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Abstract	The chapter explores the pedagogical basis of establishing excellence in educational practice. This is achieved by: exploring what excellence means and its relevance to higher educational practice; applying excellence to pedagogical approaches in particular (heutagogy) and offering ways of how to measure and demonstrate excellence within the curriculum. The chapter is based on a workshop presentation delivered at the HEA York, UK, in March 2014 entitled '*Excellence within the curriculum a lesson from EPAS*' at a Higher Education Academy (HEA) sponsored event exploring '*Community Development and Engagement*'.	
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Chapter 9
Establishing Excellence: Where Do We Go from Here?

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Robert McSherry and Michael Snowden

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Introduction

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[AU1] The chapter explores the pedagogical basis of establishing excellence in educational practice. This is achieved by: exploring what excellence means and its relevance to higher educational practice; applying excellence to pedagogical approaches in particular (heutagogy) and offering ways of how to measure and demonstrate excellence within the curriculum. The chapter is based on a workshop presentation delivered at the HEA York, U.K., in 2014 entitled '*Excellence within the curriculum a lesson from EPAS*' at a Higher Education Academy (HEA) sponsored event exploring '*Community Development and Engagement*'.

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What Is Excellence and Its Relevance to Higher Educational Practice?

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The popularity and application of the term 'excellence' is often talked about and publicised in the media, marketing, advertising and sale campaigns, but do we really understand the meaning behind the rhetoric and beyond the term in reality. The popularity of the term 'excellence' is undoubtedly expanding. These include the world of business and management, retail therapy and marketing, health and social

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Excellence is a symbol and/or symbolic acknowledgement indicating a successful achievement of a desired goal and/or given standard by an individual, team and organisation(s).

Demonstrating excellence highlights that a significant amount of work and effort(s) by individuals, teams and/or organisations who have logically and systematically worked through a process to successfully achieve a desired outcome has occurred.

Excellence seems to be an outward expressing of achieving a status or award which recognizes an acquired standard or performance of practice or achievement against a given criteria.

Finally;

Excellence is a term/phrase/concept that is associated with outstanding performance and/or performance's.

Fig. 9.1 Some observations about 'excellence'

care and higher education to name but a few (Bell, 2010; Department of Health, 2011; European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2014).

Excellence in these contexts seems to be representing an acquired standard(s) of achievement surrounding safety, quality, governance, assurance and value for money. They also cover a variety and diverse range of settings by different organisations, companies, professions and disciplines from public, private and voluntary sectors.

From our experiences 'espousing excellence in whatever we do or provide is one thing but demonstrating this happens in reality is another' (McSherry, Pearce, Grimwood, & McSherry, 2012, p. 10). This is because 'excellence' and/or 'excellent' care, customer service and/or satisfaction has strong association with individual and personal experience(s) of one person with another person(s) and/or their interaction(s) with a given team, organisation/institution culture and environment. Similarly, excellence can be attributed to the quality and performance of an individual, team, organisation and/or structure/product. Recognising and demonstrating 'excellence' as an '*outcome*' is difficult and complex because it is a multifactorial and dimensional concept tide into a multitude of factors. These could include: experience, service, quality, safety, governance, leadership, management, structures, systems, processes, etc. These can either singularly and/or collectively influence the performance and outcome of individuals, teams and/or an organisation(s) and product.

Generally excellence is defined as 'the quality of being outstanding or extremely good: "awards for excellence", a centre of academic excellence' (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Similarly, Collins (1986, p. 299) define 'excellence' and 'excellent' as 'the fact or condition of excelling; superiority' and 'outstandingly good of its kind'. Collectively these broad definitions of excellence highlight several important facts (see Fig. 9.1).

On reviewing the observations presented in Fig. 9.1 several important messages about 'excellence' emerge that require further explanation. Excellence is a difficult and multifaceted term, phrase and/or concept to define and articulate. It is a term that is interwoven with experience(s), engaging with systems, processes, structures and is dependent on me and or you to achieve a certain goal, aspiration and/or standard. The difficulty in this context is that we all live our lives and/or practice

differently therefore making it inherently more challenging to accommodate for such variables when establishing and recognising excellence. What is remarkable is the fact that when excellence is recognised and rewarded the effects of achieving this level of recognition for an acquired standard of quality and performance can have a profound impact and outcome on individuals, teams and/or organisations status, acumen, appeal, recruitment and retention can be profound.

Not to demise and/or diminish the positive aspects of excellence, cynics may want to suggest that excellence does not exist, and/or if it did how can you measure this and/or capture the evidence to demonstrate this happens. Excellence could essentially be anything that an individual, team and/organisation desire it to be. This is primarily associated with the following fact(s).

Excellence to us is associated with the way we live our lives and act, respond, integrate and work as an individual. The way we interact and communicate with other individuals and how we work with them and them with us plays an enormous part in shaping us as the person we are. Essentially we do not achieve certain goals and/or aspirations and then stop to say we have achieved an acquired level of excellence. Life, events and situations all contribute to enabling us to master certain areas of our life, work and how we are as a human and how we may influence others or them us. Excellence is not a definitive journey and/or final destination. In fact excellence is a desired aspiration/goal and/or outcome which are constantly changing. Excellence can take on many different meanings for us as an individual, team member and how we work, play and interact with fellow humans. This may be affected both positively and/or negatively by the organisational culture and working environment in which we work. We would like to argue that excellence isn't only desirable but is achievable providing the necessary team vision, goals, values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, support, resources are all in place and available.

Burford (2011, p. 1) '*My journey his purpose*: *Thoughts on faith, community and leadership*' reaffirms the above by asking 'how do you define excellence and, more importantly, how is your definition impacting your journey?'

The challenge facing all of us working in higher education is in answering and addressing the following question. What is the relevance of excellence when it comes to exploring the pedagogical basis of establishing excellence in educational practice? It is: *Unpicking and placing the concept of excellence within the higher educational context*: *opportunity and challenges*.

Published in 1982 by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman '*In Search of Excellence—Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*' (Peter & Waterman, 1982) sent shockwaves and challenged the world of management. Their argument was to shift the focus onto the software and not necessarily the hardware approach to seeking excellence within a business. Their arguments centred on the searching for excellence focusing on eight attributes (see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 illustrates how Peter and Waterman (1982) search for excellence model depicts eight critical attributes that have the potential to impact on a business's productivity, performance, quality, profitability, performance metrics and outputs/outcomes in either an enabling or inhibiting way. Essentially, these eight characteristics could be interpreted as a systems based approach where input, throughput and output can be influenced at both the hardware (structures, systems and processes) and

t1.1 **Table 9.1** Attributes akin to searching for excellence

Attribute number	Attribute title	Excellence rationale
1	*A bias for action*	Having a shared approach to decision-making both analytically (reviewing productivity/performance) and experimentally (promoting innovation and risk management)
2	*Close to the customer*	Listening and responding to the voice of the customer(s) through engagement and involvement with quality improvement systems, processes and outcomes
3	*Autonomy and entrepreneurship*	All employees are actively encouraged and empowered to be creative and innovative within their jobs
4	*Productivity through people*	People are encouraged to come up with ideas for reducing waste and enhancing productivity. Respect, empowerment involvement through engagement is priority
5	*Hands-on, value driven*	The companies' philosophy, vision and values are the drivers for excellence
6	*Stick to the knitting*	Associated with remaining close to the nature of the business
7	*Simple form, lean staff*	Keep things structurally simple and staff lean but well recognised and rewarded
8	*Simultaneous loose-tight properties*	Is associated with encouraging autonomy from the top to the frontline along with holding onto the core values and beliefs at the same time

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A Simple Model of Excellence (Peters and Austin, 1985)
The EFQM Excellence Model Available at: http://www.efqm.org/ [Accessed 10/11/2015]
The Toyota Production System 4P Model Available at: http://missiontps.blogspot.co.uk/p/starting-point-of-tps.html [Accessed 10/11/2015]
Deming's 14 Points on Total Quality Management (TQM) Available at: http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/total-quality-management/overview/deming-points.html [Accessed 10/11/2015]
The Excellence Practice Accreditation Scheme (EPAS) Available at: https://www.tees.ac.uk/schools/soh/epas_index.cfm [Accessed 10/11/2015]

Fig. 9.2 Organisational and business excellence models/frameworks

software (people) levels. We believe these eight characteristics can be broadly categorised into four fundamental themes that influence excellence. These are: leadership and management, people-centeredness, innovation and improvement and evaluation. Nurturing and building an organisation and/or business which focuses on these themes will hopefully create an organisational culture and working environment that recognises excellence through empowering and rewarding innovation and change by improvement (McSherry et al., 2012).

There are numerous models and/or frameworks that are available to help support and facilitate a business, company and/or organisation in recognising and rewarding organisational excellence. A couple of examples are offered in Fig. 9.2.

A brief review of the excellence models/frameworks detailed in box 2 reveals a variety of distinct similarities and differences. These include, the importance of ensuring the organisation has a sound strategic plan, philosophy, vision and values

base that permeates throughout the whole business and/or organisation. How leaders and managers styles, characteristics, attributes and approaches can significantly influence productivity, proficiency, performance and outcomes. The number one priority to a successful business and/or organisation is 'people'. Investing, valuing, rewarding and recognising/celebrating success will produce an abundance of quality fruits. The relevance and simplicity of the model/framework to improving quality for all impacts on people sign in and uptake which subsequently impacts on their aspirations, motivations and achievement of excellence.

In today's world, creating the type of business and/or organisational culture and working environment in which excellence can flourish requires several critical ingredients. These according to McSherry and Warr (2008, 2010) and Green (2012) are *clarity* (where are you going and why), *focus* (what is the vision and how are you going to achieve this) and *connection* (having honest, open and transparent dialogue) to encourage people to feel valued and an integral connected member of the team. Globally Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are no different to any other business and company. They like many public and independent organisations and businesses are subject to an increase in the numbers of independent external scrutiny and reviews to attest and assure regulators, commissioners and governments of an acquired standard of quality. So what makes a HEI a quality place to work and learn? How is excellence in higher education recognised and rewarded?

Quality and excellence go hand in hand. Recognising and rewarding excellence within the HEI's context is not difficult but highly challenging. This according to Professor Harper cited in Mroz (2010) is because the essence of a great university is 'a gathering of important ideals'. It is he believes, 'not one thing alone, not one capacity in itself, but a combination of many human activities'.

Like Harper we acknowledge the importance people play in recognising and acquiring excellence. However, it is also important to identify how structures, systems, processes and artefacts can enable and inhibit excellence. Quality, excellence and greatness analogous to a HEI are not achieved overnight but through months and indeed often years of continuous quality improvement and change. To be outstanding and to be awarded such accolade by students and staff from independent external review and scrutiny requires human ambition (both employer and staff), sound structural facilities, appropriate governance infrastructures and financial support. These are eloquently endorsed by Kok and McDonald (2015) research which presented eight elements that underpin excellence in higher education. These are: change management, research and training, communication, direction, strategy and shared values, leadership, departmental dynamics and culture, rewards and staffing.

We would like to argue that the globalisation of higher education and the increasing mobility of students and staff have accelerated the demand and demonstration of excellence in the provision of higher education. Within the United Kingdom (UK) Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2014) sets out the 'expectations that all UK higher education providers are required to meet'. The QAA Quality Code for HEIs aims to safeguard academic standards through assuring the quality of the learning opportunities afforded to students and to encourage uninterrupted and regular improvements to higher education provision.

159   The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
160 (2014) outlines the concept of excellence in higher education by focusing on five
161 broad themes. These include: approaches to excellence, excellence in practice, defi-
162 nitions of excellence, criteria for excellence and excellence and quality assurance.
163 They conclude 'relating the methods of QA to excellence is probably one of the
164 most difficult tasks for QA agencies. This is probably the reason why the vast major-
165 ity of ENQA member agencies do not include the word excellence in their own
166 presentations on the ENQA website' (ENQA, 2014, p. 37). Similarly, the Higher
167 Education Academy (HEA) acknowledges excellence and actively endorses this as
168 part of the 'Teaching Excellence Programme' (TEP) (2015). Furthermore the recent
169 Green Paper 'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and
170 Student Choice' (Department for Business Education and Skills, 2015) introduces
171 the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) designed to drive up quality, enhance
172 transparency and promote inclusivity, diversity and social mobility.

173   What the above documents illustrate is that given the complexity and challenges
174 surrounding demonstrating that excellence in teaching and learning occurs it does
175 not mean that HEIs should avoid rising to these challenges. Demonstrating out-
176 standingly good quality for the future should be regarded as everyone's role and
177 responsibility and can only be done in partnership with all stakeholder including our
178 students and staff. The pursuit of excellence is essentially an outward expression of
179 an achievement of an acquired standard(s) for a given practice and/or performance
180 which when benchmarked against similar statuses is comprehensive and outstand-
181 ingly good. In contrast excellence could be regarded as subjective concept open to
182 misinterpretation and abuse because of its fluidity and flexibility in highlighting
183 what constitutes evidence of achievement and compliance against the acquired stan-
184 dards and/or benchmarks.

185   The challenge facing HEIs is in engaging with potential models/frameworks
186 identified in box 2 in order to internalise and action the messages from the various
187 documents, reports indicating what excellence mean from them, their staff and stu-
188 dents. Quality, governance, leadership and assuring quality in HEIs must become a
189 priority in ensuring we provide the best possible experience for our students and
190 staff along with value for money.

191   The Excellence in Practice Accreditation Scheme (EPAS) Table 9.2 can be shown
192 how excellence may be achieved within HEIs. The EPAS launched in February
193 2003 by Lord Nigel Crisp former Chief Executive of the National Health Service
194 (NHS) has played a pivotal role in improving safety, quality and care. This is
195 achieved by focusing on six core standards. These are: Working in Organisations;
196 Collaborative Working; User Focused Care; Continuous Quality Improvement;
197 Performance Management and Measuring Efficiency and Effectiveness. The phi-
198 losophy of EPAS is dedicated to encouraging and facilitating the development of
199 best practice by ensuring effective communications, interprofessional collaborative
200 working, integrated working practices and team building in the quest for excellence.
201 From our experiences we have found that EPAS reduces the burden of inspection
202 and review through offering a patient safety, continuous quality framework for col-
203 lecting and presenting evidence within an integrated governance system and
204 process.

Table 9.2 Applying EPAS to demonstrate excellence in HEIs   t2.1

EPAS standards	Rationale	Relevance to HE MICRO	Relevance to HE MACRO	
Working in organisations	Explores the initiatives under the policies and research associated with improving learning within the university and the professional and continued development and working lives of staff. This is associated with leadership and management concentrating on team development, communication and the sharing of information. Philosophy, vision, values and beliefs all form part of this major standard	Individual staff awards, e.g. UKPSF awards at Fellow/Senior Fellow status	Institutional, faculty/School staff developing policy	t2.4 t2.5 t2.6 t2.7 t2.8
		University teaching awards	External accreditation and recognition of excellence e.g. Investors in people awards; Times Higher Education University Workplace award, Athena Swan, etc.	t2.9 t2.10 t2.11 t2.12 t2.13 t2.14
		National teaching Fellowships, shared strategic decision making	Learning and teaching focus within university level strategic plan	t2.15 t2.16 t2.17 t2.18 t2.19 t2.20 t2.21 t2.22
Collaborative working	Focuses on multi-professional and cross-disciplinary working and development as the main issue for the achievement of quality improvement through integrated team working	Cross Faculty/School collaboration, delivering creative student centre teaching and learning activities, and curriculum planning	Cross Faculty/School collaboration, supporting teaching and Learning projects across the institution	t2.23 t2.24 t2.25 t2.26 t2.27 t2.28 t2.29 t2.30 t2.31
		Peer mentoring and mentor based learning within the curriculum		t2.32 t2.33 t2.34 t2.35
User focused learning	Emphasises the importance of the student centred curriculum agenda by incorporating users' views into the development and evaluation of teaching practice and the curriculum	Application of Pedagogy e.g. Heutagogy principles within the curriculum	Barnet's (2014) conditions of flexibility; TEF	t2.36 t2.37 t2.38 t2.39 t2.40 t2.41 t2.42 t2.43 t2.44 t2.45

(continued)

Table 9.2 (continued)

EPAS standards	Rationale	Relevance to HE MICRO	Relevance to HE MACRO
Continuous quality Improvement	Within all quality improvement systems that have been introduced improving the quality of teaching and learning has always been an issue. The emphasis of this theme is how individuals and teams incorporate the concept of quality improvement in everything that they do. This theme aims to make quality part of everyday working practice	Use of ongoing, regular and responsive consumer evaluation and feedback to inform teaching and learning. Embrace a receptive culture of evaluation and challenge	University, Faculty/School wide approach to multidimensional measurement of quality including NSS and course satisfaction survey
Performance management	To manage effectively is to improve performance and user satisfaction. This theme concentrates on how this can be achieved in practice	PDP focus to teaching and learning including curriculum delivery	Effective performance and consumerist training for all participants Collaborative, collegial structure throughout the institution
Measuring efficiency and effectiveness	Aims to demonstrate how efficiency and effectiveness in practice is illustrated through the various systems and processes associated with measurement, benchmarking, audit and evaluation methodology	Pedagogical practice underpinned by striving towards excellence, with clear focus	Clear definitions of what constitutes excellence using for example TEF, UKPSF standards, including subject/professional benchmarks

There are several lenses through which quality in higher education can be viewed. One views quality improvement at the macro or university level, another focuses at the micro or educational-delivery level. One sees quality assessment as an administrative 'check-off' exercise, the other sees quality as a continuous improvement in educational delivery. One focusses upon quantitative measures to demonstrate quality, the other values qualitative measures. We propose that what is needed is integrative approach where quality improvements at the practitioner/educational-delivery level are reflected and complemented at the university level with qualitative data from the departmental and faculty level. Essentially EPAS could be applied to HEI by focusing on the macro and micro aspects of the standards and there relevance to HEI's Table 9.2, illustrates how the six features of 'EPAS' can be used to measure 'excellence' within the HEI.

Working in Organisations

All too often, quality improvement systems are viewed in isolation, many quality improvement systems that have been introduced improving the quality of teaching and learning has always been an issue. The emphasis of this theme is how individuals and teams incorporate the concept of quality improvement in everything that they do. This theme aims to make quality part of everyday working practice. The current quality assurance and accreditation systems do not always address the new curricula models being adopted and often don't address the importance of student learning and the notion of value added. Often, they fail to adequately contextualise the diversity of institutional profiles and performances, therefore we suggest that excellence and quality can be measured by the manner in which awards are made to the university and to those individuals working within the institution.

Collaborative Working

It is clear as presented elsewhere in this text, that collaborative working through cross- and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning remains the fulcrum for the achievement of quality improvement within the curriculum. Collaborative working practices promote understanding of communities and contribute to the development of societal based transferable skills. Cross faculty/school collaborations, the use of peer mentor and community mentor schemes all enhance the learning experience promoting quality and excellence, providing a real-world learning experience.

[AU10]

Continuous Quality Improvement

Within all quality improvement systems that have been introduced, improving the quality of teaching and learning has always been an issue. The emphasis of this theme is how individuals and teams incorporate the concept of quality improvement in everything that they do. Enhanced resources are often demanded to enhance quality; however, this is by no means the key for success. What is important here is that the notion of quality becomes part of everyday working practice, where practitioners regularly draw upon consumer feedback to inform teaching and learning and firmly embrace a culture of evaluation and challenge. Ensuring that the curriculum is driven by the needs of society and student population it serves. As part of this process the evaluation cycle must be multidimensional and offer full participation to all parties concerned with teaching and learning.

[AU11]

User Focused Learning

This text firmly places the student at the heart of the learning process and due emphasis has been placed upon the importance incorporating users' views in the development and evaluation of teaching and practices, curriculum content and design. The manner in which pedagogical principles have influenced the curriculum, the application of Barnet and Coate (2004) curriculum model and for example the manner in which the curriculum has embraced recommendations such as the 'Conditions of Flexibility' (Barnett, 2014) all influence the development of the curriculum of excellence.

Performance Management

To manage effectively is to improve performance and user satisfaction. This theme concentrates on how this can be achieved in practice. The principles of performance management and the associated practice of peer review are firmly embedded within academic practice and the potential benefits to practice are accepted. However, we suggest all too frequently this is viewed as a source of surveillance and is seldom used as a developmental tool for the enhancement of practice, reflecting how institutional policy of performance management and review may contrast with the perceptions of staff using the policy. Therefore, we suggest that the process is crucial to the development of quality and excellence, but the model adopted should be collegial in orientation, and embraced by staff groups as a developmental process with the appropriate support and guidance for participants.

Measuring Efficiency and Effectiveness

Existing approaches for measuring quality teaching and learning often rely on measuring the student experience and have limited reliability and validity. Efficiency and effectiveness in practice can be illustrated, we suggest, by adopting multiple systems and processes associated with measurement, benchmarking, audit and evaluation. However, examining the assumptions underpinning the conceptions of quality and excellence and its relationship with teaching and learning is fundamental for success. It is clear that 'excellence' due to its multifaceted and complex nature is difficult to define; however, without such a cogent definition it will remain challenging to measure the constituents of excellence.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued throughout that the student should be at the heart of the learning experience; in order to maintain this, we have argued that the adoption of heautogical approaches and Barnett and Coate (2005) notion of the tri-dimensional curriculum model promote a student centred and 'realist' curriculum. The EPAS scheme, whilst designed for measuring excellence in health, does provide us with a rudimentary framework which guides and contributes to our understanding of excellence and its measurement. Whilst this may form the basis of excellence, a clear definition of excellence and associated constituents are crucial for successful teaching and learning and should draw from an agreed and supported evidence base. Subject benchmarks, the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (2011), the 'Teaching Excellence Programme' (TEP) (HEA, 2015), Barnet's (2014) 'Conditions of Flexibility' and the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Department for Business Education and Skills, 2015) for example provide a starting point for the search of such a definition. None the less, the current level of evidence underpinning measures of quality and excellence adequate will only be improved by embracing a culture of challenge and accountability. A better understanding of the issues defining excellence and determining quality learning experiences in higher education is required, and we urge educators to consider innovative and creative ways to develop excellence ensuring that the student remains at the heart of an exceptional learning experience. As Barnett (2000, p. 11) notes:

> The future that beckons, however, is not just a new order. It is an order with new possibilities which may even turn out to do justice of a kind to traditional values.

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Author Queries

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