

Advancing the reward of university teaching:

insights from three waves of the Teaching Cultures Survey

Executive Summary

March 2026

The Teaching Cultures Survey (TCS) is a global collaboration between research-intensive universities that are actively engaged in improving how university teaching is recognised and rewarded within academic careers. The survey captures academics' perspectives on how university teaching is supported, valued and rewarded at their institution. It is designed, in particular, to offer insight into how institutional policies and activities designed to improve the reward of university teaching are embedded and experienced in practice.

Three waves of the cross-sectional survey have now been completed, in 2019, 2022, and 2025. In 2025, 17 universities took part in the survey, spanning nine countries and four continents. Participating universities included King's College London, Utrecht University, the University of New South Wales, and the University of British Columbia. All participating institutions have engaged in – or are planning for – systemic reform in how university teaching is evaluated, supported and/or rewarded in academic career pathways.

In all, 12,071 academics participated in the 2025 survey, spanning all career stages from PhD students to university presidents. Their feedback offers the global higher education community insight into:

- the views of academics at institutions working to strengthen how university teaching is valued and recognised, and **how these perspectives vary** across both participating universities and academic subgroups (such as discipline, contract type and role). This cross-sectional picture is based on survey data from all 17 universities participating in TCS 2025.
- how these views and experiences **change over time** as universities introduce reforms to academic career pathways, promotion processes, and/or the ways in which university teaching is defined and evaluated. This analysis of change over time is based on survey data from the 10 universities that have participated in all three survey waves (referred to as *Returning* universities hereafter).

The survey analysis points to considerable variation between institutions, both in the 2025 findings and in the changes observed over time between 2019 and 2025 at the *Returning* universities. Despite these differences, several clear patterns emerge across institutions and across the dataset as a whole. As outlined below, these patterns point to six key factors that shape academics' experiences of university teaching culture, regardless of institutional context:

1. **Cultural change is achievable within years, not decades:** Over the six-year period from 2019 to 2025, many *Returning* universities recorded substantial shifts in how academics view and experience their institutional cultures. In such institutions – actively strengthening the place of university teaching in academic careers – cultural change that is seen and felt by academics is possible within years rather than decades.

2. **Department leaders play a central role in shaping university teaching culture:** One question sits at the centre of many relationships in the survey data: academics' views of their department leaders' commitment to rewarding university teaching. Where this commitment is seen to be strong, academics are much more likely to report positive views and experiences across multiple survey measures, including how they perceive career prospects for education-focused academics and their confidence in the way university teaching is assessed. These findings suggest that academics' perceptions of their departmental leaders' commitment serve as a proxy for – and potential driver of – how institutional priorities around university teaching are experienced in practice.
3. **Views on institutional priorities and practices differ sharply by career stage:** Across the large majority of participating institutions, early- and mid-career academics report markedly less positive perceptions of how university teaching is valued and rewarded than senior academics and university leaders. This pattern is evident across most survey measures, suggesting that university teaching culture is not experienced uniformly across the academic career pipeline.
4. **Alignment of views across academic groups is a barometer of university teaching culture:** Universities in which the views of education-focused academics and those of research-and-teaching colleagues are aligned – particularly in how they view education-focused careers – consistently score more highly across most survey measures. Alignment appears to be associated with environments in which education-focused academics are more embedded within the wider academic community, supporting shared understandings and integrated practices around university teaching.
5. **Established academics play a key role in culture change:** The most marked changes between 2019 and 2025 were recorded among senior and long-serving academics, with more limited movement among early- and mid-career academics. In other words, while reform efforts are having an overall positive effect, these changes primarily reflect shifts in the views and experiences of more established academics, rather than those of more junior colleagues. As a result, differences in perceptions between career stages have tended to widen over time.
6. **Confidence in how university teaching is measured remains low:** While many aspects of university teaching culture have strengthened since 2019, confidence in the evidence used to evaluate quality and impact in university teaching remains persistently low. This suggests that further work is needed sector-wide to develop and embed evaluation measures that are robust, transparent and trusted by the academic community.

These findings make clear that meaningful cultural change in how university teaching is valued and rewarded in higher education is possible. Progress, however, is often uneven and not experienced equally across academic groups. The findings point to several institutional levers that are closely associated with positive and durable change, including trusted leadership, the integration of education-focused roles, and the prominence given to university teaching in academics' annual performance reviews. Indeed, questions of trust – in leadership, in evaluation systems, and in promotion processes – appear to run through many of the patterns observed in how academics interpret institutional values and cultures.

Taken together, the findings map out a set of building blocks that shape how university teaching cultures are formed. These building blocks provide the basis for other universities to reflect on how the reward of university teaching is interpreted and experienced across different institutional contexts and stages of the career ladder.

Acknowledgements

The Teaching Cultures Survey is an independent survey funded by the consortium of participating universities.

We are grateful to the academic communities at the participating universities who contributed so generously to the study by completing the anonymous survey. We are also grateful to the institutional and administrative survey leads at each participating institution who collaborated in the survey preparation, circulated the invitations to participate to their academic communities and encouraged participation to ensure as high a response rate as possible.

Universities participating in the 2025 survey

Aalborg University (Denmark)

Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden)

Delft University of Technology (TU Delft, Netherlands)

Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e, Netherlands)

Interdisciplinary Transformation University Austria (IT-U, Austria)

King's College London (United Kingdom)

KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden)

Maastricht University (Netherlands)

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU, Norway)

Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC, Chile)

University of British Columbia (UBC, Canada)

University of New South Wales (UNSW, Australia)

University of Sydney (Australia)

University of Twente (Netherlands)

Utrecht University (Netherlands)

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Wageningen University & Research (Netherlands)

Further information on this project

Teaching Cultures Survey

www.teachingcultures.com

Advancing Teaching initiative

www.advancingteaching.com