

Writing a Successful Application

Tips from 2018 Assessors

Provide a variety of evidence and a strong narrative. The satisfaction of students is easy evidence to gather, yet it only tells part of the story of how the teaching takes place.

Look in other places to show quality - like retention, attrition and engagement. Tell a story about your growth (and continuous development) as an academic. Small cohorts and large cohorts have different teaching approaches. Online classes are different to face-to-face. Teaching a language is different to teaching anatomy. Embrace your point of difference and share it with us. There is no right or wrong - explain your cohort, set the scene, and tell us why you do what you do. Explain how you have shared what you know - within your institution, across our nation and around the world! Tell us why you are great, and - better - show us how others know you are great!

Focus on the selection criteria. Keep in mind that many teachers are great - but this is an award for outstanding teachers - so what is it about your nomination that demonstrates this excellence? Also, anything that demonstrates the sustained contribution and the dissemination of your work via publications or presentations is valuable - particularly if you can demonstrate that your techniques have been adopted by others in your institutions or elsewhere. Keep in mind, the award is based on evidence so include as much relevant evidence as possible.

Be clear about the tone, style and purpose of the application and well as the audience (the assessors), who may not have discipline expertise. As always, the evidence provided needs to be pertinent, focused and specific, including its source, solicited, unsolicited, evaluations of teaching, sample size, etc.

Given the competitiveness of the scheme, I would imagine that successful nominations would be more likely to have adoption of their initiatives outside of their classroom, particularly by universities other than their own. Weaker applications only include data from university implemented student feedback surveys. Quantitative evidence specifically collected by the nominee on the initiative is encouraged.

Read the requirements carefully and ensure you focus on what they say. If applying for an award about improving equitable access don't just focus on International students but consider students from the equity groups discussed by HEPPP (<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-participation-and-partnerships-programme-heppp>).

I think presentation of evidence to clearly make one's case or tell their story is really important. Common problems include lack of appropriate evidence; not being clear about what the evidence goes to; or positioning evidence in the wrong place so that it is not clearly related to the story being told.

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Start with discovering and being able to enunciate your philosophy of teaching and student learning. Be able to show how this philosophy frames your teaching. Know the value of evidence about good teaching and different ways to evaluate your teaching outside of institutional student surveys. Show growth and development over time. Be honest and indicate why some things worked, and others did not and what you did to address that.

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An applicant needs to use every word available in the submission to provide convincing evidence and to express their points succinctly. Really thinking of what it is that differentiates their approach and creating a narrative which they can then weave their pieces of evidence through, is what will make their submission successful. Avoid being too general and focusing on a common approach or philosophy. Look for your niche, your story and your impact.

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Irrespective of the criterion addressed, applicants should consider describing their beliefs about the aspect of teaching practice they address. That is; if it is about 'Approaches to teaching', a description of the approach they adopt and what underpins it is important. Similarly, for the 'Curriculum.' criterion, a statement of beliefs about and approaches to curriculum development should either be implied or explicitly outlined. The 'Evaluation.' criterion would, in this framework, include a description of the approach to evaluation adopted and where possible, the evaluation framework. This aspect was a feature of strong applications and its absence a defining feature of less highly rated ones.

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Regarding evidence, statistics quoted regarding student outcomes (satisfaction, retention) needs to include the size of the cohort and the survey response rates. Institutional data (satisfaction and retention for example) should always be included along with more locally collected data - especially where cohorts are small or distinctive in other ways. In strong applications, there is also reference to current research regarding the issue identified and addressed in the application. This reference to literature about teaching and student learning needs to extend beyond generic references such as Bigges or Ramsden.