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Lost in translation? The role of reward and recognition in the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. (0019)

Within business, systems of reward are perceived as having a strong impact on organisational culture, serving to encourage change in employees' behaviour in line with strategic aims (Lawler, 1990). UK governments have increasingly used performance measurement, demonstrations of quality and the celebration of success as standard practice to lead change (Taylor, 2007). Therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that systems of reward have become a common feature of the academy, used to achieve policy goals.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) adopted the language of reward in 1998. The idea that reward mechanisms can change behaviour has become a mantra repeated many times (e.g. DfES, 2003) and implemented through various reward initiatives, with variable success (Taylor, 2007).

The use of reward and recognition has always been controversial because it is seen by some as an example of what Foucault calls a 'micro-technology' designed to increase surveillance as a way of 'disciplining' citizens (Foucault, 1977). This trend in education policy has created an 'economy of performance' (Stronach *et al.*, 2002) based on 'highly constructed and artificial means of measuring real output' resulting in what has been called a 'tyranny of transparency' (Strathern, 2000).

The announcement of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) initiative (DfES, 2003; HEFCE, 2003) created the largest funding programme to support the development teaching and learning based on the idea of rewarding 'excellent' performance both of institutions and individuals. HEFCE (2004) laid out a vision for CETLs, which saw their purpose to *reward* excellent teaching practices and to invest in that practice in order to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community. Following a two-stage bidding process, 74 CETLs were announced.

The funding period ended in 2010, by which time HEFCE anticipated that the CETLs would have left a legacy of high quality learning environments, a culture of innovation and institutional change in practices of reward and recognition (HEFCE, 2004). But policy is never passively received; 'there will always be refraction and domestication of the change initiative' (Trowler, 2008). This paper examines ways in which recipients of the reward for excellence in teaching understood, interpreted and 'translated' (Latour, 1987) HEFCE's policy intentions. Using this case study we reflect on the importance of locality and agency in policy realisation (Ball 1997).

Methods

The research is part of a longitudinal study which has tracked the CETL initiative through from bid writing, formation, and now considers sustainability and legacy (Gosling & Hannan, 2007a; 2007b). We have returned to previous participants to investigate how their original aspirations have been met or evolved, the success and challenges that have been experienced and the contribution their CETL made to the status of teaching and learning within their institution. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 CETL staff who were either directors or in strategic roles from 15 CETLs. In this paper we examine their understandings of the concept of reward and recognition and how this understanding influenced their interpretation of the policy within their CETL.

Translation of HEFCE's agenda for reward and recognition

HEFCE stated aim was that 'CETLs will recognise, celebrate and promote excellence by rewarding teachers who have made a demonstrable impact on student learning' (HEFCE, 2004). Respondents indicated that the translation of this vision was fraught with difficulties. They questioned the extent to which a CETL could operate a reward system in parallel with the established institutional human resource strategies. They were also concerned that by focusing on specific areas of activity the CETL could be perceived as being selective or discriminatory. These concerns emerged at the bidding stage (Gosling & Hannan, 2007a), bringing into question the potential for longer-term implementation of practices of reward and recognition. Gibbs & Habeshaw (2002) argue that to be successful in raising the profile of teaching and learning reward and recognition mechanisms need to be embedded within institutional cultures at a number of levels. But because

respondents were unable to influence the wider institutional culture they concentrated on what was achievable within the context of the individual CETL, therefore reducing the scale of impact from the institutional to local.

Mechanisms of reward and recognition employed by CETLs

Although two Respondents demonstrated that reward and recognition was integral to their aims, references to this aspect of the CETLs work were mixed. A number of CETLs used reward and recognition to induct university staff into their CETL's way of thinking. Employing established practices such as teaching fellowship schemes and educational development grants, individuals or small teams were encouraged to undertake work which fitted within the wider remit of the CETL's focus. This resulted in short-term systems of reward, operating in parallel rather than in collaboration with institutional mechanisms. Five Respondents downplayed the role of reward and recognition, concentrating instead on developing learning environments, resources and teaching practices in line with the vision of their CETL. These moves away from HEFCE's core aim was taken for a number of reasons, and were facilitated by the light-touch approach HEFCE took to the overall management of the initiative.

Resilience of academic identities

There is evidence that some individuals within CETL teams did receive rewards through promotions and institutional awards, and national / international recognition of their work. But these individuals were not necessarily those for whose work the CETL had been awarded in the first instance. Furthermore there were limits to the extent to which reward-systems were able to change strongly held behaviours and values (Henkel, 2005, Wright, 2010). HEFCE, through the CETL initiative, attempted to create separate reward systems that would challenge established practice which has principally recognised research outputs. Respondents continued to be concerned about the exclusion of CETL research outputs in RAE submissions and felt that promotion criteria continued to be dominated by measures of research performance rather than teaching excellence. The lack significant change in institutional recognition and reward systems for teaching and learning suggest that one-off policy initiatives, no matter how well-funded, cannot by themselves significantly impact on well-established academic identities.

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