

Title of presentation

Evaluation by Our Own Standards: Towards an equitable system of teaching evaluation

Presenters

Dr Kieran Higgins

Abstract

Student evaluation of teaching, particularly anonymously, is an accepted practice across the higher education sector for supposedly improving teaching standards and raising student satisfaction. Yet research shows that it does little to improve teaching quality and has negative cultural impacts to the learning community. It is riddled with sample and response bias, with students having been shown to negatively and unfairly evaluate lecturers on their pedagogical abilities for non-pedagogical reasons, particularly when these lecturers do not fit the students' stereotype of a higher education teacher. As a result, groupings such as early career lecturers, those who identify as women, those who identify as LGBT+, and lecturers from the global majority (especially if they have a non-native accent) are disproportionately impacted by this practice.

It is highly detrimental to staff wellbeing and mental health. My own struggles are documented in my forthcoming paper "Broken system, broken staff: an auto-ethnographic exploration of the impact and alternatives to anonymous student evaluations of teaching" and I am not alone in this. I propose to lead an interactive and collaborative workshop with teaching staff to reflect on their experiences of student feedback and work together to develop feedback in a way that still preserves the student's right to a quality and continuously improving education against the wellbeing of the greater QUB workforce. The output from this workshop should form a series of recommendations that can be presented to decision-makers in QUB and inform wider institutional and sectoral discussions on teaching evaluation and quality assurance. Further work could then involve students in co-creating a method of evaluation that addresses their own concerns.