# Strengthening the Reward of University Teaching: Learning from Effective Practice

Project outline – October 2026

Growing numbers of universities worldwide are working to strengthen how university teaching is valued and rewarded in academic careers. While their approaches vary substantially, changes often include a fundamental redesign of academic career pathways, promotion criteria, or processes used to evaluate academics' contributions to university teaching. Despite the scale and ambition of many such activities, it is often difficult to gauge the extent to which changes in **policy** have led to real improvements in institutional **practice**. The success of these reforms ultimately rests on how they are experienced by the academic community: whether academics recognise a change in institutional decision-making and perceive a shift in the university's norms, values and priorities. The Teaching Cultures Survey[1] (TCS) is designed to provide this evidence.

In each of three surveys between 2019 and 2025, the TCS gathered the views of more than 12,000 academics on how university teaching is valued and rewarded at their institutions. The dataset is distinctive not only in its scale but in the community from which it is drawn: 17 research-intensive universities from diverse global contexts that have each engaged in sustained efforts to strengthen the reward of university teaching. The 2026 TCS report[2] charts the progress and nature of institutional reform over the three survey waves. Across the participating institutions, the report identifies both areas of particular strength and areas of substantial progress over the six years of the survey. It also identifies a set of consistent factors that appear to shape academics' views and experiences irrespective of institutional context. However, while the survey provides rich quantitative evidence of **what** academics are experiencing and **where** their experiences differ, it cannot explain **why** these differences occur or **how** positive outcomes have been achieved. And, crucially, the survey alone cannot offer insight into the institutional strategies and practices associated with positive change.

The *Learning from Effective Practice* study will move behind the survey data to answer these questions. Detailed analysis of the TCS dataset will first identify the universities that demonstrate areas of particular strength, substantial improvement or pronounced differences in academics' experiences. In-depth qualitative case studies at these universities will then be used to address two central questions:

A. What institutional strategies and conditions underpin successful efforts to strengthen the reward of university teaching – and what can other universities learn from these approaches?

B. What are the factors shaping academics' views of how university teaching is valued and rewarded – and what can these tell us about the levers for driving cultural change?

Drawing on interview evidence from the case study universities, the study will address these two questions in turn: Section A will investigate **how** particularly positive outcomes have been achieved, while Section B will explore **why** important differences in academics' experiences occur.

## Section A. Effective institutional strategies to strengthen the value and reward of university teaching

Across the 17 participating universities, the TCS dataset identifies distinct pockets of high performance and rapid improvement: institutions that perform particularly well or have improved markedly over time on specific measures of how university teaching is valued and rewarded. For each survey measure selected for case study investigation, the TCS data will first be used to identify the universities demonstrating the strongest outcomes. The case studies will then identify the institutional strategies,

priorities and conditions associated with these positive outcomes and examine what the wider higher education community can learn from these effective approaches. Analysis of the TCS data identifies three survey measures as particularly strong candidates for case study investigation, addressing each of the following three questions:

1. How have universities strengthened the priority given to university teaching in **professorial appointment and promotion decisions**?
2. How have universities strengthened the prominence given to university teaching in academics' **annual performance reviews**?
3. How have universities strengthened the status and career advancement prospects of **education-focused academic roles?**

## Section B. The factors shaping academics' views of how university teaching is valued and rewarded

The 2026 TCS report[2] identified several factors that appear to play a pivotal role in shaping academics' views of how university teaching is rewarded, regardless of institutional context. Understanding why these relationships exist will offer important insights into how universities can improve academics' experiences of institutional cultures and norms in university teaching. Three of these factors have been identified as particularly strong candidates for further investigation, with case studies addressing each of the following three questions:

1. Why do academics' **views of their department leaders** serve as such a powerful indicator of how they perceive wider institutional cultures, priorities and practices?
2. Why do **early- and mid-career academics** report markedly less positive experiences of how university teaching is valued and rewarded than their **senior colleagues**?
3. Why are university teaching cultures consistently stronger in institutions where education-focused and research-and-teaching academics are **aligned in their views**?

## Study design and outputs

The primary output will be a synthesis report setting out evidence-based strategies and practical guidance for universities seeking to strengthen the culture, value and reward of university teaching. The report will be built on six case studies, addressing in turn three questions from Section A and three questions from Section B of the study. Each case study will draw on interview evidence from academics, change agents and university leaders across several universities selected on the basis of their TCS findings. Taken together, the case studies will provide insight into the strategies and conditions underpinning effective institutional change and the factors shaping academics' experiences of how university teaching is valued and rewarded. Case study universities may choose whether to be identified by name or to remain anonymous. All universities named in the report will be invited to review relevant draft material to identify any errors or omissions prior to publication.

The report will form part of the *Advancing Teaching*[3] suite of outputs and will be made freely available as an open-access resource. The study will be led by Dr Ruth Graham. Interim findings will be presented and discussed at the next *Advancing Teaching* meeting in October 2027.

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[1] Teaching Cultures Survey: www.teachingcultures.com

[2] *Advancing the Reward of University Teaching: insights* from three waves of the Teaching Cultures Survey (2026 report): https://www.teachingcultures.com/Findings/

[3] Advancing Teaching: www.advancingteaching.com