suggesting that their nominees were the sole reason why they did not take an academic break. This truly shows how much of an impact even a single teacher can have on the university experience of a student.

Out of these 18, five nominations emphasised that the nominees were the ones initiating and sustaining the contact once they became aware of the struggles experienced by a student. These came in the form of checking up on students who have not submitted an assignment on time or establishing weekly check-up calls for students who came to the University from a non-academic background or experienced personal difficulties. This forethought was seen as a sign of instructional excellence as it made the students feel like they were deeply and truly cared for, even if they initially felt like their concerns or problems did not matter enough or would be of an inconvenience to a teacher if brought up too frequently. A teacher taking an initiative in reaching out to a student was seen as something truly outstanding.

It is also worth acknowledging that only three students have mentioned extensions or feedback flexibility in general as a form of care that they regarded as exemplary of teaching excellence. A possible explanation for this is that in some schools, extensions are administered by the school administration or the heads of teaching (or the heads of modules, who would be different from the nominees in cases when the nominee only acted as a tutor). Another possible explanation is that extensions have become a standard practice in the recent years and are an expected practice. It is also possible that few students who submitted nominations asked for extensions. Overall, it is impossible to provide conclusive speculations on this subject from the nominations alone.

**However, the almost total absence of the mentions of extensions despite so many references to care suggests that the forms of care that students especially seek and praise are tied far closer to personal communication than to the practical arrangements.** Students focused on how their nominees were there for them, available to talk through the difficulties, discuss the complex material, or to just have a chat. This, in their own words, had a significant impact on their ability to continue with their studies or to overcome challenges – and was seen as an important thing to acknowledge in the nominations.

Overall, the acts of individual care mentioned in the Teaching Awards nominations are highly varied. Although a majority of them refer to academic matters, quite frequently the experience of studying with a caring teacher had ‘unintended’ side-effects. A timely response to a query or a check-up with a student who struggles with an essay were valued not only for practical reasons but also for encouragement and motivation that students got from such interactions. **Students described how individual care helped them to improve their studies and also to improve their view of self.**

## Caring attitude: characteristics

Caring attitude is a broadly applicable theme of this study in comparison to individual care. It consists of students speaking not about certain acts of care but of general descriptions of the attitude of a teacher as helpful, supportive, empathetic, caring, etc. Caring attitude was mentioned by 99 (53%) of the nominations.

Teachers who were described as caring were also often described as **passionate/enthusiastic** and **inspiring/motivational** in the same fragments of text. Usually, these qualities appeared together in shorter nominations which described the nominees in brief, broad terms. In other cases, the overlap between care, passion, and inspiration was intentional. Overall, passionate/enthusiastic, inspiring/motivational and caring attitudes have been consistently commented upon throughout the nominations, and lead to suggest that from students' perspective they represent the hallmark of a well-rounded excellent teacher. A caring teacher is passionate for the subject and for learning itself. Equally, a caring teacher wants to motivate their students to do their best job.

"<...> if I ever have any questions or concerns, she is there to help, and she motivates me (and I'm sure everyone else in my class) to do our best. I can truly say that her passion for the subject illuminates her teaching, and I never thought I would enjoy this subject and this module as much as I do <...>"  
- Nomination 15

The caring attitude of a teacher could be perceived from the general atmosphere of a class rather than from some particular acts of individual care – this is another difference from the individual care sub-theme. Teachers who reminded students about the availability of further support during classes, asked the class about their wellbeing, and listened to group concerns were often described as caring even if particular students writing the nominations did not experience any problems/challenges requiring further one-on-one contact.

A caring teacher is also frequently described as someone who treats their students as equals. This is further explored in the next section, 'Students as collaborators and contributors'

## Context: care versus knowledge/expertise

The reader might be surprised by the overwhelming presence of care and inquire about how it compares to such things as knowledge and expertise of a teacher. After all, one might assume a teacher's ability to act as a valuable source of information is an important criterion for evaluation of teaching excellence.

Indeed, knowledgeability of a teacher is a theme that has been highlighted in a significant portion of the nominations. 46 out of 186 students (25%) spoke about the wide knowledge or a high level of expertise of their nominees. However, it is not as prominent as any of the three major themes of this paper.

The nominations suggest that students appreciate the knowledgeability of a teacher if this knowledgeability is 'activated' through the approach that a teacher takes towards the students. 34 out of 46 students who pointed out the wide knowledge of a teacher (74%) also spoke about individual care or caring attitude.

This is further supported by the prominence of another theme that was observed in the nominations, digestion of complex knowledge, mentioned by 60 students overall (32%), which, likewise, has a significant overlap with care. Students predominantly praised not only knowledgeable teachers, but those who took time and effort to communicate this knowledge in an easy-to-understand manner and took care to ensure that students understood them. Some nominations specifically pointed out that they were positively impressed by how the knowledgeability of a nominee did not come at the expense of a patronising stance.

"His consistently positive and engaged attitude, his obvious care and thoughtfulness, and the depth of his knowledge of the field made him one of the best tutors I have had at St Andrews."

- Nomination 157

"She cares for her students' progress and provides the class with valuable knowledge whether in the form of advice for project writing or clarity on a tricky reading from a lecture."

- Nomination 91

## 3.3 Practical steps

How can a teacher make students feel cared for? While the diversity of examples in this section make this question challenging to answer, there are some practices that students have highlighted most frequently. These have been adapted into practical propositions for teachers to consider and use.

### - Timely responses

For teachers, a delayed response to a student can be seen as resulting in nothing more than a slight practical inconvenience. For students, the timeliness of a response can determine their level of anxiety and stress- even if on the surface the question is rather inconsequential. **Teachers who were seen as reliable in their responses to students' questions and concerns were often described as exemplary of an excellent teaching approach.**

### - Encouraging feedback

Students describe feedback as an important learning tool. At the same time, they imply that feedback can be demotivating if it solely focuses on mistakes and has no further practical applicability. **Feedback that highlights reasonable areas for improvement and motivates students to achieve their best is treated as a sign of deep care for academic development.**

### - Check-ups on students in difficult circumstances: initiative and consistency

Those students who wrote about their challenging circumstances in the nominations often highlighted that they were unsure about requesting additional help. **A teacher who took initiative in reaching out to a student or in establishing a network of support was regarded as exceptional.** The nominations highlight that initiation of support does not necessarily need to be time-consuming to be impactful: sometimes a short email is enough to remind a student that they are cared for and their presence at the University is valuable.

### - Addressing the class as a whole

A caring atmosphere in a class setting can be a hard thing to achieve – however, the nominations suggest that it is positively received even if not everyone needs a deeper one-on-one engagement. **A teacher who is known to students as an approachable and reliable point of contact for further questions and concerns was frequently described as excellent.** Students often gathered this perception from teachers who addressed the class with questions about their understanding of the materials, and with more personable enquiries about their general level of wellbeing.

“Whenever I contacted her, be it for essay help or to excuse my absence, her replies were quick and friendly. It is obvious that she genuinely cares about the wellbeing of her students; and this is refreshing to see in a university setting.”

- Nomination 232

“<...> the feedback is thoroughly personalised, demonstrating a level of interest in and commitment to his students that has really improved my learning experience <...>”

- Nomination 176

“He is a firm but fair marker - and never fails to communicate how we can do better. In my three years of teaching here I was yet to be taught exactly what markers expect from us - but he explained it.”

- Nomination 240

“As a direct entry student, I found it difficult to pick up things from the lectures at the beginning. <...> When I emailed him, he showed concerns about me. He offered a meeting and we talked about my academic background <...> I felt that he really does care about his student and wants to provide support.”

- Nomination 16

“He has shown incredible support for my wellbeing in a time during which I needed more support. He has been very appreciative, patient, and respectful with my journey <...>”

- Nomination 166

“Although I personally never requested any extra sessions, she made it abundantly clear there was no shame in asking and that she would be more than happy to oblige.”

- Nomination 12

## 4. Theme II: Students as collaborators and contributors

A second major theme in the nominations highlighted the opportunities and the encouragement for students to act as contributors and collaborators in teaching and in knowledge production in general. The available data suggests that students highly evaluate the efforts that teachers put into listening, acknowledging, and fostering critical independent thinking. This aligns with the University's core teaching values, and the nominations suggest that such values are reflected upon by the students who chose to comment on excellent teaching.

Students highlighted the cases in which they believed that their opinions were given room to be voiced and were heard by staff. What mattered to students was not only an ability to develop a critical perspective on the material, but also a chance to discuss ideas, questions, and mistakes in a non-judgemental, respectful atmosphere. This was true for all disciplines and in relation to both theoretical and practical concerns. Approachable teachers were evaluated highly because they helped students to feel that their contributions were treated openly and seriously as worthy of consideration.

A respectful and democratic atmosphere was taken even further in some cases, in which students contributed not only to in-class discussions but also to the module's structure and content. Teachers who have acknowledged students' feedback and used it for adjusting the course and the materials to students' needs were regarded as exceptional. An opportunity to collaborate on the course was seen as exemplary of a deep commitment to academic values. In certain cases, it was also seen as exemplary of commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

Due to time limitations, the analysis conducted for this paper did not differentiate nominations by the year of study. However, this could be an insightful line of further analysis, which can be noted from the ways in which students described their perception of collaborative and group approaches. Speaking of their experiences of being contributors and collaborators, students often reflected on their position as either first year or honours students. The nominations suggest that at different level of studies students assign different values to and express different views of collaborative practices. Equally, it is possible to suggest that evaluations of teaching excellence would also change throughout one's academic journey. Thus, this section of the paper could especially benefit from further analysis.

129 out of 186 nominations (69%) discussed opportunities to act as contributors or collaborators. This major theme emphasises that **students making the Teaching Awards nominations highly evaluate an active, participatory approach to learning as opposed to 'passive' listening and memorising**. The difference between these two styles of teaching was often cited as something that was the main reason for considering a certain teacher to be "excellent."

The nominations analysed in this section appeared in the categories of Outstanding Teacher in Arts/Divinity, Outstanding Teacher in Science/Medicine, and Commitment to Academic Inclusivity.

## 4.1 Main findings

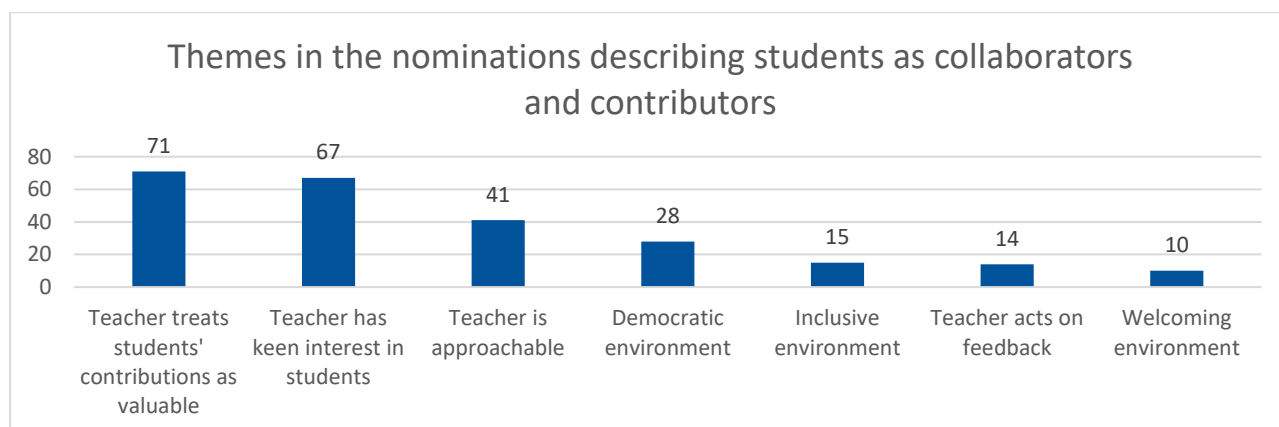
The overarching theme of collaboration and contribution was deduced from a number of slightly different aspects of teaching highlighted by the students in the nominations. These aspects all refer in one way or another to democratic approach, equal-ground communication with a teacher, and a sense that students' contributions (including both opinions and questions) are treated with respect and consideration. Some of the aspects refer to the general sense of class environment fostered by a teacher: democratic, inclusive, welcoming. Other aspects refer to how a teacher established a certain rapport in communication with students in class, by treating students' interventions as valuable, being easily approachable, acting on course feedback, etc.

In general, this section deals with aspects of communication with groups of students (e.g. a module) , rather than in individual cases. This focus on class interaction derives from the nominations themselves: students highly appreciate lectures, tutorials, and modules in which they feel like not only their own contributions, but also contributions of their peers are heard and valued. **Excellent teaching, according to students, is characterised by ability to learn not only from the teacher but also from and with other students.**

The nominations for Teaching Awards are a particularly interesting set of data to analyse because students often contrast the excellence of their nominees to the perceived problems and drawbacks that they have experienced in other modules. This is particularly noticeable in how students speak about collaborative and democratic aspects of teaching. They often point out that usually one might not feel comfortable to ask a question in a class or make a 'stupid' mistake in front of everyone. According to students, this sometimes prevents them from engaging with a class on a deeper level: they tend to keep their queries and suggestions to themselves. An approach in which collaboration and contribution of students are centred, on the other hand, makes students feel more comfortable to explore new perspectives and ideas. Thus, students often see improved communication with a teacher and of a collaborative class atmosphere as beneficial for their engagement with the studies on an individual level.

## 4.2 What makes students feel like contributors and collaborators – and what makes these excellent teaching practices?

### Sub-themes



There are a variety of ways in which students have expressed the overall feeling of being valued contributors and collaborators in teaching.

Most frequently mentioned sub-theme deals with students' evaluation of a teacher as someone who **treats students' contributions as valuable**. This approach was mentioned in 38% of the nominations analysed in this paper. The contributions include both questions and ideas. A teacher who thought about students' queries before responding and seriously considered the ideas proposed by students was often highlighted as excellent.

Almost as frequent were the mentions of a teacher having a **keen interest in students**. This sub-theme is different from those mentioned under the theme of care as it includes examples of how a teacher approached students as a *group*, rather than on the level of individual interaction. This aspect was mentioned by 36% of the nominations and is more abstract than the previous one. It includes examples which were less of a practical nature and referred more to the general feeling that students have developed during a module or some of its parts (e.g., tutorials in cases when these were run by someone other than the lecturers). Examples of broad statements about students feeling actively listened to and prioritised by a teacher were included into this sub-theme. If students felt that a teacher found time and made an active effort to learn, acknowledge, and address students' needs, they were likely to highlight it as the evidence of teaching excellence.

"<...> she is a tutor for whom no idea is a bad idea. You always feel comfortable and confident speaking in her tutorials because even if you are struggling, anything you say will be engaged with and your presence will be seen as valuable."  
- Nomination 8

"If I were to pick the main reason he deserves an award, it would be his commitment to students. In the first lecture, he took time to listen to our personal introductions, to build up mini-profiles on our academic and career ambitions, so that he could use them to provide personalised help and assistance – it made a great first impression on me and set the tone for the semester."  
- Nomination 176

Students also highlighted **approachability of a teacher** as exemplary of teaching excellence. 22% of the nominations acknowledged that a teacher was highly approachable. Interestingly, this was not necessarily tied to whether a certain student had approached their nominee with further questions/requests themselves. **The nominations suggest that for students even the *knowledge that they can comfortably communicate with a teacher could improve their satisfaction with the studies, regardless of whether such communication was practically useful for them personally.***

The next sub-theme mentioned by students was the **democratic environment** of a class. It was mentioned by 15% of the nominations and is strongly related to the first sub-theme. Students who commented on the democratic environment usually spoke about the atmosphere of discussions in class, in which all participants were believed to make equally valuable contributions. Students often highlighted how such atmosphere made them feel deeper academic engagement not only with the material but also with each other.

The last three sub-themes were less frequent, but still noticeable in the nominations. **Inclusive and welcoming environment** were mentioned by 8% and 5% of the nominations respectively. Students who described the class environment in these terms have focused more prominently on opportunities for students from different backgrounds and with different level of knowledge of the subject to equally participate in the class. Students who spoke of inclusive environment usually reflected on how minority voices were encouraged in discussion. Students who spoke about welcoming environment often mentioned how they were cautious and unsure when approaching a new subject – and later, with support from a teacher, realised that they belong in the class.

Inclusive and welcoming environment are subthemes further explored in the Inclusivity and Diversity section of this paper.

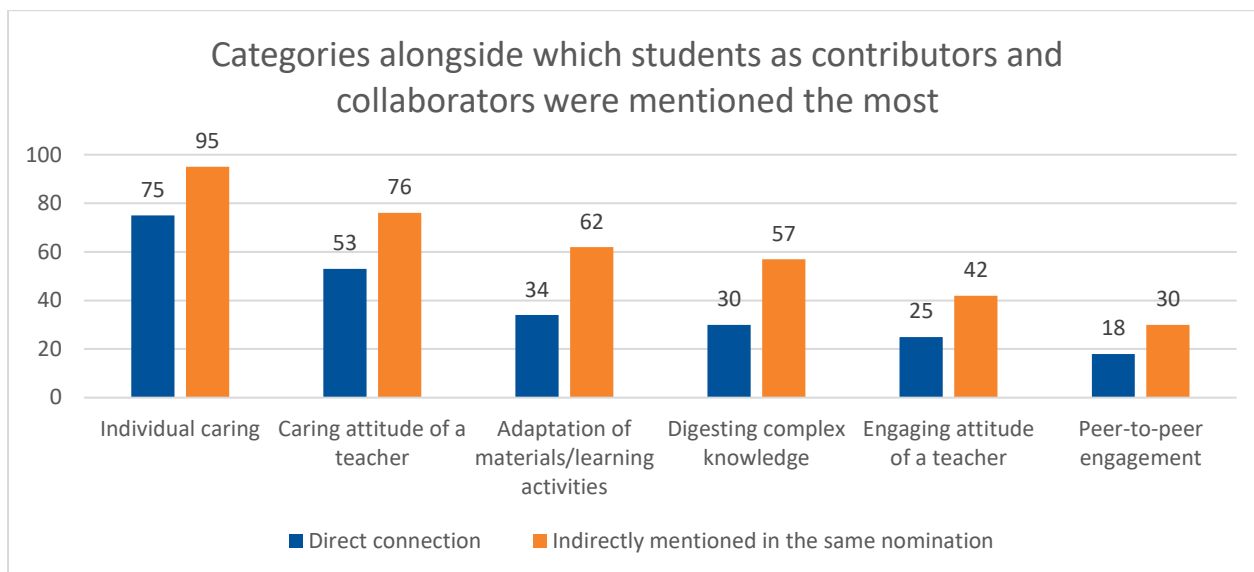
The last of the minor themes concerns teachers **acting on student feedback**. It was only mentioned by 8% of students – possibly because it is not a wide-spread practice to take module-level feedback in the middle of the course. It is reasonable to assume that students are unaware of the changes made to the University modules in response to the final MEQs between academic years as they can only take a certain module once, so this is rarely something that they can evaluate. However, some students observed how their teachers were a part of school- or University-wide changes and saw it as a sign of dedication to teaching on a high level. In other cases, a teacher was praised for making an adjustment to the module during its single run.

While it is impossible to form conclusive observations on the basis of just a few nominations mentioning a teacher acting on feedback, it is reasonable to speculate that this practice is highly sought after – since the students who have noted it often described at length how the acknowledgment of feedback made them feel valuable and improved their experience of a module.

The sub-themes related to contribution and collaboration paint a vibrant picture of approaches and attitudes of teachers that can make students feel central to their academic experience. Some aspects mentioned by students are more straightforward, while others refer to general atmosphere. Both are equally important since the general sense of collaborative and respectful approach can be experienced as beneficial even by those students who do not feel the need to ask questions or put forward experimental ideas. However, knowing that their contributions would be treated as valuable and that a teacher has a keen interest in everyone's academic development makes students comfortable to develop their opinions and critical engagement further.



## Context



The theme of this section strongly overlaps with **individual care**, a theme that was previously discussed in this paper. This does not come as surprising since students who evaluated their teacher as democratic and approachable often mentioned how a teacher represented these values both in class and in personal communication with regards to the difficulties that students were facing. 75 of the 129 students who mentioned collaborative attitude (58%) have connected their experience of being a valued contributor to the individual care that they have received from a teacher. The biggest further intersection is between responsiveness (the sub-category mentioned under the 'individual caring' umbrella theme) and collaborative approach. Students highly appreciate opportunities to ask further questions or to continue discussion after the class. If a teacher is enthusiastic about such further communication, it is seen as an additional sign of a collaborative approach and of teaching excellence.

The intersection with individual care also overlaps with the general evaluations of a **teacher as caring**. 53 out of 129 nominations analysed in this section (41%) described a teacher in these terms.

The overlap with the third theme of this paper, **the adaptation of materials and the introduction of learning activities** is also significant. This connection is addressed in the next section, after the practices related to adaptation of materials and learning activities are explained.

Collaborative approaches have also been discussed in relation to how they facilitated **digesting complex knowledge**. 30 out of 129 nominations discussed in this section (23%) emphasised how collaboration and equal-ground contribution was a gateway to deeper understanding of the material. Students pointed out how being treated as a valuable contributor encouraged them to dive deeper into new concepts and theories and to feel comfortable with clarifying misunderstandings whenever those occurred. **An approach in which students were given an opportunity to act as contributors was noted for allowing students to meaningfully learn from their mistakes rather than to feel ashamed for not knowing the correct answer straightaway.**

A teacher who fostered democratic and collaborative environment could also be sometimes described as **engaging**. This connection was made by 25 out of 129 nominations analysed in this section (19%). Thus, some students feel that a teacher who utilises an approach in which their contributions are given the central role encourages them to engage more with the material.

Finally, 18 students out of 129 (14%) made a direct connection between collaborative approaches and deep **peer-to-peer engagement**. Here, further analysis by year of study of the students making the nominations would be particularly insightful. A proposed hypothesis so far is that peer-to-peer engagement becomes more important to students at the honours and postgraduate levels (excluding online students, whose experience of peer-to-peer engagement is analysed later in this paper).

To summarise, students appreciate being treated as collaborators and contributors due to a variety of factors. They regard this approach as academically beneficial and also conducive to the feeling of being an important part of a community. Students connect collaborative approaches to better understanding of, and better engagement with, the contents of teaching. If students feel that their teacher is understanding and forgiving of mistakes, they are more likely to take risks and further push their critical engagement with the module and with their peers' opinions. The comfortable atmosphere and the general approachability of a teacher creates an environment and an atmosphere that students believe to be conducive to more meaningful and well-rounded learning.

## 4.3 Practical steps

The following points outline particular approaches that were most frequently mentioned as conducive of collaboration and democratic discussion in a class in the nominations.

### - Clear and supportive communication

The nominations suggest that some students might be unsure of the level of engagement expected in the class at the beginning of the term. Some students have commented on their worries about when and how it would be appropriate to ask questions or seek further clarifications of the material. They have praised teachers who were enthusiastic and clear about the level of support available to students in the module. **If a teacher clearly explained their approach to different perspectives and potential mistakes, and dedicated time in class to student questions, students saw it as exemplary of excellent teaching** as their anxiety about misunderstanding the material would be greatly reduced.

### - Acknowledgment of different backgrounds

For many students, education at the University of St Andrews is a chance to venture into new disciplines due to the way the sub-honours progression is managed. This opportunity, however, can be intimidating for those students who are venturing into a completely new field – or for students who come from a background that is underrepresented in their field of studies. Teachers who took time to get to know their students and their abilities (and later accounted for their needs in teaching provision teaching) were seen as exceptional. This way students felt that their presence and their contributions were valuable regardless of their prior knowledge or positionality.

### - Early and mid-semester feedback

For some students, being a collaborator and a contributor means being consulted on how the module is being run. While this is not something that can be realistically implemented on a large scale for most modules, even some minor changes, like additional elaboration of complex material or flexible tutorial structure, can be regarded as exemplary of excellent teaching. Moreover, **the willingness to act upon feedback makes students feel like their participation in the module is sincerely valued, rather than only expressed in words.**

“With significantly greater academic knowledge than the rest of us, he nevertheless treated us as equals during our discussions. He reassured me and others that we do not need to have all the answers to have a meaningful discussion.”

- Nomination 140

“She always encouraged students to reach out to chat about any issues and offered comforting and wise advice every time.”

- Nomination 98

“Despite his enormous workload and many responsibilities, he is very attentive to the need of his students. He shapes his module in order to include everyone’s interest in particular topics whenever possible.”

- Nomination 181

“She includes everyone in the class whether it is your degree, or you are taking the discipline for fun. She equally cares about your improvement.”

- Nomination 213

“Students have been rather confused about a section of the content. She took this situation seriously and suggested that perhaps she had not explained this concept clearly enough in the lectures and went on to make adjustments. This attitude not only makes students feel heard, but also shows a refreshing stance and really communicates her passion for education and her care for the module and the students.”

- Nomination 302

“He takes our feedback into account and adapts his tutorials to be more fun and useful. He requested a room change for one of the tutorials because the desks were distracting and annoying to use.”

- Nomination 151

- **Discussions that foster peer-to-peer engagement and acknowledgment of different views**

Students have most frequently commented on how they felt as contributors and collaborators vis-à-vis a teacher. However, peer-to-peer collaboration was also important, potentially more so for students in more senior levels of studies. Moreover, even those students who tended to assign a greater value to communication with a teacher rather than with their peers, still suggested that an excellent teacher is the one who takes questions and comments from everyone in the class. Thus, **an environment where everyone feels comfortable to speak up (and in more advanced cases – to speak to each other) was seen as characteristic of excellent teaching.** Once again, such environment, according to students, would have been impossible if a teacher was acting in a patronising fashion. Some students have suggested that they find it difficult to speak in classes where a teacher does not treat students as equally important contributors.

'His tutorials are more student-led than most of the other tutorials I have been in, which makes for a better learning experience. It clearly comes across to students that he cares about and is genuinely interested in our opinions and the ways that we see and think about what we are learning, which is conducive to a positive, supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to speak up and engage both with classmates and with the source material.'

- Nomination 22

'In every tutorial, it was apparent that he takes care to ensure that everybody's voice is equally heard, helping every discussion during class to be smooth, inclusive, and fruitful.'

- Nomination 203

## 5. Theme III: Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities

This section outlines the main characteristics and practices that students have highlighted in relation to adaptation of materials and introduction of learning-enhancing activities in the nominations for the Teaching Awards. It discusses what values students see in an appropriately and creatively formulated course structure and provides an overview of the practical measures that students have commented upon as exemplary of excellent teaching.

Students often acknowledged staff members' efforts to tailor learning materials and class activities to the objectives of the course, and the effect that this can have on the quality of the education they receive. Over the last two years, students have been exposed to a variety of new learning practices (live sessions, online questionnaires, collaborative forums, etc.), and their experience allows them to evaluate which instruments have been successful. At the same time, students acknowledge that there is room for improvement even in a standard course setting, consisting of just lectures and tutorials/practical classes.

There are some limitations in this section of the study as the researcher is not familiar with the practices and the reasonable constraints of different Schools of the University. The same can be said about the students themselves: for example, something that students might regard as innovative in an unfamiliar course which they take outside of their degree pathway might be a normal practice for that School; or a certain approach favoured by students might not be possible to realise in other courses for reasons that they are unaware of (for example, a switching rota for in-person lecture attendance). In other words, both the researcher and the students might be limited in their ability to evaluate context. However, the frequency of mentions of adaptation of materials and of learning-enhancing activities is enough to propose that while some practices deemed as excellent might be standard or not easily reproducible, the general observations would still hold.

The nominations analysed in this section were made for the categories of Outstanding Teacher in Arts/Divinity, Outstanding Teacher in Science/Medicine, and Commitment to Academic Inclusivity. 89 out of 186 (48%) students have mentioned adaptation of materials and/or learning enhancing activities among the reasons for nomination.

## 5.1 Main findings

Adaptation of learning materials and introduction of learning enhancing activities are the two main subthemes that students highlighted in relation to academic matters in the Teaching Awards nominations. The majority of students who made nominations for Teaching Awards had taken one or two modules led or taught by their nominee. In making the nominations, students usually first reflected on their overall experience of a module/modules and their general perception of a teacher, and then discussed certain useful materials or engaging activities as examples. Thus, although this section of the paper speaks about certain practices that can be adapted in different contexts, they are preceded by the overall consistency, coherence, and clarity of the module contents and structure. **An excellent teacher is not someone who can come up with new, creative and thus entertaining approaches, but someone who does so in a manner which, from the students' perspective, adds value and depth to the overall learning experience.**

A teacher who works on presenting materials in an engaging way or thinks about interesting activities to add to the curriculum is perceived to be not only organised, but also dedicated and caring. Students acknowledge the time that it takes to create a stimulating classroom environment and an informative curriculum. They interpret these efforts as a sign of deep involvement on behalf of the teacher. This is particularly noticeable in the cases of students mentioning how a teacher changed their style or added new components to the module as a result of acting upon student feedback. Teachers who reflect on students' needs in planning and delivering a module are perceived to have a keen interest in students' overall development.

**Adaptation of materials** was mentioned by 63 (34%) students. This subtheme can be broadly separated into five further sub-categories:

- (1) matters related to delivery of lectures;
- (2) selection and formatting of supplementary materials for lectures and tutorials;
- (3) practices related to delivery of tutorials;
- (4) email summaries
- (5) additional lectures/short videos by request.

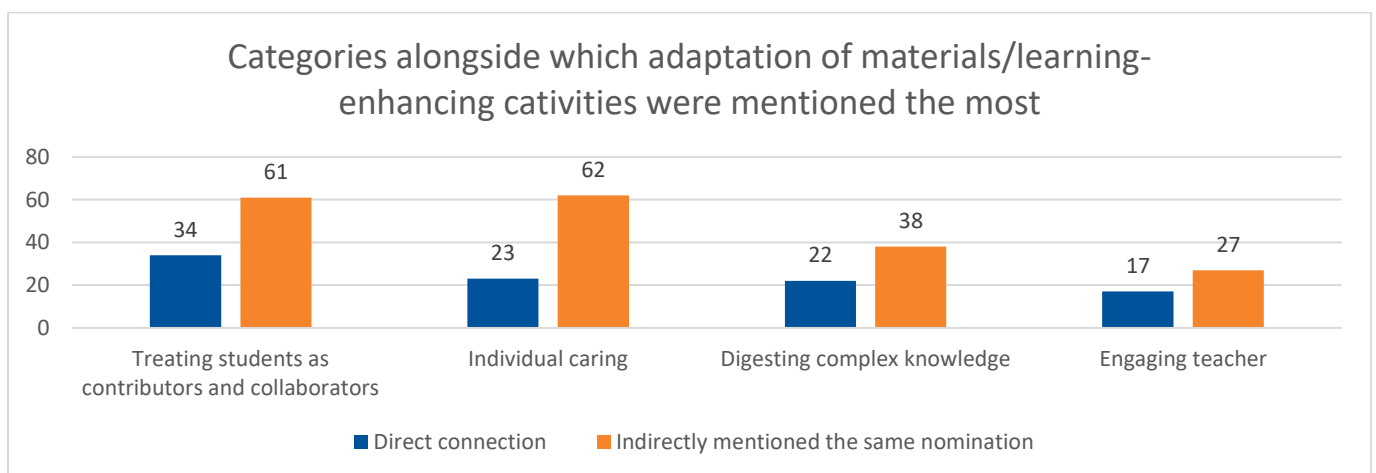
In each of these subcategories, students made observations about how the adaptation of materials helped them better understand and retain information in a certain way.

**Learning-enhancing activities** are not easily separated into sub-categories because of their variety and specificity. As an overall rule, any activity that did not fit into the usual lecture-tutorials/practical workshop format was put into this category for the purposes of this study. Learning-enhancing activities were mentioned by 51 (28%) students and included practices such as: Q&A sessions, research seminars of a postgraduate standard, work with Special Collections, fieldtrips, exercises aimed at improving notetaking and essay-writing skills, etc. Students often remarked on learning-enhancing activities that inspired them to consider new avenues for career or studies or proved to be useful in terms of transferable skills. Thus, while the category of adaptation of materials relates more to engagement with the contents of a course as an end in itself, learning-enhancing activities were quite often seen as a great way to expand students' horizons beyond the course.

## 5.2 What constitutes “adaptation of materials” and “learning-enhancing activities” – and what makes them excellent?

### Context

Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities are far more ‘practical’ factors mentioned in the nominations than the abovementioned individual caring and collaborative approaches. Particular examples of practices, techniques, approaches, etc. which students have highlighted as useful and productive are discussed later. However, this section first addresses the wider context in which examples of well-adapted materials and activities appear to examine what attitudes and benefits students associate with them.



Since adaptation of materials/learning-enhancing activities is one of the three main themes observed in the Teaching awards nominations, it comes as no surprise that it significantly overlaps with the other two, individual caring and collaborative approach. Some students established direct links among the three themes in their nominations.

34 students (38% out of 89 who mentioned adaptation of materials/learning enhancing activities) expressed that a **collaborative approach** came hand-in-hand with how the learning materials and activities were implemented. This connection is mostly accounted for by cases in which students believed that certain changes to the curriculum of a module were made out of consideration for feedback. Considering the previous findings discussed in this paper, it is not an unexpected connection. Treating students as collaborators is considered to be a hallmark of excellent teaching and has a wide range of applications – including consulting the students on the contents and the techniques of a course.

The overlap between teaching materials/activities and individual caring seems less straightforward. Upon further inspection, individual caring was paired with discussion of adaptation of materials and learning enhancing activities by 23 (26% out of 89) students explicitly. Usually, this connection came from highlighting that, for example, *not only* did their nominee utilise great techniques of presentation or provided engaging workshop, but they *also* made sure that everyone was on track/supported within the module.

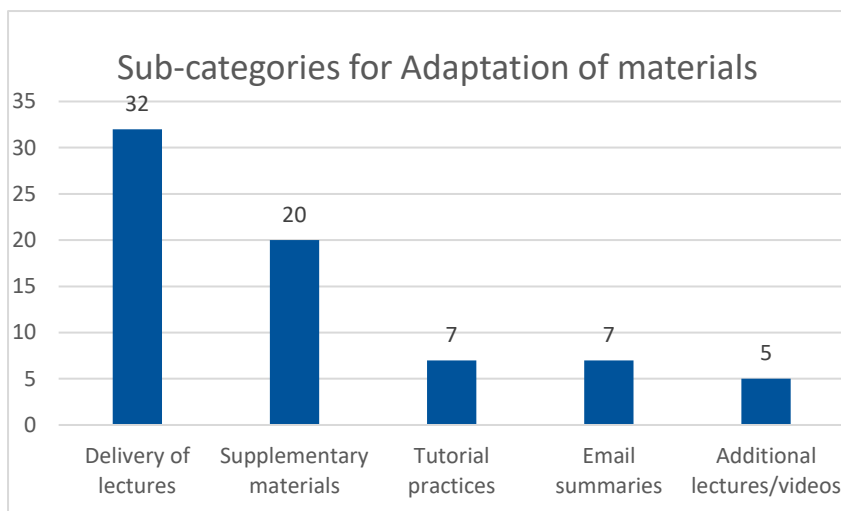
22 (25% out of 89) students pointed out how some techniques have allowed their teachers to digest complex knowledge and illuminate unclear material more easily. This was the case for techniques associated with adaptation of materials more frequently than with those associated with learning-enhancing activities. The following discussion will dive more deeply into which techniques were mentioned most frequently.

Finally, 17 (19% out of 89) nominations explicitly mentioned that the way in which the module contents were adapted, or an activity was introduced, revealed a teacher to be capable of engaging students. It is important to note here that creative approaches to delivery of materials and activities were not praised for being entertaining or merely different. While it might seem that students might be more biased towards highly unique approaches that are hard to replicate, the following analysis reveals that the nominations do not support such hypothesis. Often, a quite ‘mundane’ change to selection and delivery of materials/activities was regarded as sign of an engaging teacher and of teaching excellence.

The data observed in this category supports the hypothesis that in students’ perceptions of excellent teaching the contents of teaching (in this case, the particular ways of selecting and delivering materials and the learning-enhancing activities) are usually made relevant through the attitude with which they are delivered. **Being a caring teacher or a teacher who is open to collaboration are not side qualities that comes in parallel to, or second to, the depth of knowledge or teaching skills. They remain an important point for consideration even in discussions of more practical matters of teaching.**

### Adaptation of materials

The following analysis addresses the adaptation of materials as a separate category and describes the sub-categories observed within it. Any case in which a student spoke about how their teacher formatted, altered, presented, or delivered teaching materials in a certain way (from a practical standpoint) was classified as an instance of “adaptation of materials.”



Students most frequently commented on the practices related to delivery of lectures – mentioned by 32 out of 63 students who spoke about adaptation of materials and by 17% of the total number of nominations. Coming second were the comments on how teachers approached selection and presentation of supplementary materials – mentioned by 20 out of 63 students (11% of all nominations).

The rest of sub-categories (tutorial practices, email summaries, additional lectures/videos) were far less frequently mentioned (by 7, 7, and 5 students respectively).



When speaking about **delivery of lectures**, students usually pointed out that a certain style of presentation worked best for them because of their individual approaches to studying or personal inclinations (e.g., whether they prefer to frequently revisit lecture slides or whether they need to understand applicability to grasp complex theory). However, two main aspects were highlighted most frequently as examples of excellent teaching: formatting of slides and introduction of examples, and thus will be discussed further.

- **Formatting of slides:** students appreciate when the lecture are were not only useful for the presenter but also useful for them. Coherently formatted lecture slides with a consistent summary of the main arguments or the main practical procedures, according to students, can not only help with understanding of the material but also be later utilised in revision, which makes them an important asset.
- **Introduction of examples:** some students have highlighted that dry, or overly technical/theoretical delivery of a lecture leaves them quickly disengaged. A teacher's ability to break complex content with relevant examples was on a few occasions interpreted as a sign of excellent teaching.

Given that a majority of university lectures have been delivered online for the past two years, the reader might want to refer to the section on Online/Hybrid Teaching in this paper for more information about students' perceptions of excellent lecture delivery.

Useful and engaging **supplementary materials** were another frequently noted aspect. Here, students spoke about a wide range course-specific materials that teachers have prepared to better aid the learning process, including practice and exam sheets, handouts, additional exercises, lecture notes, etc. Students saw these as illustrative of excellent teaching when the supplementary materials were useful for practice and revision, consistent with the rest of teaching content, and well-formatted. A teacher who took time to tailor supplementary materials to the needs of the students was most likely to be regarded as dedicated and caring. Students appreciate the difference between just recording a lecture and supplementing a lecture with materials and highly evaluate the effort put into creation and distribution of such materials.

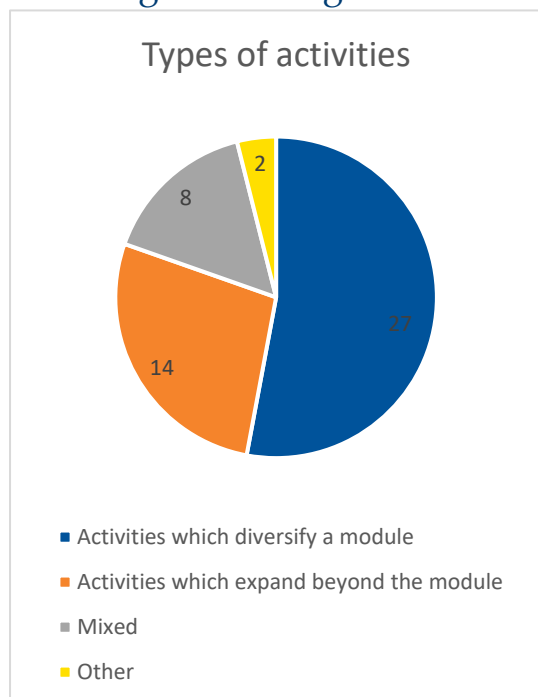
There have been only a few comments highlighting adaptation of materials specifically in the context of **tutorial practices**. These comments reflected on how tutorial handouts can establish a solid connection between the materials learned in the lecture and the discussion. A teacher's ability to foster such connection through the use of materials was seen as exemplary of excellent teaching on a couple of occasions.

Weekly **email summaries** were also mentioned by a few students, mostly online learners. These were described as a useful technique of ensuring that everyone is up to date with the activities of the module. A teacher who took this responsibility upon themselves was regarded as someone dedicated to the learning process even on the level of small details.

Finally, **additional lectures or videos** were described as a great tool for providing clarification on questions that students struggle with the most. Nominations which mentioned teachers recording extra segments by request described such teachers as caring and genuinely keen to help.

Overall, it is possible to propose that the high frequency of mentions relating to the adaptation of materials suggests that preparation, selection, and presentation of learning materials is an area of teaching that can have a significant effect on how the quality of teaching is perceived. Adaptation of materials for the needs of the students is one of the most predominant practical features of teaching that was consistently reflected upon in the nominations.

## Learning-enhancing activities



As it was previously mentioned in this paper, learning-enhancing activities are more difficult to categorise due to diversity and module-specificity of the teaching practices mentioned in the nominations. For example, an extra practical class or a visit to Special Collections are not activities that can be as easily implemented across all modules as, for example, informational lecture slides and email summaries.

However, there are some observable trends. The descriptions of learning-enhancing activities made by the students can be distinguished into the ones which diversify a certain module and those which expand beyond the scope of a single module. 8 nominations featured a mixture of perspectives. Out of 51 students who spoke of learning-enhancing activities, 27 (53%) spoke about 'diversifying' activities, 14 (27%) – about the 'expanding' ones. 8 (16%) nominations featured a mixture of perspectives. Only 2 descriptions did not correspond clearly to this classification.

Students who discussed those **activities which diversified a module** spoke about how well an activity fit into a module, how much it enhanced the learning process, and how thoughtfully it was executed. In these types of descriptions teachers were praised for providing a stimulating class environment. 'Diversifying' activities were deemed successful if they enriched the learning process, usually by providing students with a chance to revise and to practice previously studied information. Examples of activities that were most frequently described as an excellent way to diversify a module are additional practical sessions, online questionnaires (including those for collecting student feedback), and field trips to various sites and institutions.

**Activities which expanded beyond the module** allowed students to expand their horizons and come into contact with new perspectives on education, academic research, and careers. The teachers who provided such activities were praised for motivating students to consider new options and ideas in other modules, further studies, and career plans. Among activities described from this perspective were postgraduate-style research seminars, workshops or Q and A's addressing the teacher's own research, lectures or tutorials featuring external speakers or industry professionals. Less time- and effort-consuming examples concerned activities promoting good essay writing and note-taking skills.

Example:

"The module itself is also delivered and structured in a way that makes learning from it easy and enjoyable; with a portion of the credit coming from interacting with Peerwise, allowing students to author questions and answer those of other students. This is in my experience unique to her modules and is such a helpful learning tool."

- Nomination 302

Example:

"Aside from lectures, we also have [weekly] discussion sessions in the computer architecture module. In each of these sessions as a class, we discuss a research paper. Recently, we covered a paper written by our teacher. This allowed for more significant discussion around the paper and helped students understand how academic research is conducted."

- Nomination 7

Such analysis of descriptive features of students' nominations shows that learning enhancing activities can be seen as useful and successful on different scales, sometimes simultaneously. Learning enhancing activities can actualise lecture materials and 'tie' the whole module together in an engaging manner, or they can lead a student towards exploring a completely new path.

Thus, the benefits that can come from the introduction of such activities into a module can range from mundane to far-reaching. Students tend to positively evaluate creative approaches to module structure, too. However, the nominations show that an activity of such sort is expected to have a practical purpose that is clear enough to students to be regarded as exemplary of excellent teaching. **Students expect an extra activity provided by their teacher to be useful either as an additional learning tool for a module or as something that promotes their further development.**

## 5.3 Practical steps

A wide variety of techniques and practices fall under the umbrella of excellent examples of adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities. These techniques and practices are often contextual and specialised, meaning that their successfulness is perceived in relation to a certain module or a discipline rather than in relation to some generalisable standard. However, the nominations for the Teaching Awards provide enough grounds to outline some approaches that are likely to result in more positively received evaluation.

### - Evident module methodology and structure

An idea that a clearly explained course structure is favourably regarded by students might be too obvious to even mention here. However, the number of nominations highlighting it as a sign of teaching excellence suggests that this is not something that students experience in all university modules. Particularly from the perspective of this section, it seems important to reiterate that a creative mode of delivery or a unique learning opportunity are regarded as excellent only as long as their practical purpose and relevance for a certain module/discipline are revealed. Students tend to evaluate university teaching in modules, and they are **more likely to praise a certain module if it has an evident degree of integrity and internal coherence.**

### - Materials that can be revisited, activities that allow students to revisit materials

The in-depth look into the most frequently mentioned learning-enhancing activities and techniques of adaptation of materials showed that teachers who provide their students with opportunities to revisit the contents of teaching are regarded as excellent. Easy-to-follow lecture slides, useful handouts, workshops that allow students to engage deeply with the previously covered information have all been mentioned as examples of a caring and dedicated attitude. Thus, it is possible to suggest that **sometimes, new and exciting information is less valuable to students than the chance to solidify what they already know, and an excellent teacher is the one who can feel this balance and adjust accordingly.**

"I haven't felt lost in her classes because the module follows a path which is very smooth and easy to understand."

- Nomination 146

"Aside from her really structured and easily followed plan for the modules, in which one feels that they are actually grasping and deeply understanding the content, she delivers her material in an incredible way. I've found it so easy to follow what she is teaching, and her use of technology has helped to cement my understanding."

- Nomination 150

"He always come into the lesson with good questions which helps us through the topic, with this I really think it provokes deeper thinking and leads to a better memory of the content and helps with our ability of critically engage with the content."

- Nomination 259

"Outside of lectures, he also runs workshops and Q&A sessions. I can tell that he is very passionate about the subjects he is teaching, and really cares that every student understands all of the material he is delivering."

- Nomination 99

- **Actualised knowledge**

Another trend which can be observed from the nominations concerns the use of real-life examples and the real-life applicability offered through certain methods of presentation and more 'externally' oriented activities. Students seem to highly appreciate a chance to expand and test their knowledge beyond the theoretical 'confinements'. **A teacher who can show their students how a certain module relates to real-life issues or how it connects to future career/studies is likely to be regarded as excellent.**

- **Considering feedback**

Not much will be mentioned in relation to this point as it is extensively covered in the previous section on collaborative approach. However, it seemed fitting to mention that some changes to materials and activities that were discussed in this section were a result of acting upon student feedback. This is just another example of an overall trend observed by this paper: **students' evaluations of teaching excellence largely depend on how central of a role they feel to occupy in the teaching process.**

"She masterfully keeps the class engaged, knowing when the material is becoming a bit dry, or when to include an example so the class can better understand things."

- Nomination 160

"The assignment of a literature review also challenged me, making me learn a new form of writing - extremely helpful for further research."

- Nomination 316

"She asked for feedback at the start and in the middle of semester, and actively listened to our concerns, incorporating changes into the module as we moved along. This made the module very responsive to what we, as students, cared about."

- Nomination 171

"She is always well-prepared and open to feedback. She wants the class to be useful for us and adapts as we need."

- Nomination 255

## 6. Focus On: Inclusivity and Diversity

The focus on inclusivity and diversity is an important part of values and practices of the University of St Andrews. Last academic year (2021/22) this was further reflected by the introduction of a new Teaching Award – Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity. One of the goals of this paper was to analyse which practices and attitudes, from the students' perspective, help to foster inclusive and diverse environment in class setting and in personal communication with a teacher.

Unfortunately, not many students made use of the new award. Only 9 awards have been submitted for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity category. There might be two main reasons for that. On the one hand, students might be unsure of how to approach the new category yet. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the aspects highlighted by students as exemplary of excellent commitment to inclusivity and diversity were varied. Students spoke about the contents of modules, the attention to special needs, and the extracurricular activities of their nominees.

On the other hand, students might be unsure of which category better suits their nominee. Some nominations for the Outstanding Teacher category, for example, have mentioned matters related to inclusivity and diversity as the aspects of teaching which make nominees deserving of the award. It is possible to hypothesise that if commitment to academic inclusivity was only one of the perceived strengths of a particular teacher, students were more likely to nominate them for what they see as the general "Outstanding Teacher" award.

Therefore, this section not only discusses the nominations for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity category, but also the nominations for the Outstanding Teacher category if those mentioned elements relating to inclusivity and diversity. 25 nominations from the Outstanding Teacher pathway include comments on inclusivity and diversity. This brings the scope of this section to 34 nominations in total – 18% of 186 nominations analysed for this paper.

### 6.1 Main findings

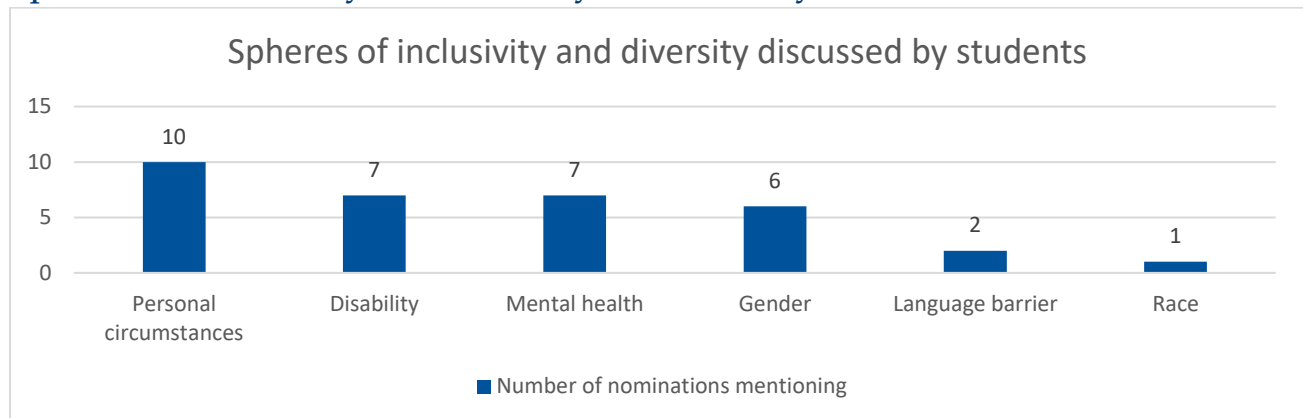
Nominations which spoke about inclusivity and diversity are characterised by the variability of what students chose to speak about. Students focused on the contents of the module, adaptation of materials for dyslexic students, commitment to the role of the Wellbeing Officer, participation in EDI and minority-focused activities outside of the school and outside of the University, care for students with disabilities, attention to mental health, and several other areas.

The breadth of focus shows that students understand inclusivity and diversity as context-specific and nuanced. The solutions to the issues of support and representation are hardly generalisable across schools and even across modules. **The nominations suggest that each teacher has to acknowledge and act upon the issues of inclusivity and diversity individually, while reflecting on the constraints and the biases of a certain field of study and of the University's accommodations for individual needs.**

In terms of particular spheres associated with inclusivity and diversity, students most frequently spoke about personal circumstances (differences in social and demographic background, limited access to academia), mental health, disability, and gender. Only one nomination discussed how a teacher addressed the issues of race/ethnicity in teaching. This is surprising considering that the last few years saw an expansion of student-led initiatives tackling inclusion of people of colour (POC) and minority representation at the University. Overall, it seems that the category of Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity can benefit from further clarification and advertisement in the next academic year to attract more nominations and a wider range of student perspectives on inclusivity and diversity.

## 6.2 What constitutes commitment to academic inclusivity?

### Spheres of inclusivity and diversity discussed by students



Even though approaches and practices highlighted by students who chose to speak about inclusivity and diversity are highly varied, they nevertheless relate to distinct EDI spheres.

Most frequent in relation to inclusivity and diversity were discussions of **personal circumstances**. Here, students usually reflected on how their background made it challenging to (re)enter the academia or how they required additional assistance and encouragement. Examples included students who entered the University after a long period out of education, mature students, some of whom remained remote due to family commitments or COVID precautions, or students who were going through traumatic life events.

These students have highlighted how they were positively impressed by the one-on-one availability of their teachers. Students reflected on how their personal circumstances, especially in the pandemic years, led them to believe that university experience would become challenging or alienating – and how the care provided by their nominees has proven these assumptions wrong. High praise was given to teachers who initiated or scheduled regular contact to ensure that students from non-academic backgrounds or students with complex caring responsibilities were not falling behind and could catch up with the class. Students going through traumatic life events noted how attention and support provided by their nominees reassured respect for their personal journey.

The next in terms of the frequency of mentions were the comments on excellence relating to **disability support**. Most students did not mention their disabilities but pointed out how their teachers established special arrangements for assessment and class participation that accommodated students with individual needs. One disability that was mentioned in multiple nominations was dyslexia. Students saw it as a sign of commitment to inclusivity when teachers adapted lecture slides to be dyslexia friendly.

A few students spoke about issues related to **mental health**. Here, only the nominations that clearly elaborated on and acknowledged mental health issues were examined. Students spoke about how their teachers acknowledged their needs and provided a calm, respectful, and non-triggering environment.

Teachers were described as excellent if they worked out special arrangements for students who could not present in front of a class due to anxiety and panic attacks. It must be noted here that students were not excused from group work or presentation assessments altogether. Rather, they pointed out

how their teachers excelled in providing additional encouragement and help that allowed them to gradually become re-involved in class activities and regain confidence.

In a number of cases, students spoke about the general feelings of anxiety and stress – however, the format of the nominations makes it impossible to determine whether these mentions were an expression of issues related to mental health or mental wellbeing. Reduction of anxiety and stress more generally is touched upon in the sections Theme I and Theme II.

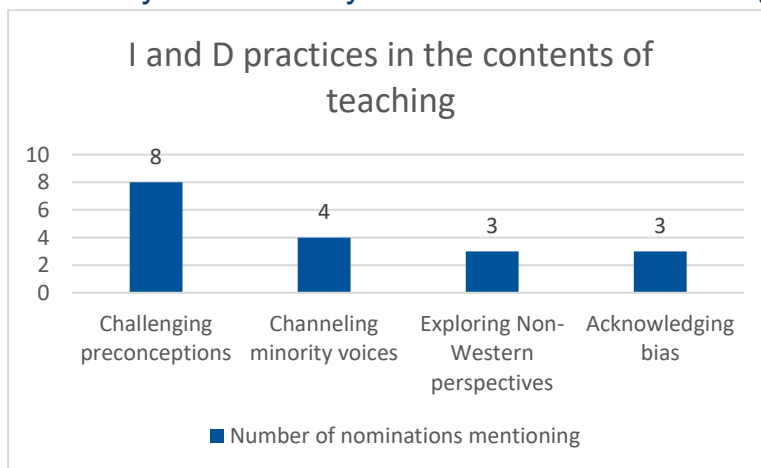
**Gender** is a curious sphere with regards to how it was described in the nominations. It stands in contrast with the already discussed spheres since the nominations. Students who mentioned gender often spoke about the contents of teaching or the extracurricular activities that addressed issues of representation in the University and in academic research. Students appreciated how their teachers challenged the gender biases and stereotypes of their disciplines and saw this as inspiring and topical.

Additionally, students praised teachers who inquired about everyone’s pronouns at the beginning of the module. Language students also positively highlighted those teachers who dedicated time to teaching gender-neutral grammar and vocabulary of foreign languages. In general, a focus on pronouns was the most common generalisable inclusivity and diversity-related observation that students made in the nominations.

Two students also spoke about **language barriers**. They mentioned that students in their classes had varying levels of English proficiency and praised their teachers for speaking in a clear way, avoiding unnecessary academic jargon, ensuring that all students understand them.

Finally, only one student mentioned **race** as a sphere of inclusivity and diversity addressed by their teacher. This nomination was made directly for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity Award. The almost total absence of acknowledgment of issues of race and ethnicity potentially means that the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity category was not separately advertised to students and did not attract much attention, since it is a new category appearing in the middle of a list of more familiar categories for the first time.

### Inclusivity and diversity in the contents of teaching



The previous paragraphs have already spoken about gender as the sphere of inclusivity and diversity which was sometimes discussed in the module content. Students also focused on how their teachers acknowledged non-Western/minority perspectives and challenged the existing preconceptions in their fields.

Here, the findings are largely non-generalisable. The exact ways in which a teacher can challenge students’ preconceptions, channel minority

voices, explore non-Western perspectives, or acknowledge disciplinary biases is highly dependent on the subject of the course. Students have described such practices within the context of modules on colonialism, terrorism, art history, biology, etc. Overall, students paid attention to how their teachers communicated the issues of diversity and inclusivity in academia and research, regarded such discussions as relevant, and saw them as exemplary of teaching excellence and of commitment to the discipline.

## 6.3 Practical steps

This section has highlighted that there are no “quick fixes” to improve or widen the delivery of inclusive or diverse teaching. Each discipline requires personalised attention and reflection on constraints and inherent biases. Thus, the following practical steps can, for the most part, only offer a broad overview of the approaches that are likely to lead to practices and changes that students tend to regard as exemplary of commitment to academic inclusivity.

### - Initiating contact with students who have indicated individual needs

Students with disabilities, as well as students who recently re-entered academia or have been through traumatic life events have indicated that they often feel uncomfortable initiating contact with teachers or that they rarely see teachers approach them first. **A teacher who briefs a student on the forms of support available to them and takes a proactive approach to addressing the special needs of a student is likely to be regarded as exemplary of commitment to inclusivity.**

### - Reflecting on how to include students with individual needs into the regular class activities

The nominations show that students with individual needs do not seek to be excused from the regular class activities – they want to feel like a part of the group and participate in tutorials/workshops even if it is challenging. **Teachers who in a courteous manner arranged a set-up for a class that allowed all students to feel included were described as excellent.** Teachers were praised for their ability to balance the focus on education with the focus on personal needs.

### - Reflecting on/acknowledging biases

Judging by the nominations, **students are up to date with the current discussions about gender biases and West-centrism of the academia and positively respond to their teachers acknowledging these issues.** While it might seem that this point is most relevant for Arts/Divinities disciplines, students have also commented on how this approach was also welcomed in STEM. A teacher who reflects on possible ways of diversifying the curriculum, points out harming stereotypes and reflects on biases is seen as exemplary of commitment to diversity. Moreover, this approach can allow students belonging to underrepresented minority communities to feel like important members of the University community.

“I struggled to get into in-person teaching and she was extremely accommodating. She has made it clear how much she cares about her student’s access to education with helpful information on which classes would be accessible for me at my mobility level. This stood out to me among other teachers who just assumed I would be able to do this difficult transition by myself, whereas she made me feel included.”

- Nomination 199

“Due to extreme anxiety about public speaking following trauma I was concerned that I would be unable to complete the assessment and considered dropping out because of my mental health. I reached out to the teacher and explained my situation. I was overwhelmed by the support and reassurance he gave me, and I was able to complete my presentation only because of his encouragement.”

- Nomination 85

“One student was suffering from panic attacks when asked to read her work out loud. At the next class, the teacher quietly changed how we ran the workshop - we submitted our writing anonymously, and she randomly redistributed our submissions <...> Crucially though, she later tentatively returned to the normal setup. She struck a great balance here.”

- Nomination 247

“She recognises and champions the importance of EDI education as being a key part of becoming a scientist in the modern world; and is vocal about the issues of equity which are present in the physics world – despite STEM often positioning itself as objective.”

- Nomination 283

“Every student presented in tutorials, and this gave way to a wide range of diverse perspectives, highlighting sources from the Global South that would have been otherwise overlooked <...>The opportunity for me, as a woman of colour, to be given the freedom to research and share resources from my country of origin has been so significant.”

- Nomination 10



- **Attention to pronouns**

The University is currently in the process of implementing a system that acknowledges pronouns of students in their academic profiles. However, the nominations suggest that there is no harm in asking students about their pronouns anyways in the beginning of the term – if anything, **students are likely to regard this as exemplary of keen interest in them and to see this as an excellent practice which fosters an inclusive environment.** Additionally, students respond positively to problematisation of pronouns within the contents of teaching. They see it as an example of keen attention to implicit academic biases.

'He asked us to write our names and pronouns on cards to show the class. Despite its apparent simplicity, I think this small action in fact had a long-lasting effect. I found that by starting with this exercise he has set the tone for the rest of the academic year, a tone which I could only describe as inclusive and accepting'

- Nomination 30

'She makes sure we know how to correctly address gender non-conforming persons in our target language which, although it may seem like a given, is uncommon amongst many language teachers.'

- Nomination 149

'In the classroom she has made a point of using gender neutral pronouns and has worked hard to problematize overly gendered and close-minded views of the ancient world.'

- Nomination 106

## 7. Focus On: Excellent online/hybrid modes of teaching

The pandemic and the resultant adjustments to the teaching processes have created a unique set of circumstances for all students who have been in education since the year 2020. Consequentially, this project aimed to investigate students' evaluations of good teaching practice in response to the new conditions. This year, the nominations for the Teaching Awards were made by students for whom most, if not all, of their university journey in St Andrews has been affected by the pandemic.

This section discusses the comments made by the students with regards to online/hybrid modes of teaching within their nominations for the Teaching Awards. The purpose of the section is to outline the general perceptions of online teaching expressed in these comments and to highlight attitudes and practices employed by teaching staff that made online/hybrid teaching the most successful in the eyes of the students.

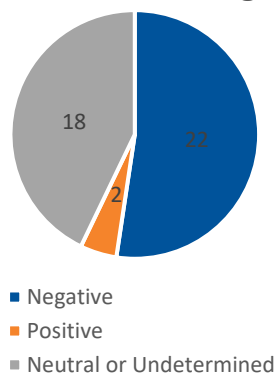
While students have not been explicitly asked about the mode of teaching in making the nominations, many have chosen to reflect on it themselves. This poses certain limitations for analysis, as it is not possible to state what exact aspects of online teaching students have encountered. For example, while some have mentioned studying fully remotely, others have only spoken about online lectures or commented on the hybrid environment while potentially attending in-person themselves. Thus, this section deals with cases in which students mentioned certain aspects of online or hybrid teaching as examples of excellent teaching, largely without data on the students' form of attendance (unless this was explicitly stated in a nomination).

The nominations analysed in this section were made for the categories of Outstanding Teacher in Arts/Divinity and in Science/Medicine. There were no mentions of online or hybrid components in the Commitment to Academic Inclusivity nominations.

42 out of 186 (23%) nominations analysed for this paper mentioned online or hybrid modes. Some students have only broadly commented on their teachers' ability to successfully work in these environments, while others highlighted particular practices, including pre-recorded and live lectures, online/hybrid tutorials, check-ins with remote students, etc.

## 7.1 Attitudes towards online teaching

General perception of online teaching



Most students who wrote about online/hybrid teaching seem to believe that it is hard to do right. 23 out of 42 nominations (55%) saw online teaching as challenging and praised their nominees for coping well with it. This is especially true for online students, for whom the teacher's ability to engage and support online students was often a decisive factor in writing the nomination.

It is worth acknowledging that a significant number of students regard the challenge of online learning as something that cannot be fully overcome. 22 of 42 nominations which mentioned online/hybrid modes (52%) saw online experience as negative or significantly inferior to in-person teaching.

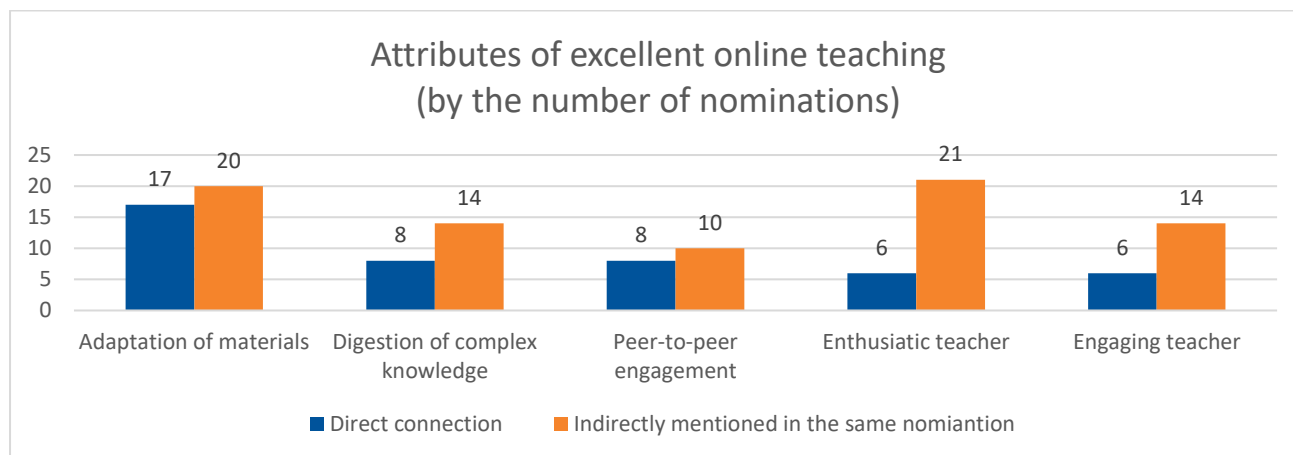
This was expressed in a few ways. Some students have implied that online teaching, even though it can be perfected, is still less effective than in-person teaching. Usually this was expressed by saying that 'despite' teaching online, their nominees came as close as possible to the 'normal' teaching environment. Direct engagement with a teacher was something students seemed to long for, with a couple of respondents suggesting that despite the excellent online teaching, they believed they could have gained more from the course if it was fully in-person. Five students have mentioned their teachers' dedication to implementation of in-person lectures as soon as possible as one of the reasons for the nomination. Others, while not going as far as implying that online learning is an inherently less preferable option, pointed out that they have rarely encountered good online teaching at the university. According to these students, the people they have nominated were among the only members of teaching staff who managed to navigate the online environment successfully.

There were two cases (5%) that described online teaching experience as favourable. These related to personal circumstances of the students, as both have mentioned that they were unable to attend in-person classes. 46% of responses mentioning online/hybrid modes did not express a clear positive or negative general attitude.

Thus, the student nominations assessed in this paper predominantly describe online learning as challenging and generally more complex than in-person teaching. **Most students believe that good online teaching is a relatively rare occurrence for which the staff member deserves special recognition.** Almost half of students openly articulate a general preference for in-person teaching even while acknowledging the presence of a few good examples of online teaching.

## 7.2 Attributes of excellent online teaching

Students considered various factors in describing the online teaching from their nominees as excellent, relating to contents of teaching, class environment, and teacher's attitudes.



The most prominent factor in students' descriptions was the **adaptation of materials**. Students praised creative and unique approaches to organisation of lectures and lecture slides. Tailoring of materials specifically for online use was highly appreciated, and the effort behind it was especially highlighted and appreciated.

Additionally, students commented on teachers' ability to **digest complex knowledge**. While some teachers were perceived as excelling at keeping an eye on and responding to queries from online and in-person students during hybrid classes, others were praised for their availability for further questions after delivery of pre-recorded components.

Students have also mentioned communication in online and hybrid classes. Some have spoken about their experience of a **peer-to-peer engagement** in an online class as a noteworthy achievement of their teachers. The nominations for the Teaching Awards demonstrate that some students who study online tend to expect a weaker peer-to-peer and student-teacher communication as a result of their form of attendance. When a teacher manages to create an environment in which online learners are encouraged to communicate with each other, or, in a hybrid setting, both online and in-person learners are given an equal opportunity to participate and contribute to the discussion, students are likely to point it out as exemplary of excellent teaching.

Students who mentioned online or hybrid teaching also described their teachers as **passionate/enthusiastic** their subject and/or teaching in general. Likewise, students praised their teachers for being **engaging** presenters and communicators.

The more in-depth comments on the attitudes of teachers in relation to online teaching suggest that **some students believe that charisma and communication skills are not always easily transferrable between in-person and online/hybrid modes of teaching**. When a nominee managed to adapt to the online environment and maintain students' attention by delivering enthusiastic and engaging teaching, some students saw this as worthy of extra acknowledgement.

## 7.3 Practical steps

While the Teaching Awards nominations show a general ambivalence of students towards different elements of online and hybrid teaching, there are undoubtedly certain approaches that seem to increase overall satisfaction with the learning process.

### - Thought-out strategy

Students express an opinion that online components are often overlooked by their teachers. Having a coherent, course-tailored plan for delivery of online teaching is seen as an example of dedication to student satisfaction. **A clear explanation of how the module is going to be run and how it is going to be adapted to be educational and enjoyable even in online context eases students' doubts.** With addition of consistency and smooth delivery it turns into a hallmark of excellent online teaching.

### - Utilising individual strengths in adaptation of materials

There has been no universal agreement among students on which practices work best in the online context. Positive evaluations of teachers' enthusiasm and ability to effectively present complex material were far more prevalent factors. It is possible to suggest that best online/hybrid practices are the ones which are the most comfortable and familiar to a teacher. **Synchronous and asynchronous delivery, regular summary emails, online workshops can all be received positively if executed in a clear, engaging way and with technical competence.** Creative and unique practices, tailored specifically for the module contents, were highly praised.

### - Special attention to online students

Not only did students allude to online teaching being overlooked – the experience of being an online student was occasionally described as generally isolating. With this in mind, **a teacher who regularly listened to and checked up on online learners was regarded as exemplary.** Just as with the delivery of teaching components, a straightforward and regularly monitored line of communication (both during classes and outside of them) reminds students that they are valuable contributors and members of the University community.

"<...> her teaching content is very well-structured, with quizzes and class tests to help students follow up and recall material. <...> She sends us weekly emails, reminding what is coming up in the lectures; and answers questions through email very quickly, making it very helpful for online students. Students can feel that she not only has passion for the subject but also for teaching itself."

- Nomination 110

"He has exceptionally well-formatted slides, extensive and detailed notes, and interesting tutorial questions. He splits his lectures up into manageable, focused short videos; and edits and prepares them very well. <...> Overall, he strikes anyone he teaches as an extremely committed and well prepared lecturer who has clearly worked very hard to adapt his lectures for an online format."

- Nomination 136

"She has very well adapted to the dual delivery mode, and she has easily transitioned between online and in-person students by using technology in a smooth way so that for every class, it is easy and effective to follow both on teams and in the lecture theatre."

- Nomination 76

"I was unwell with asthma early on in the semester and was stressed as I wasn't able to work. She reassured me that my health was much more important and even checked in on me. In an online age, I have not experienced such personal or caring relationship with a teacher."

- Nomination 84

"<...> he has created opportunities for our cohort to meet virtually. I am especially grateful for these opportunities as they help me feel part of the St Andrews community from afar."

- Nomination 285

## 7.4 Final note: Pre-recorded VS. live lectures

The responses collected for the Teaching Awards nominations show no clear preference for a certain format of online lectures. It should be noted that the available sample is small (12 students who highlighted the online lecture format); however, it points towards the same conclusion as the rest of this section. Within this sample, on various occasions both the pre-recorded and the live lectures have been described as engaging and useful.

Pre-recorded lectures were described as exceptionally successful when a teacher thoughtfully and creatively engaged with the possibilities offered by technology. Examples of this were lectures presented as shorter, well-edited, and easily digestible soundbites, and lectures recorded in more engaging environments relating to the contents of the module, rather than at a desk.

Live lectures were often regarded favourably on occasions when teachers demonstrated a willingness to engage with class and to take feedback on-the-go. Students appreciated the ability to ask questions or to request further clarifications synchronously.

As with all things to do with hybrid and online teaching, **the decisive factor in students' evaluations was thoughtfulness, preparedness, and utilisation of individual strengths in delivering engaging content and adequate level of feedback and support.** Both formats were described as conducive to a stimulating learning environment as long as the students saw a clear effort to meet the needs of online learners on behalf of the lecturers.

<p>"lectures &lt;...&gt; were outstanding: talking about the deathly world of Charles Dickens, she filmed herself giving parts of her lecture in archives or on a London graveyard or consulting an original manuscript of a Victorian journal. [Lectures felt] more like professional educational videos &lt;...&gt;"</p> <p>- Nomination 282</p>	<p>"By always delivering live lectures, she has been able to react to student feedback and adjust her teaching style and pace as she goes along. This has been very useful and has greatly increased my understanding of the content, and maximises the amount learnt in each lecture."</p> <p>- Nomination 97</p>
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## 8. Additional practical steps: career advice, essay-writing advice, clear expectations

This final section briefly outlines some minor themes which have not been discussed (or were only briefly mentioned) in the previous sections, yet still seemed interesting and important to mention. These include career advice, essay-writing/notetaking advice, and clear expectations. To an extent, all of them are tied to the main themes of this paper.

- A teacher who supports students by sharing career insights is likely to be seen as caring and open to collaboration (e.g., Individual career advice or suggestions on work placements).
- A teacher who gives essay-writing/notetaking advice is equally likely to be regarded as caring and as someone who is capable of introducing effective and helpful learning-enhancing activities.
- A teacher who sets out clear expectations is likely to be regarded as someone who treats students as valuable contributors and collaborators.

All of these minor themes lead to very clear practical insights about what students find as exemplary of excellent teaching.

### - Career advice

Career advice was mentioned by 20 out of 186 nominations (11%). Students appreciated both the discussions of their teachers' experience and useful links to newly advertised internships. The nominations show that some students become concerned about 'education for education's sake' and want to learn more about the future applicability of their knowledge. A teacher who demonstrates how a certain degree or a sphere of interest can lead to a future career is likely to be regarded as deeply committed to students' development.

### - Essay-writing/notetaking advice

Advice on essay writing and notetaking was mentioned by 14 out of 186 nominations (8%). Some students have implied that in the quest to cover as much material as possible, teachers tend to side-track the transferable skills which are the most crucial in education: how to study well and how to write well. Development of such skills can be interpreted as especially significant considering the international student body of the University of St Andrews: the majority of students come from non-British educational systems and are unsure of how to approach assignments at first. A teacher who found time to discuss and give advice on essay writing and notetaking, even if briefly, was regarded as someone who wants to see students excel in and beyond the module.

"He has provided on numerous occasions advice and help regarding internships, both privately and to the module at large. Most impressively, he has provided much of this advice without being directly asked."

- Nomination 167

"The class convinced me that I want to pursue a career in marketing. When I shared this with my teacher, he was very kind in offering me mentorship and a recommendation, and some extra readings to deepen my knowledge."

- Nomination 36

"Rather than simply teaching us about a subject, he teaches us how to research and write about the subject, too. This is not typical: none of the other modules I have taken have dedicated classroom time to these elements of studies. It has been enormously helpful and being in his class has taught me not just the module content but has made me a better student in my other modules."

- Nomination 22

"She goes above and beyond in assisting her students in the development of their writing, research, and analytical skills equipping them with not only the content but the tools to succeed."

- Nomination 284

- **Clear expectations**

Clarity of communication and clarity about the module structure have already been highlighted in this paper as the aspect of teaching that students regard as excellent. Additionally, students appreciate clarity about teachers' expectations and the grading criteria for the assignments. This theme has been mentioned in 8 out of 186 nominations (4%) and is partially tied to advice on essay writing. Students might feel uneasy about taking a new subject or studying with a new teacher as they might be unsure about the standard and the style of work expected from them. Teachers who took time to explain the grading criteria and the tutorial guidelines (in class or in office hours) were described as outstanding.

'In her course she gave us an essay expectations sheet, which in my four years I hadn't had yet, which made writing the essays for her course much more relaxing, as in this subject it can be hard to know what tutors may want from you.'

- Nomination 143

'His expectations for collaborative work were established from the first class on - we were given very clear guidelines for engagement, and these were displayed on the board each week.'

- Nomination 247



# Appendix: Codes overview

## General codes

Code	Nominations mentioning
Attitude of a teacher	-
Caring/Supportive	99
Enthusiastic/Passionate	76
Engaging	62
Inspiring/Motivational	60
Dedicated	39
Organised	36
Humorous	22
Challenging	16
Strong work ethic	11
Entertaining	8
Class environment	-
Peer-to-peer engagement	38
Democratic	28
Comfortable	15
Inclusive	15
Welcoming	10
Contents of teaching	-
Digestion of complex knowledge	79
Good course structure	45
Addressing current issues	28
Establishing links beyond course material	28
Fostering critical engagement	27
Consideration for student feedback	14
Reasonable workload	11
Crossing departmental boundaries	10
Good examples	9
Teacher highlights own research	4
Individual caring	130
Responsiveness to emails	43
Detailed/useful feedback	38
Individual suggestions of further resources	25
Care in challenging circumstances	18
Discussion of individual ideas	17
Practical concerns	-
Adaptation of materials	63
Delivery of lectures	32
Supplementary materials	20
Tutorial practices	7
Email summaries	7
Additional lectures/videos	5
Learning-enhancing activities	51
Activities which diversify a module	27
Activities which expand beyond a module	14
Mixed	8

Code	Nominations mentioning
Practical concerns – cont.	-
Career advice	20
Essay-writing/notetaking advice	14
Clear expectations	8
Treatment of students	-
Students' contributions are valued	71
Keen interest in students	67
Teacher is comfortable to approach	41
Noting students' potential	30
Promoting confidence	26
Teacher asks about wellbeing of a class	21
Promoting individual research	15
Promoting reflexivity	8
Wide knowledge	45

## Inclusivity and diversity codes

Code	Nominations mentioning
All mentions	35
Spheres	-
Personal circumstances	10
Disability	7
Mental health	7
Gender	6
Language barrier	2
Race	1

Code	Nominations mentioning
Extracurricular role of a teacher	9
Practical steps	-
Challenging preconceptions	8
Use of pronouns	4
Acknowledgement of biases	3
Non-Western perspectives in the curriculum	3
Consideration for student feedback	2

## Online/hybrid teaching codes

Code	Nominations mentioning
All mentions	42
Challenging	23
Negative	22
Neutral	18
Positive	2