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Enhancing the Impact of National Teaching Fellows: Critical Success Factors

Stella Jones-Devitt and Professor Susannah Quinsee
Higher Education Academy (HEA) Ambassadors for
Learning and Teaching Excellence (2017/18)

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Contact

publications@advance-he.ac.uk

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Executive summary

Introduction

- 1 This work is the first research output from the HEA¹ -appointed National Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching Excellence, whose remit is to publicly champion and advocate excellence in learning and teaching. Initial work has focused on promoting the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) and working across the sector to start to evidence reach, value and impact. This is the subject of this study. The report is written primarily for institutions involved in supporting NTFS applications. It should also be of interest to individuals aspiring to become NTFs and wider supporting agencies.

Methodology

- 2 The ambassadors wanted to produce work that was accessible and rigorous, while acknowledging they were looking for success factors. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology was chosen as it focuses on identifying positive aspects for change.
- 3 The '4D' model of AI, advocated by Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) was selected to give a practitioner focus, in which *discovery* (identifying best existing characteristics), *dreaming* (envisioning what the best could look like), *designing* (how the best can be realised and sustained) and *delivery* (identifying what works in practice to deliver the best), was used as a method for scaffolding the discussion around success factors.

Aim

- 4 The aim was to examine whether there is an essential infrastructure for supporting the impact of National Teaching Fellows (NTFs).

- 5 This was operationalised as the following research question: what makes a difference in successfully developing the impact of NTFs within and beyond the institution?

Methods

- 6 Phase one consisted of developing a survey which addressed significant aspects of the NTFS lifecycle. This was sent to all NTFs on the NTFS JiscMail, deans of students, the Principal Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) JiscMail, HEA staff involved in NTFS, National Union of Students (NUS) senior leaders, the Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG), Association of National Teaching Fellows (ANTF) and Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) members.
- 7 Survey questions focused on three key facets across the NTFS lifecycle: success factors, types of innovation and sustainability. Although innovation, *per se*, is not part of the scheme criteria, it was deemed to be an important aspect to explore following discussion with the advisory group² set up to oversee this work.
- 8 Phase two concerned development of a critical path analysis (CPA) for maximising NTFs' institutional impact. This was constructed from factor and content analyses gleaned from the initial survey. Given the divergence and complexity of the responses, producing a traditional CPA that demonstrated the most efficient routes for success was problematic. Therefore, this approach was modified into a set of critical path diagrams (CPDs) showing all key success factors across the NTFS lifecycle. This was instead of producing one version, prioritised on efficiency, that might not have widespread application.

1 At the time of writing this report the HEA had not joined Advance HE so HEA is used throughout.

2 The Advisory Group was formed of the ambassadors, members of the HEA and members of the ANTF.

- 9 The CPDs were tested by arranging three follow-up virtual discussion groups and one face-to-face group, via a workshop organised by the Association of National Teaching Fellows, and appealing for participants through the communication mechanisms outlined in point six above. Workshop participants need not have completed the original survey to attend one of the workshops. Participants commented upon the proposed constructs and then applied the '4D' AI model to develop further evidence concerning success factors underpinning the NTFS.

Results

- 10 The online survey achieved a response rate of just over 7% of those listed on the NTFS JiscMail at the time of surveying (n. 43 respondents) so caution needs to be applied when examining survey results, which should be considered impressionistic and niche. Table 1 (pages 12-15) provides further analysis of the most popular factors for each question.
- 11 Drawing on all submitted data from the survey and focus groups, the CPDs (pages 17-19) were constructed by distilling the responses into emerging priorities for each of the sections concerning success factors, successful innovations and sustaining success.
- 12 In addition, Table 2 (pages 20-22) provides a synopsis of AI findings gleaned from the four focus groups (n. 32 participants).

Discussion of findings

- 13 This research into critical enablers for success was welcomed as a useful process of engagement that highlights positive aspects of the NTFS and the work of NTFs in developing learning and teaching excellence.
- 14 Participants felt that high-quality mentoring is imperative throughout the NTFS process and beyond. The engagement of established NTFs in these processes was seen as pivotal.
- 15 Participants indicated that successful NTFs need a clear mandate from their own institution concerning how their expertise will be used in both supporting teaching excellence and how their own work will achieve impact within their institution.
- 16 More should be done to enhance the impact of the NTFS and a systematic approach needs to be taken. This could be done on application by having to produce an impact and dissemination plan as part of the process.
- 17 There were mixed views about success linked to funding levels for the award. Some respondents highlighted that the earlier, larger funding amounts allowed for more sustainable cross-institutional projects that achieved real impact, while others felt that award monies were too individualised.³
- 18 NTFs should work closely with PFHEAs/SFHEAs but they are not synonymous. It was felt that the similar nomenclature did not help to differentiate the NTFS as an award for individual learning and teaching excellence. There appeared to be confusion about the value of NTFS as well as PFHEAs by some participants whereas others were very clear about the distinctions between them.

3 It should be noted that the NTFS scheme has changed in various ways since its inception in 2000. Over the years winners have received decreasing amounts of award funding, from £50,000 in the early years to £5,000 in 2016. There were also different categories of award in the early years which were phased out.

- 19 Closer collaboration with other countries' national award schemes could yield tremendous potential for further impact. NTFs felt that the collaborative nature of their work is central to sustaining excellence and opportunities for further collaboration should be made explicit.
- 20 Participants expressed mixed responses in terms of how the award had, or could potentially, give them greater status and confidence in their institutions to assume an educational leadership position. This also related to some points that were made about what happens when you have been given the award and how to encourage continued and sustained impact once you are an NTF.

Recommendations

- 21 Recommendations are divided into those key recommendations for individuals, institutions and supporting agencies. There are also some suggestions which could be further explored should resources allow.
- 22 Key recommendations focus on support for institutions from the HEA and ANTF for successful NTFs including guidance and mentoring; institutions to use the critical path diagrams to ascertain internal success factors and ensuring NTF applications are aware of their institutional contribution beyond the award.
- 23 Suggestions focus on how to support NTF applicants at an institutional level, more case studies and examples, development plans for NTFs once they have their award, and raising the profile of the NTFS on a global scale.

1 Introduction

At the start of 2017, two National Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching Excellence were appointed via a competitive process. Working with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) as scheme sponsors, the ambassadors would also work with the National Teaching Fellows (NTFs) community, the Association of National Teaching Fellows (ANTF), students and others to:

- + Develop and execute strategies for the identification, collation and dissemination of innovative practice.
- + Promote the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) and the work of NTFs across the sector.
- + Provide evidence of the reach, value and impact derived from the innovative work of NTFs.
- + Identify where good practice has been embedded and led to sustained change of institutional/sector practice and improved learning outcomes.

This publication is the first output from their collective activity. It specifically concerns promoting the NTFS and working across the sector in beginning to evidence reach, value and impact. Both ambassadors are existing NTFs and Principal Fellows of the HEA (PFHEA) and hold strategic roles within their own organisations; hence this research was undertaken proportionately in light of timescale and available resource.

2 Methodology

The remit of the ambassadors is unashamedly positive as they are tasked with identifying and promoting innovative good practice. While this clearly relies on subjective experience, both ambassadors wanted to produce work that was defensible, accessible and rigorous. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology was chosen as it focuses upon identifying positive aspects for change rather than approaching social phenomena as problems to be solved.

Grant and Humphries (2006) note that there are several variants of AI, all of which originate from the initial work of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). According to Grant and Humphries (2006: 403), the methodology is grounded in:

the conceptual / ontological positions of social constructionists, who work from the premise that language, knowledge and action are inextricably linked. Organisations are considered as the outcomes of their members' interactions with historical, cultural, social, economic and political occurrences.

This research focused on the '4D' model advocated by Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) in which discovery (identifying the best characteristics of the topic of enquiry) dreaming (envisioning what the best really looks like) designing (how this vision can be realised and sustained) and delivery (identifying what works in practice), are used as a structure to elicit a range of responses around the chosen topic. This model was deemed to be an appropriate vehicle, given the practitioner focus.

3 Aims and objectives

Aim

To examine whether there is an essential infrastructure for supporting the impact of NTFs.

Objectives

- + Identifying NTF success stories
- + Recognising crucial supportive and enabling formal and informal mechanisms
- + Making recommendations in light of findings

Operationalised as the following research question:

- + What makes a difference in successfully developing the impact of NTFs within and beyond the institution?

4 Methods

4.1 Phase one

This involved constructing a questionnaire addressing significant aspects of the NTFS lifecycle, in which the sampling frame comprised:

- + All NTFs on the NTFS JiscMail at time of survey
- + Deans of students, where appointed
- + PFHEA JiscMail
- + HEA staff involved in scheme
- + National Union of Students (NUS) senior leadership team
- + Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) membership
- + Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG) membership
- + Association of National Teaching Fellows (ANTF)

The questionnaire differentiated response rates by type(s) of higher education provider; roles; gender; ethnicity; and whether holding NTF status. (NB This information was voluntary, not mandatory). Participants did not need to be NTF award holders to contribute to the research.

Survey questions focused on three key facets:

Success factors

- + At pre-selection stage, what do potential NTF candidates need to know in order to engage effectively in the process?
- + What three crucial factors are essential when supporting NTF candidates to submit a strong application?
- + How can institutions continue to support successful NTF award holders to be effective, post award?
- + How can institutions continue to support unsuccessful NTFs candidates, post outcome?

Type(s) of innovations

- + Which NTFs-led innovations have been most successful and why?
- + How are NTFs-led innovations scaled successfully?
- + How does your organisation use such innovations to demonstrate impact of learning and teaching excellence?
- + How is the impact of these innovations measured?

Sustainability

- + How are experienced NTFs engaged effectively in identifying and mentoring staff with demonstrable commitment to pursuing learning and teaching excellence?
- + How has your organisation used NTFs effectively as a critical mass of expertise and what is done to ensure further sustainability?

There was also space for additional information

- + Any further information?

The survey ascertained if respondents would be willing to participate in phase two of the process, which concerned engaging in a follow-up virtual or face-to-face discussion group meeting to examine success factors in more depth. The process was also promoted at the 15th Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching Conference at Plymouth University in June 2017 following an invitation to the ambassadors to present the work to date. Evidence gleaned from that session helped the development of phase two.

4.2 Phase two

This concerned the development of an embryonic critical path analysis (CPA) for maximising NTFs' institutional impact, constructed from a factor analysis gleaned from initial survey responses. Responses were so complex and diverse that constructing a traditional CPA was problematic; hence, the researchers made a minor adjustment and constructed a critical path diagram (CPD) which aimed to show all key success factors across the NTFS lifecycle, rather than identifying which factors might be prioritised over others within the most efficient routes, as would be expected via CPA.

Once constructed, the CPD was tested by:

- + Arranging follow-up virtual discussion groups (x 3) to test opinion of possible CPD constructs.
- + Using the September 2017 ANTF workshop event to launch initial findings and gain further feedback.

In addition to gauging opinion of the CPD constructs, the ambassadors drew on the AI 4D model (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000) to develop further evidence concerning the NTFS.

It is envisaged that further feedback and refinement will occur via:

- + Developing appropriate resource(s) including a synopsis of findings and recommendations (this publication) and as part of wider dissemination with stakeholder groups such as HEDG, SEDA, PVC network.

5 Results

The online survey was available for three weeks and yielded a total of 43 responses from the NTFS JiscMail as the primary source for recruiting respondents. This corresponds with a response rate of just over 7% so caution needs to be applied when examining the results from the survey, which can be treated as impressionistic and 'niche' at best. Respondents came from a variety of roles, including Professors / Professors Emeritus, Principal Lecturers, Associate Professors, Heads of Educational Development, Readers, Deans, Independent Consultants and those in what were described as in 'managerial academic' roles. The majority were NTFs and many held additional professional memberships, including PFHEA, Senior Fellow of HEA (SFHEA), Fellow of HEA (FHEA), SEDA and HEDG. Several also cited discipline-specific professional membership groups. There was a 60:40% split of female to male respondents from an overwhelmingly white ethnic background. The average amount of time spent working in higher education was around 25 years. There were several outliers in terms of years worked, with three respondents having 41-42+ years while one respondent had only been in higher education for 2.5 years, which was significantly lower than all other respondents. In terms of provider type, there was a very even spread across provider mission groups.

The following table (Table 1) provides analysis of the most popular factors for each question.

Table 1. Factor analysis from online survey

Section: Success factors		
Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
1 At pre-selection stage, what do potential NTF candidates need to know in order to engage effectively in the process?	+ Gathering of evidence and effective deployment + Understanding the criteria + Having access to wider support structures (both institutional and NTFs)	+ Robust writing skills and ability to craft information effectively + Understanding and demonstrating impact + Understanding priorities underpinning the wider learning and teaching context
2 What factors are essential when supporting NTF candidates to submit a strong application?	+ Pre-submission mentoring + Helping candidates to address the criteria + Providing ongoing writing support	+ Finding enough time to craft and refine applications + Ensuring independent critical review of submissions + Understanding quality of requisite evidence
3 How can institutions continue to support successful NTF award holders to be effective, post-award?	+ Use NTFs in an array of strategic policy development roles related to learning and teaching + Develop reward and recognition schemes which are cognisant of NTFs' skills and abilities to innovate and factor into contractual structures for internal learning and teaching promotions processes + Provide NTFs with substantive leadership and mentoring roles within the institution	+ Showcase NTF work on a continuous basis to encourage adoption of innovations and scale within the institution + Create and support an NTF group / community of practice by giving space, resource and work-loaded time + Define effectiveness for learning and teaching practice within the institution and let NTFs lead on developing impact

Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
4 How can institutions continue to support unsuccessful NTFs candidates, post-outcome?	+ Provide an excellent mentor on an ongoing basis in order to maximise on feedback received and respond constructively about possible re-submission + Institutions should make more of the status of being nominated and should provide further networking opportunities to develop applicants' profile for future success + Develop a tailored support package for possible resubmission that could include: writing development support; time / resources to develop pedagogic research and resources that will add to the evidence base	+ Create a network of institutional learning and teaching excellence which includes inviting all successful NTFs and all those who have participated in the scheme in recognition of the fine margin between gaining NTF awards and otherwise.

Section: Innovations

Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
5 Which NTFs-led innovations have been most successful and why?	+ An array of projects linked to assessment and feedback + The work and overall impact of ANTF activities + Those examining teaching and scholarship promotions criteria and recognition schemes	+ Capstone research concerned with final year dissertation processes + First year experience and transition + Those with substantial NTF project monies attached that have been really influential in the sector
6 How are NTFs-led innovations scaled successfully?	+ By building the idea of scaling up at the outset and by networking and dissemination + Where NTFs are backed to lead by the institution within the context of strategic institution-wide projects + Via NTFs own efforts in creating partnership networks and collaborations across the institution	+ By providing sufficient support from senior leadership to determine putting appropriate resource in place to achieve meaningful change over time

Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
7 How does your organisation use such innovations to demonstrate impact of learning and teaching excellence?	+ Principally within TEF submissions + Institution showcases the work of NTFs and invites their participation and representation on consultations and policy working groups + By publishing outputs and then using as part of a data-driven approach	+ NTFs were invited to develop our teaching and learning principles which are now embedded in the institution's strategic plan
8 How is the impact of these innovations measured?	+ By using a range of student experience and student voice measures + Student success scores + In a range of outputs and esteem markers including conference presentations, publications, keynote invitations	+ Key performance indicators + Impact on practice, including leadership within HEI + Learning and teaching publicity generated by the innovation

Section: Sustainability

Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
9 How are experienced NTFs engaged effectively in identifying and mentoring staff with demonstrable commitment to pursuing learning and teaching excellence?	+ Via formal institutionally instigated mentoring schemes in which NTFs support NTF nominees, UKPSF applications and teach on PG Cert HE courses and deliver CPD activity + Helping to identify aspiring NTF nominees at pre-selection stage and mentoring through the application process + Through informal arrangements in which existing NTFs can volunteer as mentors	+ Many NTFs engage in cross-institutional mentoring arrangements such as the SEDA scheme to advance teaching and learning excellence

Question	Top three factors	Other significant factors
10 How has your organisation used NTFs effectively as a critical mass of expertise and what is done to ensure further sustainability?	+ The institution has a bespoke NTF mailing list, holds regular meetings and the NTF group has involvement in strategic initiatives and showcasing work + NTFs are involved in centrally funded learning and teaching initiatives, in developing staff academic practice and some hold advisory roles in faculties + NTFs are involved in consultation on excellence awards, developing future NTFs and in supporting the TEF submission	+ NTFs directly support ANTF in expectation of galvanising the energies of a range of NTFs within the sector
11 Do you have anything further to add about positive aspects of NTFs contribution to learning and teaching?	+ NTFs provide impetus for risk-taking and in pushing new boundaries for teaching excellence + Becoming an NTF can lead to more internal credibility as advice gets followed and opportunities arise in which to disseminate own work within the sector + The NTF award has helped to identify, reward and promote excellent teaching with academics locally and across institutional barriers	+ NTFs can be a force for good within their own organisation to promote all aspects of teaching and learning <i>per se</i> and as a tangible career pathway + Fellowship is one of the great levers for innovation as NTFs can mutually support one another and then work beyond their own community
12 Further comments to express ideas not covered elsewhere in this survey	+ The awards help shift the balance in academic achievement away from grants and research, while the funds do allow for contributing to research and innovation + The major benefit concerns a boost to self-confidence above all else	+ Completing the survey has initiated further reflective thinking about how to create change within own institution + PFHEAs should be considered alongside NTFs as catalysts for change

Drawing on all of the submitted data, the ambassadors then constructed the CPDs by distilling all of the responses into emerging priorities for each of the sections concerning success factors, successful innovations and sustaining success.

- + **Diagram 1** below, concerning success factors, draws upon aspects required for positive outcomes at: pre-selection phase; at application stage; requirements for making the most of successful NTFs; how can unsuccessful NTFs be supported and add value to teaching excellence.
- + **Diagram 2** concerns successful innovations and how these can be scaled and show demonstrable impact. It is important to note that while ‘innovations’ are not part of the existing scheme criteria, the expressed remit of the ambassadors’ work is to identify and

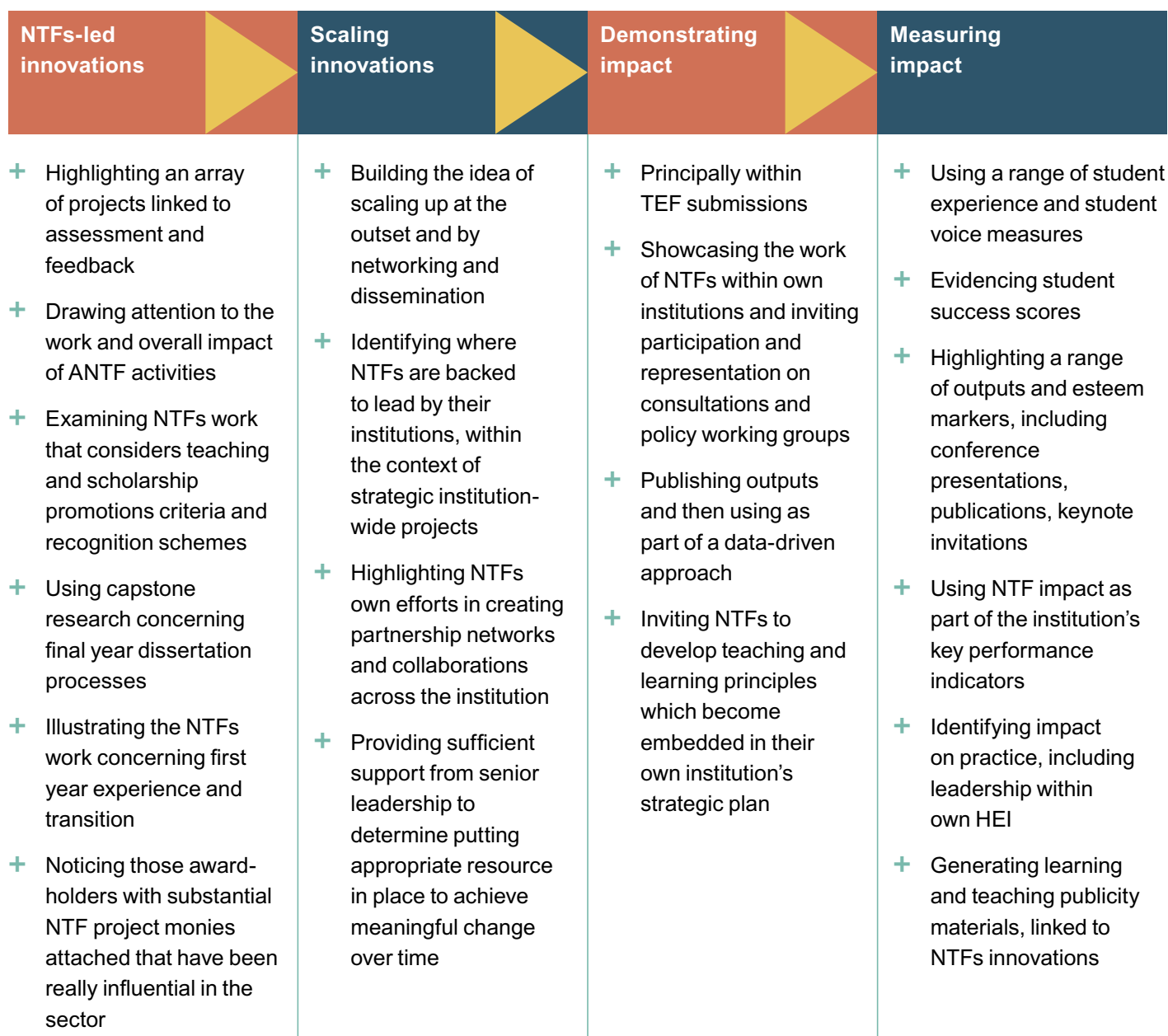
examine innovations. Additionally, the advisory group set up to oversee this small-scale project felt it was worthy of more exploration. The term “innovations” is often context specific and this would need to be recognised in institutions considering what innovation means in their setting.

- + **Diagram 3** highlights positive mechanisms for sustaining success, concerning the use of NTFs mentors for each other and how NTFs can be garnered as a critical mass of expertise within own institutions and beyond. Diagram 3 also identifies further positive and sustainable contributions made by NTFs. Mentorship here generally refers to how existing NTFs support each other. However, it can also relate to how they advise prospective NTFs on what development and career support is needed to apply for an NTF.

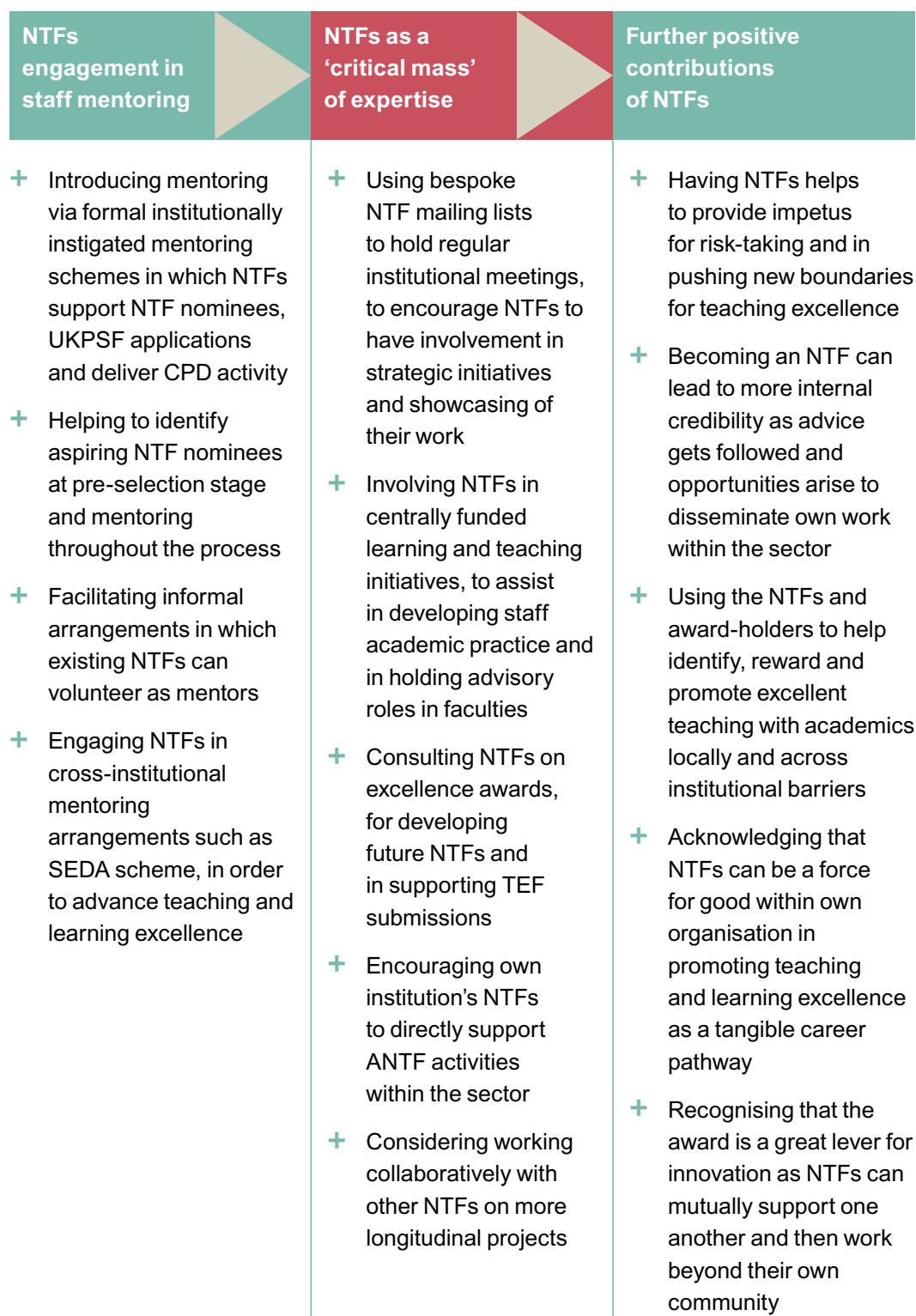
Critical Path Diagram 1 – Success Factors

Pre-selection phase	Application stage	Successful NTFs	Unsuccessful NTFs
+ Having effective talent-spotting mechanisms + Gathering of evidence and effective deployment + Understanding the criteria + Having access to wider support structures (both institutional and NTFs) + Developing robust writing skills and ability to craft information effectively + Understanding and demonstrating impact + Understanding priorities underpinning the wider learning and teaching context	+ Pre-submission mentoring + Helping candidates to address the criteria + Providing ongoing writing support + Finding enough time to craft and refine applications + Ensuring independent critical review of submissions + Understanding quality of requisite evidence + Using existing NTFs as critical friends when applying	+ Using NTFs in strategic policy development roles related to learning and teaching + Developing reward and recognition schemes cognisant of NTFs' skills and abilities to innovate and factoring into contractual structures for internal learning and teaching promotions + Providing NTFs with substantive leadership and mentoring roles within the institution + Showcasing NTF work continuously to encourage adoption of innovations and scale within the institution + Creating and supporting an NTF group / community of practice by giving space, resource and work-loaded time + Defining effectiveness for learning and teaching practice within the institution and letting NTFs lead on developing impact	+ Providing an excellent mentor to maximise on feedback and to consider possible re-submission + Making more of status of being nominated and providing further networking opportunities to develop profile for future success + Developing a tailored support package for possible resubmission that includes: writing development support; time and resources to develop pedagogic research that will add to the evidence-base + Creating a network of institutional learning and teaching excellence which includes all, in recognition of the fine margin between gaining NTF award and otherwise

Critical Path Diagram 2 – Successful Innovations



Critical Path Diagram 3 – Sustaining Success



Further data was collected by holding four discussion groups comprising 32 participants (three virtual sessions and one face-to-face) to examine the veracity of the CPDs and to apply AI thinking to being an NTF and to the scheme in general. The 4D model of Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) was used, focusing on the four phases in which Discovery concerned defining the best characteristics of the existing award scheme, Dreaming envisioned what the best scheme might look like, Designing captured views on how to realise and sustain the vision, and the Delivery phase focused participants to identify what works in practice. Table 2 below provides a synopsis of AI findings gleaned from the four discussion groups.

Table 2. ‘4D’ Synopsis

Discovery phase <i>Defining the best characteristics of the present scheme</i>	The sense of collegiality and opportunity for collaborative and innovative working across institutions and disciplines. Being an NTF provides a sense of community and pedagogical location. It also gives a sense of disruptive legitimacy and a boost to confidence. The award provides a learning and teaching plaudit, often underplayed in relation to research. The whole scheme is really transformative in many ways. For example, the opportunity to disseminate interesting practice is very powerful and can lead to some unlikely but productive partnerships. Provides a sense of joy, playfulness and encourages creativity, especially at subsequent NTF events. The reflective section in the application creates opportunity to create the ‘journey’ and express passion and is often the most rewarding component. The process of writing the application, <i>per se</i>, is affirming and worthwhile. Some of the impacts, including physical outputs such as books, but also the impact of NTFS on other networks (such as educational developers and librarians) and national projects in which NTFs have acted as real change agents in the sector. The award money which gives freedom to use it with far less strings. The inclusion of team-based collaborative awards (CATEs) as part of the wider scheme for excellence.
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Dreaming phase <i>What the best scheme looks like</i>	Create an umbrella organisation that can offer mentorship to HE providers concerning how to deal constructively with their new NTFs. This would encourage consistency in ensuring NTF involvement in sustaining success. Raise the profile of NTFs in the HE media to enhance awareness of what they do in HE. This could also be enhanced by mentoring in a more collective way and making wider links across the sector. The best scheme has more money attached to go beyond a three-year experience, which would increase the significance of the award and can help with buying out periods of time and sustainability. The HEA should encourage applicants and key leaders should meet in order to plan how to make more use of their NTFs learning and teaching expertise. This could also ensure that award holders are encouraged to go beyond their department in their own institution. On application, institutions should demonstrate that they will provide a supportive infrastructure to fully exploit the excellence of their NTFs. Matched funding should also be considered as a prerequisite for developing and sustaining impact. On application, institutions should demonstrate that they will provide a supportive infrastructure to fully exploit the excellence of their NTFs. Matched funding should also be considered as a prerequisite for developing and sustaining impact. Disaggregate the difference between Principal Fellows and NTFs. NTFs are awarded due to their individual excellence and innovative practice rather than primarily for strategic impact. Changing the names to be sufficiently distinctive might help avoid confusion. Consider automatic tagging of Senior Fellowship of the HEA to all those awarded a National Teaching Fellowship.
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Designing phase <i>Realising / sustaining the vision</i>	Provide support for institutions as this is pivotal in realising the fullest impact of any scheme. This requires working in partnership to define and identify the qualitative difference that NTFs make to learning and teaching excellence as opposed to PFHEAs/SFHEAs. Have senior HEA staff present at institutions' learning and teaching away days to work with senior managers to consider how to make real impact with their NTFS and existing award holders. There are several ways that sustaining momentum can be incorporated by: ensuring that the passion and vitality of many NTFs is captured to provide an antidote to many of the other agendas currently dominating learning and teaching; highlighting that the fun stuff needs to be uppermost; involving more experienced NTFs who can add value. Consider working collaboratively and longitudinally with other countries' national teaching excellence schemes so that international impact becomes widespread.
Delivery phase <i>Identifying what works well in practice</i>	Revisit brokering a mentoring process across the scheme in which established NTFs mentor new ones across institutions. The NTFS roadshows could be expanded so that there could be a visible presence of NTFs and their achievements over the years at providers' learning and teaching conferences. This would raise awareness of profile and impact. Consider sponsorship as per the 3M model, in which funding or resources 'in kind' are linked more explicitly with outcomes and outputs. With any given resource / allocation of funds, there should be a duty to give back substantially to the sector.

6 Discussion of findings

The following analysis is drawn from the initial online survey, the three virtual discussion groups and one face-to-face workshop organised by ANTF. The three critical path diagrams were constructed from a factor and content analysis drawn from online responses. These diagrams were then presented to the virtual and face-to-face discussion groups for scrutiny and possible amendment. Within these groups, an AI model was also employed, using the '4D' process to consider: what was best about the present scheme; what an ideal scheme looked like; how this ideal scheme could be sustained and what worked really well in practice.

Overall, respondents felt that the NTFS and becoming an NTF had offered them a transformative experience that had resulted in tangible benefits for student experience across the sector. Several key themes emerged within all of the data collection processes:

- + This research into critical enablers for success (and the resultant critical path diagrams and AI approach) was welcomed as a useful process of engagement that highlights positive aspects of the NTFS and the work of NTFs in developing learning and teaching excellence.
- + Recognising that high-quality mentoring is imperative throughout the NTFS process and beyond. Furthermore, the engagement of established NTFs in these processes was seen as pivotal. Mentoring was seen as a critical enabler for success at pre-selection phase and as a new NTF. It was also seen as very useful in supporting unsuccessful NTF applicants and in sustaining reciprocity and impact.
- + Mentoring was referred to in two distinct areas: firstly in relation to support given by existing NTFs to aspiring NTFs in terms of engaging in activities that could potentially be evidence for applications and advice on what is required to be a successful NTF in terms of the philosophy of the scheme. This was described clearly as advice and professional support, not any form of coaching. Secondly, and more significantly, existing NTFs frequently used the NTF community for mentoring and this was an area that was regarded as important for ongoing learning and teaching excellence.
- + Successful NTFs need a clear mandate from their own institution concerning how their expertise will be used in both supporting teaching excellence but also in how their own work will achieve impact within their institution. They also need clarity concerning the level and availability of institutional resources to support their work. There was a suggestion that institutions should be expected to document how they will support NTFs at the point of application and that this could become one of the essential criteria, in addition to those addressed by the individual applicant. A common theme to emerge was that gaining an NTF award should be linked explicitly to learning and teaching promotions routes.
- + More should be done to enhance the impact of the NTFS (and NTFs) with the need for a systematic approach to be taken in the scheme. This could be done on application by having to produce an impact and dissemination plan as part of the process, along similar lines as the recent CATE awards. Generally, it was felt that more support needs to be offered to institutions concerning how to support the NTFS process. For example, highlighting impact and how it can be measured and by citing real areas of pedagogic enhancement that have occurred via the work of NTFs. This means that institutions can see how the investment in the NTFS can be demonstrably worthwhile.

- + Discussions around funding elicited the least agreement, where mixed views were expressed about the funding levels for the award. It was noted that the amounts had changed considerably over time and this clearly influenced participants views on the usefulness or otherwise of the funding. It could also be that access to funds and the usefulness of allocated grant money is linked with the accessibility of NTFs to access internal funding in their institution, hence the mixed response here.
- + Some respondents highlighted that the larger funding amounts (£50k) allowed for more sustainable cross-institutional projects that achieved real impact, whereas others felt that award monies were too individualised and should have more strictures placed upon them regarding impact, thus ensuring that award holders might seek to collaborate more effectively within the sector. This could help to build a critical mass of excellence that goes beyond discipline or institution by necessity.
- + Although no clear consensus could be reached with participants around funding, consensus was reached in the view that NTFs could still make an impact regardless of whether or not they received a grant.
- + While it is essential that NTFs should work closely with PFHEAs/SFHEAs, they are not synonymous. It was felt that the similar nomenclature did not help to discern the differences between the NTFS as an award for individual learning and teaching excellence, *per se*, rather than being a strategic influencer of learning and teaching as implied within PFHEA/SFHEA status.
- + All felt that NTFs want to give back to the sector to enhance learning and teaching excellence and it was suggested that closer collaboration with other countries' national award schemes could yield tremendous potential for further impact in the HE sector. NTFs felt that the collaborative nature of their work is central to sustaining excellence and opportunities for further collaboration should be made explicit.

7 Recommendations

Following this initial piece of appreciative inquiry research, there are some areas that should be further exploited to enhance the impact of NTFs and to develop understanding of critical success factors. These have been organised into key recommendations for individuals, institutions and supporting agencies and further suggestions that could be explored with additional resources.

7.1 Key recommendations:

For institutions:

- + Use the critical path diagrams and further positive evidence to encourage institutions to apply these identified success factors constructively, in order to enhance and sustain the impact of NTFs within their own institution.

For individuals:

- + NTFs applicants should clearly state in their application how they will make a positive contribution to their institution and wider HE community once they have received their award.

For supporting agencies:

- + The HEA should consider developing a cross-institutional mentoring scheme for NTFs, which would enhance opportunity for wider collaboration, equity and impact.
- + The HEA and ANTF should work together closely to offer a systematic approach to participating institutions concerning how to support NTFs positively throughout the application lifecycle within their own institutions and beyond.
- + The HEA and ANTF should work together to produce guidance around development opportunities and career advancement for NTFs once they have achieved their award. This would be particularly important for those who were awarded their NTF a while ago and whose award funding has finished.

Suggestions:

- + Aspiring NTFs could produce impact and dissemination plans upon receipt of the award as this could help institutions support applicants effectively to continue their pursuit of learning and teaching excellence.
- + More positive stories and case studies of successful NTFs and their subsequent influence could be compiled using AI methodology. This could be shared within the wider sector in order to have an impact on the achievements of the NTFS and on how individuals within the process continue to make significant contributions to developing teaching excellence.
- + The sector should consider whether some kind of global meta-organisation for recognising excellent teachers should be explored, in which collaboration with other countries' national award schemes and their fellows could lead to further sustained and scalable impact.

8 Concluding remarks

Undertaking this small-scale piece of research has uncovered several key messages concerning the need for existing NTFs to have their voices heard and their successes celebrated across the sector. Many participating NTFs feel passionately about developing teaching excellence and are willing to share ideas and excellent practice across the sector. They also welcome the opportunity to have enhanced strategic roles within their own organisations and beyond that will contribute to developing widespread teaching excellence by supporting and enabling others, in addition to pursuing individual excellence. We reiterate our thanks for the generosity shown by those who participated in helping to identify ways to enhance the impact of NTFs and in exploring critical success factors for sustaining teaching excellence.

9 References

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Contact us

+44 (0)20 7438 1010

publications@advance-he.ac.uk

www.advance-he.ac.uk

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