Application for a Teaching Award in the Rising Stars category
Dr Joe Webster, History and Anthropology

1.   PREVIOUS TEACHING AWARDS (200 words maximum)

If you have ever previously won a Queen's Teaching Award, please note the year and category (eg Rising Star, Team etc) below. You should also provide a short explanation of how the work outlined in this application differs from the work for which you were previously recognised.

I have not previously applied for a Queen's Teaching Award.

2.   CONTEXT FOR THE APPLICATION (300 words maximum)

Please provide a brief summary of your application and a context for your work.
Examples of the information you might include are; the subject you teach or the area of learning support you work in, the type of learning and teaching/learning support activities you are involved in, how many learners are involved, your particular learning and teaching/learning support interests and an outline of your overall teaching/learning support philosophy?

I am a lecturer in Anthropology in the School of History and Anthropology, and, crucially, my teaching crosses both subjects. Cross-disciplinary learning is fundamental to my teaching practice and philosophy, which aims to turn History students into Anthropologists and Anthropology students into Historians. I founded, convene, and co-teach the largest History/Anthropology option module in the School – 'Apocalypse! The History and Anthropology of the End of the World'. This has received outstanding student feedback (see below). Such was the popularity of this module (introduced only two years ago, as a model of School best-practice) that the cap was lifted from 59 to 73 students to meet demand. My modules (Apocalypse, Expressive Cultures, Economic Anthropology, New Frontiers of Anthropology, War of Gods) use a mixed-methods approach, including interactive lectures, Q&A sessions, use of single-session team-teaching, invited guest lecturers from outside of Northern Ireland, small-group 'problem based learning', seminar debates, unseen texts analysis, and 'virtual' fieldwork training via the use of ethnographic film.

The number of learners I teach range from 73 in 'Apocalypse!' to twelve in a tutorial or seminar. I also meet one-on-one with undergraduate and MA/PhD students for dissertation supervisions. While varying teaching methods/resources according to the size of the group is crucial to my learning approach, ensuring effective interaction and student involvement is always fundamental, regardless of class size.

My particular learning/teaching support interests include: (i) as a Lecturer, facilitating effective learning for those with dyslexia and other learning conditions, (ii) as a Tutor, promoting engaged participatory discussion from the whole group, and (iii) as an Advisor of Studies, carefully managing individual student learning in relation to pastoral issues they are facing.

My overall teaching philosophy is to promote innovative cross-disciplinary teaching, where meaningful interaction is expected and encouraged, all held within a learning environment that is pastorally supportive.

3.   DISCUSSION

You should illustrate your discussion throughout with reference to specific learning and teaching activities/learning support activities. You should also provide examples of the influence of learner feedback on your learning and teaching/learning support practice.

(a)   Promoting and enhancing the learners' experience (1000 words maximum)

As an Anthropologist teaching also in History, my approach to student learning seeks to stimulate students intellectually, allowing them to see the world in a radically new light. 'Apocalypse! The History and Anthropology of the End of the World', a module I convene, is a key example of my approach.

'Apocalypse!' was co-founded with Prof Crawford Gribben (History) as a way to build stronger connections between students on both sides of the School, and has grown to become one of the School's largest and most popular modules. This success is due in large part to my highly varied, interactive, and cross-disciplinary approach to learning. Starting with an analysis of the Biblical Book of Revelation, and ending with secular accounts of the end of the world such as fears of catastrophic climate change, every teaching session provokes students to analyse apocalypticism in new and exciting ways. As requested by student feedback in 2014-15, lectures are constantly kept up-to-date with the latest doomsday predictions being made across the globe; students are invited to personally research these claims and present them to the class. One highly successful teaching method has been team-teaching within a single lecture, made possible by inviting an annual guest lecturer to teach and debate with the students (2014/15: Dr Robertson, Religious Studies, University of Edinburgh; lecture on UFO conspiracy culture. 2015/16: Dr Guest, Sociology, University of Durham; lecture on American mainstream evangelical apocalypticism). *In line with the Educational Strategy 2011-16, 'developing a dynamic and relevant curriculum' is achieved by funding leading UK experts to travel to QUB to co-teach 'Apocalypse!' students, giving them a truly enriching learning experience.*

Small group teaching is as important as large lecture classes, since it is here where most effective engagement/interaction with students takes place. I often deploy 'Problem Based Learning' in my tutorials and seminars. For example, to simultaneously teach transferable research skills and core module content, in an 'Apocalypse!' tutorial I confront students with a wide array of sacred texts from 'doomsday cults', and ask them to survey the beliefs/practices of the sect as rapidly as they can using only the text. In 'Economic Anthropology', as an exercise in qualitative fieldwork methodology (key skill-sets that both Intel and Google are currently recruiting for), I show brief clips of different ethnographic

films, asking students to take fieldnotes, as if actually doing the research themselves. Students then compare notes and discuss with the whole class the principles of this kind of ethnographic data. *In line with the Educational Strategy 2011-16, my aim here is to provide 'innovation and enrichment of teaching' via a mixed-methods learning approach. By equipping students with specific transferrable research skills, I seek to 'develop high quality graduates and postgraduates who are equipped for life in a global society and work in a global economy'.*

Key to my teaching is the development of excellent learning resources. As a way to promote independent research, I actively encourage students to seek out and request new resources for their modules. Students who propose excellent resources are then encouraged to submit these as a request to be ordered through our School Library Representative. In response to student feedback, my module handbooks present not just lecture abstracts and readings lists, but also key questions for tutorial debates, lists of relevant web-based primary and secondary sources for independent research, and a section on the use of visual learning materials, especially ethnographic films, paired with every lecture. I also now use whole-class emails to constantly update students on relevant newly released online media commentary and radio/film documentaries.

Promoting fair, accurate, and appropriate assessment is fundamental. For students with dyslexia or whose first language is not English, I encourage them to consider exchanging their final exam for an extended essay, which allows them much greater time to craft their written expression. Short mid-semester essay titles are issued in the first lecture, and I frequently refer to these questions, indicating how teaching content may be applied to them in diverse ways. Feedback on short essays is written to allow students to apply this to their final assessments, and I invite students to make individual appointments with me to discuss feedback face-to-face. Essay titles are also discussed in tutorials to ensure full and sophisticated comprehension. Lecture slides frequently make visual reference to ethnographic and historical texts not directly covered in the module, directing students towards a diverse range of appropriate sources for independent reading. I actively foster full-class participation by giving each student both implicit and explicit opportunities to contribute to small and whole-group discussions/debates, stating that asking questions is just as fruitful as posing arguments.

In sum, I promote and enhance students' learning experiences by developing an enriched and innovative cross-disciplinary curriculum which allows them to approach their learning in a way that changes their views about scholarly debates *and* the world around them. I push learning beyond the purely intellectual, applying such learning to real-world cases and problems in ways that prepare students for life and work a global economy.

I believe my teaching is best assessed in the words of the 'Apocalypse!' students I taught in 2015-16:

- "I loved the module".

- "I absolutely loved this module! My favourite one so far!"

- "I honestly have never enjoyed a module more. Since attending the history open day in year 14 I have wanted to do this module, and it certainly didn't disappoint. I just wish I could continue studying it through in the second semester!"

- "It was super interesting in every single aspect and I was actually looking forward to the weekly 2 hour lectures".

- "Always prepared, always interesting, always stimulating!"

- "This was my favourite module by far, I'm just sad it is over!"

- "Literally the best level 2 history module offered".

- "By far the best module I have ever done and probably ever will do! So much interesting and relevant information and teaching methods were impeccable! Wish I was able to do this course for a much longer time. Will always be my favourite module".

- "Favourite module of the semester"

(b)   Supporting colleagues and influencing support for student/and or staff learning (maximum 350 words)

My teaching has significantly influenced support for learning (for students and staff), both within and outside my School. Prof Gribben and I have established an 'Apocalypse!' reading group with several students, some of which now plan to continue to study with us at MA level. We have also developed joint bids for research funding on apocalypticism (most recently a bid to NSF-RCUK for £135,397). I have also developed further teaching contacts with Dr Sturm (QUB Geography), who is now a contributor to the 'Apocalypse!' reading group, and with whom I am currently developing a staff-student conference series on apocalypticism hosted by QUB.

Colleagues in my School are now looking to 'Apocalypse!' as an example of teaching best-practice by developing their own History-Anthropology joint modules. I have also begun to develop other History-Anthropology teaching exchanges; I have brought History teaching into Anthropology by developing an 'Economic Anthropology' lecture on sex workers to be co-taught with Dr Kieran Connell, and have brought Anthropology teaching into History by myself giving a guest lecture on 'War of Gods' to History MA students. Further student-staff learning exchanges have come about through my developing a conference on 'The Morality of Millenarianism', with international speakers coming from the USA and GB to QUB to present their work to 'Apocalypse!' students and QUB academics. This collaboration has culminated in Prof Gribben, Dr Sturm, and I developing a web project designed to give our teaching and

research collaboration a wider online presence, provisionally entitled the 'Millenarianism and Apocalypticism Project'.

Beyond the international collaboration achieved through our 'Morality of Millenarianism' conference, our joint teaching has also led to significant international networking with Anthropology colleagues at BYU in Utah, where I gave an invited lecture, (with Prof Gribben also to give a lecture at BYU next academic year). Finally, Prof Gribben, Dr Sturm and I are developing a research and teaching network on apocalypticism with the Panacea Charitable Trust; I organised a conference on 'The Gender of Apocalypse' in January 2016 funded and hosted by Panacea in Bedford. This conference was filmed and will become a key teaching resource for 'Apocalypse!'.

(c)   Ongoing professional development (maximum 350 words)

I have recently undertaken the PGCHET which has given me an extended opportunity to reflect upon my own teaching practice while increasing my knowledge of current theory in higher education. Of particular benefit was the PGCHET session of recorded mini-lectures, whereby as lecturers we were able to watch ourselves teach, and then be critiqued by the class. I was able to extend this observational assessment by then developing this method with two colleagues with whom I undertook peer-observations of full teaching sessions. These observation sessions were insightful insofar as they showed me the importance of clearly stating learning intentions at the start of each session, as well as being more confident in using silence to encourage greater group discussion, leading to tangible increases in student understanding, participation, and learning.

These discoveries – gained via peer-observation – encouraged me to further develop my professional practice by focusing my PGCHET Research Project on the effective facilitation of small group discussion in tutorials. For this research I conducted a survey of all my tutorial groups, asking them to assess the usefulness of various teaching methods designed to promote whole-class debate. To my surprise, the method that I thought was least popular (formal class presentations of key readings) was actually the *most* popular method. This was genuinely insightful, and led me to reassess the use of tutorial presentations as a central teaching method. This has also led to improved teaching practice by following-up these presentations with a class-led Q&A session, which has brought about significant increases in class participation and debate.

Lastly, as part of the 'Millenarianism and Apocalypticism Project' (in development), Dr Sturm and I have undertaken web-development training using the QUB Content Management System. This website, (which would never have been conceived of outwith the 'Apocalypse!' module), will allow us to give students access to a far greater range of teaching and learning resources, from electronic bibliographies,

book reviews, media reports, blog entries, 'The Conversation' articles, as well as a links pages to the websites of dozens of millenarian and apocalyptic groups, allowing them to conduct their own digital archival work and ethnography.