

TR&R Learning Circle: The Meaning of Excellence in Learning and Teaching to Students Project

Focus Group Examples of Excellence

UG Perceptions of Excellence	UG Specific Examples	PGT Perceptions of Excellence	PGT Specific Examples
<i>How would you describe excellence in learning and teaching? What does that sort of look like or feel like to you?</i>			
Clear explanations from staff to promote understanding	Students leave lectures feeling motivated to attend more lectures	Active and applicable learning	Professionals from the field are invited to guest lecturer to give students relevant and practical examples of work Lectures based on more practical life and career skills such as jobs, insurance, finances are provided for students
Mutual engagement from staff and students	Students feeling inspired to do extra reading and independent study	Learning and teaching is personalised	Smaller cohorts allow for more specific feedback and enables better interpersonal relationships between staff and students Lecturers ask about student expectations and what students hope to get out of their teaching to help lecturers identify what is the best use of valuable teaching hours Students have flexibility in topic when answering essay questions and picking research topics as this encourages students to pursue what interests them and results in better work from students
Diversity and Inclusivity	Efforts to decolonise the curriculum Diverse teaching staff to reflect diverse student body Staff actively reach out to international students if they appear to need extra support (alternatively, international students feel comfortable seeking this support) Staff make efforts to highlight perspectives of, and issues faced by, people of colour	Challenging, yet fair content	Questions and problems are appropriate to the level of learning and are not too easy, or so difficult that students become discouraged

Support with self-study beyond the scope of lectures	Students have access to supplementary tutorials, additional resources/handouts or to stay behind for a few minutes after lectures		
<i>The statement of 'lecturers teaching effectively' was agreed as excellent by a majority of students who answered. Can you describe an example of where a lecturer has taught effectively?</i>			
Staff adapt teaching methods to suit students learning styles	Staff are able to read the room and use different activities for low-energy 9am classes	Clear expectations and explanations from staff to promote student understanding	Staff make it clear to students what the prerequisites for a given session are so students can make the most of the session Explanations are quick and clear and students leave lectures feeling like they have learned something
Staff are able to facilitate productive debates and discussions	When debates become controversial, staff are able to control this and encourage comments to remain impersonal and on-topic	Critical thinking is encouraged	Staff guide students to think in nuanced ways about theory and how this would/would not apply to a practical setting
Students regularly have the opportunity to ask questions and reflect on content	Lecturers leaving five-ten minutes at the end of the session for students to ask questions Lecturers giving time for students to reflect on questions themselves, even if they don't answer out loud Students feeling able to ask questions to or amongst themselves	Staff reflect on their own work and experiences	Staff sharing their own mistakes highlights that students do not have to be perfect in their own work and helps students see that mistakes and failing are part of the learning process
<i>The statement 'quality of feedback from the lecturer enhances student learning', was agreed as excellent by a majority of students. Can you describe an example of a time when a specific piece of feedback has enhanced your learning?</i>			
Formal feedback is clear and constructive	Feedback balances both positive and negative aspects. Students are given specific examples of what to continue doing or how they could improve next time. Students are given advice on how they can apply feedback Lecturers give students examples of how essay plans would be graded to give more clarity on marking	Students should have opportunities to apply their feedback	Assignments should be similar enough that feedback from the first should be able to be applied to the second in order to show improvement Feedback should be given in a timely enough manner that it can be applied to the next assignment

Informal feedback is given more regularly to support students' progress and maintain motivation	Students receive comments and feedback on work they complete in seminars Students receive general positive affirmations and encouragement after particularly difficult content or engaging sessions	Formal feedback should be specific and individualised	Lecturers provide feedback that is specific in giving examples of things to change or improve. Broad statements of 'be more concise' or similar, are not helpful For feedback in art-based subjects, lecturers provide feedback that is thought-provoking and acknowledges that different processes work for different people
		Cohort feedback and advice should be provided regularly	Staff provide broad ways the majority of students could improve, such as reminding students to refer to tables and figures, as this saves time compared to telling this to individual students Examples of past work are provided to students to give tangible examples of how to structure various written assignments
<i>The statement of 'commitment to student well-being' was agreed as excellent by a majority of students. Can any of you describe an example where a lecturer has been particularly sensitive to your well-being?</i>			
Lecturers show compassion towards external student circumstances impacting on university work	Students are not judged for occasionally missing seminar readings and attempts are made by staff to include them regardless More content warnings are given for lectures Lecturers consider external events such as holidays and adapt teaching to include light-hearted moments or easier topics around these times	Staff should do what they can to foster a welcoming environment so students feel able to reach out to others	Staff regularly remind students to reach out for help if they need it, and communicate in slightly less formal tones when students do reach out Welcome events before the course to break the ice between staff and students and also between students and their peers before teaching starts helps to calm anxieties Staff should actively encourage students to interact inside and outside of lectures
The stressful impact of group work is taken into greater consideration	Reassurance that lecturers will take group members concerns seriously if conflict arises Students have the opportunity to identify if group members are not contributing equally to projects	Expectations around workload should be set in honest, yet reassuring ways	Lecturers are realistic when telling students about the difficulty of the workload, but also reassure students that they can and will get through it. Honesty and understanding about the difficulty level makes students feel more

			relaxed and better able to plan their workload
Student feedback is acknowledged and acted on (imperfect action is appreciated more than no action at all)	More content warnings are introduced to lectures Lecturers do what they can to resolve conflict in group work even if they don't have much direct power over the situation		
Students are given increased support and sensitivity during exam season so they can feel as prepared as possible	Lecturers ensure that their resources are complete and of high quality, such as past papers including mark schemes		
<i>The statement of 'creating an environment within which all students can succeed and thrive' was agreed as excellent by a majority of students. Can you describe an example of where a lecturer has done this?</i>			
Physical accessibility	Extra provisions and adaptations are made so that students feel encouraged and able to attend sessions regardless of physical disability/injury and are still able to learn and benefit from sessions	Lecturers ensure all students have the opportunity to cover the base knowledge needed to be successful on the course	Staff take the time to cover basic theories and first principles before moving on to more difficult or complex content so that all students are on a level playing field regardless of their previous academic background
Basic accessibility checks	Staff consistently check that all students in a lecture theatre/seminar room can see and hear clearly	Lecturers are sensitive to, and make an effort to support students who are struggling or anxious about work	Lecturers allow students to observe and contribute to external projects they are working on to build confidence and skills that are applicable to the student's own work and assignments
		Lecturers encourage and facilitate peer discussion	Time is given at the end of lectures and seminars for students to discuss any topics covered in the session to allow learning opportunities for both those who feel they have a good understanding and those who are more unsure.
		Lecturers give space for and support students with independent study	Rather than directly answering questions, lecturers guide students towards research which could answer their questions. Lecturers actively offer students directions for further reading for topics that they find

			particularly interesting to encourage students' passion
		Lecturers offer and regularly remind students of office hours	Students have consistent access to 1:1 space where they can ask individualised questions in an environment which is more comfortable and which students do not perceive as wasting others' time.
		Students should have clarity around the aims and goals of assessment including structure, content, and marking criteria	Students are provided with past cohorts work (no grades attached), or lecturers own examples to give examples of the types of structure and content they could use. Lecturers are more clear about what separates 'good' work from 'excellent' work, by providing examples such as the lecturer wanting to learn something new Lecturers are clear about word limits and if there is any leniency with these