

Academic teachers' attitudes to the Pedagogical Academy at The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Bergen, Norway

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Abstract—The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Bergen, Norway, established a Pedagogical Academy in 2016, where academic teachers can apply to have their pedagogical competence assessed to get the status Excellent Teaching Practitioner (ETP). This merit system for teaching was inspired and built on the Pedagogical Academy at LTH, with similar process and assessment criteria. The ETP is an individual reward, including a salary raise and membership in the Pedagogical Academy. The Academy's main purposes are to promote educational development and collegial and scholarly culture at the Faculty, and function as a network for ETPs. As part of an evaluation of the system, a survey was sent to all academic teachers. The survey was designed to uncover attitudes to the Pedagogical Academy and ETP, as well as impressions of the assessment criteria. The findings show that the academic teachers are generally positive to the system, even the teachers that have not considered applying. The criteria are largely seen as reflecting excellent teaching and relatable to teaching practice. The teachers are more divided on whether the Pedagogical Academy has contributed to more sharing and exchange of ideas. These findings indicate that the reward system and criteria are aligned with academic teachers' perceptions of excellence in teaching, although the potential of the Pedagogical Academy to promote a collegial and scholarly teaching culture is unfulfilled.

Index Terms— Pedagogical academy, ETP, pedagogical merit systems

I. INTRODUCTION

THE Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (MN) at the University of Bergen, Norway, established a Pedagogical Academy in 2016. Through applying for membership, academic teachers have their pedagogical competence assessed for the status Excellent Teaching Practitioner (ETP) [1]. This reward system for teaching was inspired by the Pedagogical Academy at LTH [2, 3, 4], with a similar process and assessment criteria (see Table 1). By introducing an incentive for academic teachers that systematically develops, documents, and shares their teaching practice, the MN Faculty aim to acknowledge and highlight Excellent Teaching Practitioners. Additional objectives are to elevate educational quality and the status of teaching and support a scholarly and collegial teaching culture.

This paper reports findings from an evaluation survey among academic teachers (eligible to apply for ETP status), designed to investigate attitudes and opinions about the pedagogical reward system and its evaluation criteria.

II. THE PEDAGOGICAL ACADEMY

A. Assessment criteria

Applicants are assessed in four main criteria: i) a focus on student learning, ii) a clear development over time, iii) a scholarly approach to teaching, and iv) a collegial attitude and practice (see Table 1 for details). These criteria are heavily inspired by the LTH criteria [3]. Criterion iv reflects the Faculty's ambition to support a collegial culture among the academic teachers. The Pedagogical Academy is a network for the ETPs and is expected to contribute to a collegial culture.

TABLE I. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR ETP

In a teaching portfolio, applicants must describe, analyse, discuss, and document systematic work with educational quality in their own teaching practice, targeting four general criteria:

1. Focus on student learning

- The applicant has a clear focus on student learning in all their teaching practice and activities.
 - The applicant considers the relationship between teaching method, learning outcomes, assessment, and types of learning.
 - There is a clear and justified connection between the applicant's teaching and learning philosophy and teaching practice.
 - The applicant has a good relationship with the students and seeks their feedback and reacts constructively to it.
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2. Clear development over time

- The applicant has worked in a conscious and systematic way to develop their teaching in both form and content, to support student learning.
 - The applicant has ideas and plans for continued development of their pedagogical competence and teaching practice in the future.
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3. A scholarly approach

- The applicant plans, investigates, evaluates, and modifies their teaching practice to best support student learning.
 - The applicant reflects on their teaching using educational theory and knowledge of discipline didactics.
 - The applicant's teaching is research-based, both in the sense that the form and content is based on new and relevant disciplinary research, and that the students use elements of the research process in their learning.
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4. A collegial attitude and practice

- The applicant shares experiences with others and interacts constructively with students and colleagues to develop teaching and educational quality.
 - The applicant cooperates with others through mutual exchange and sharing, for example through discussions, conferences, and publications.
 - The applicant contributes to the strategic goals for educational quality at the institution.
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The application is a reflective teaching portfolio with supporting documentation. It is assessed by a committee consisting of internal and external members, and includes

student representatives. The committee members should hold both pedagogical and disciplinary (STEM) expertise. Applicants that are assessed as fulfilling the criteria in the preliminary assessment are called for an individual interview with the committee. All applicants receive a report with the assessment and feedback on their application in relation to the criteria. Successful applicants are awarded ETP status and become members of the Pedagogical Academy. They also receive a salary increase. In contrast to LTH, there is no financial reward for the ETP's department, neither is there any requirement for applicants to have their Head of Department's support for applying. Applicants are supported in Teaching portfolio workshops that include peer and expert feedback on portfolio drafts.

B. The Pedagogical Academy

The Pedagogical Academy [5] consists of those academic teachers that hold the title *Excellent Teaching Practitioner* (ETP). The Pedagogical Academy is expected to contribute to the development of a scholarly and collegial culture through initiation and participation in educational development, mentoring colleagues, and supporting sharing and exchange of experience and knowledge among teachers at the MN Faculty. They have some funds at their disposal for supporting activities. Members are also expected to participate in the mentoring of colleagues that seek ETP status, and as members of the assessment committee for future ETP applications.

Since the Academy was established in 2017, the members have organized activities such as seminars and workshops, contributed to working groups and committees, and served on ETP evaluation committees and teaching portfolio workshops.

Calls for ETP applications are issued every other year, and the MN Faculty have appointed 19 ETPs to the Academy from a total of 53 applications (42 individuals) over four calls (Table 2). Out of seven departments, five now have ETPs, as does the University Centre of Svalbard (UNIS), which is also part of the Pedagogical Academy. Women and associate professors are slightly overrepresented among the applicants and the ETPs.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF APPLICANTS AND AWARDED ETP STATUS

Year	Applications	ETPs
2016/17	20	5
2018	11	2
2020/21	8	5
2022/23	14	7
<i>Total</i>	53	19

C. Evaluation survey

As part of the evaluation of the system, an anonymous survey was sent to all academic teachers at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in August 2023. The survey was designed to uncover attitudes to the Pedagogical Academy and ETP, as well as the assessment criteria. 110 of 250 teachers responded to the survey (44% response rate). To protect anonymity applicants were not asked about their department or whether their application was successful.

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with a series of statements about the pedagogical merit system and the evaluation criteria, and they were also invited to share

their thoughts in free text comments. As no items in this survey was mandatory, the number of respondents per item might vary (min. N=98, max N=110). The survey was anonymous and conducted in accordance with GDPR. Distribution was online in SurveyXact by Rambøll [6].

Results are reported in the three categories: Those that had not considered applying (63% of respondents, N=70), those that have applied (23% of the respondents, N=25), and those that are considering applying in the future (14% of respondents, N=15).

III. FINDINGS

The results of the survey show that the ETP status is well known by the academic teachers, however the Pedagogical Academy is somewhat less well known (31% of respondents do not know the Pedagogical Academy, 9% of respondents do not know ETP), especially among those that have not considered applying.

Results for items on attitudes to the merit system for teaching and the assessment criteria for ETP can be found in Figure 1. Overall, respondents think it is good to have a pedagogical merit system (72 % strongly agree or somewhat agree, N=107), and agree that the system could contribute to elevating the status of teaching (67% strongly agree or somewhat agree, N=106) and help elevate educational quality (60% strongly agree or somewhat agree, N=107). Respondents that have applied, or are considering applying, are more positive than those who have not considered applying. Yet even respondents in this group are generally also more positive than negative to the system (Fig. 1).

The respondents largely agree that the assessment criteria reflect what they see as excellent teaching (69% strongly agree or somewhat agree, N= 99), and that the criteria can be linked to their teaching practice (71% strongly agree or somewhat agree, N= 99). This positive attitude to the criteria is found among all categories of respondents (Fig. 1), including those that have not considered applying (64% strongly agree or somewhat agree, N=61).

For some statements the respondents are more divided in their attitudes, for example on whether assessment of pedagogical competence is already conducted through other processes. On this issue 26% of respondents agree and 34% disagree, while 40% of respondents are neutral/do not know (N=107).

The evaluation survey results show that academic teachers overall have a positive attitude towards ETP and the Pedagogical Academy. They also largely agree that such a merit system for teaching can contribute to educational quality and elevate the status of teaching. The positive attitude towards the assessment criteria indicate that these criteria are well aligned with teachers' perception of excellent teaching practice. However, when asked whether the Pedagogical Academy has encouraged more sharing and exchange of experiences among the teachers at the MN Faculty – an important objective for the system, 63% of respondents disagree or remain neutral (N=107). This is also reflected in the reported limited knowledge of the Academy and the comments, where respondents point to the Academy having an unclear role and little visibility. It seems the potential of the Pedagogical Academy to promote a collegial and scholarly teaching culture is unfulfilled [7].

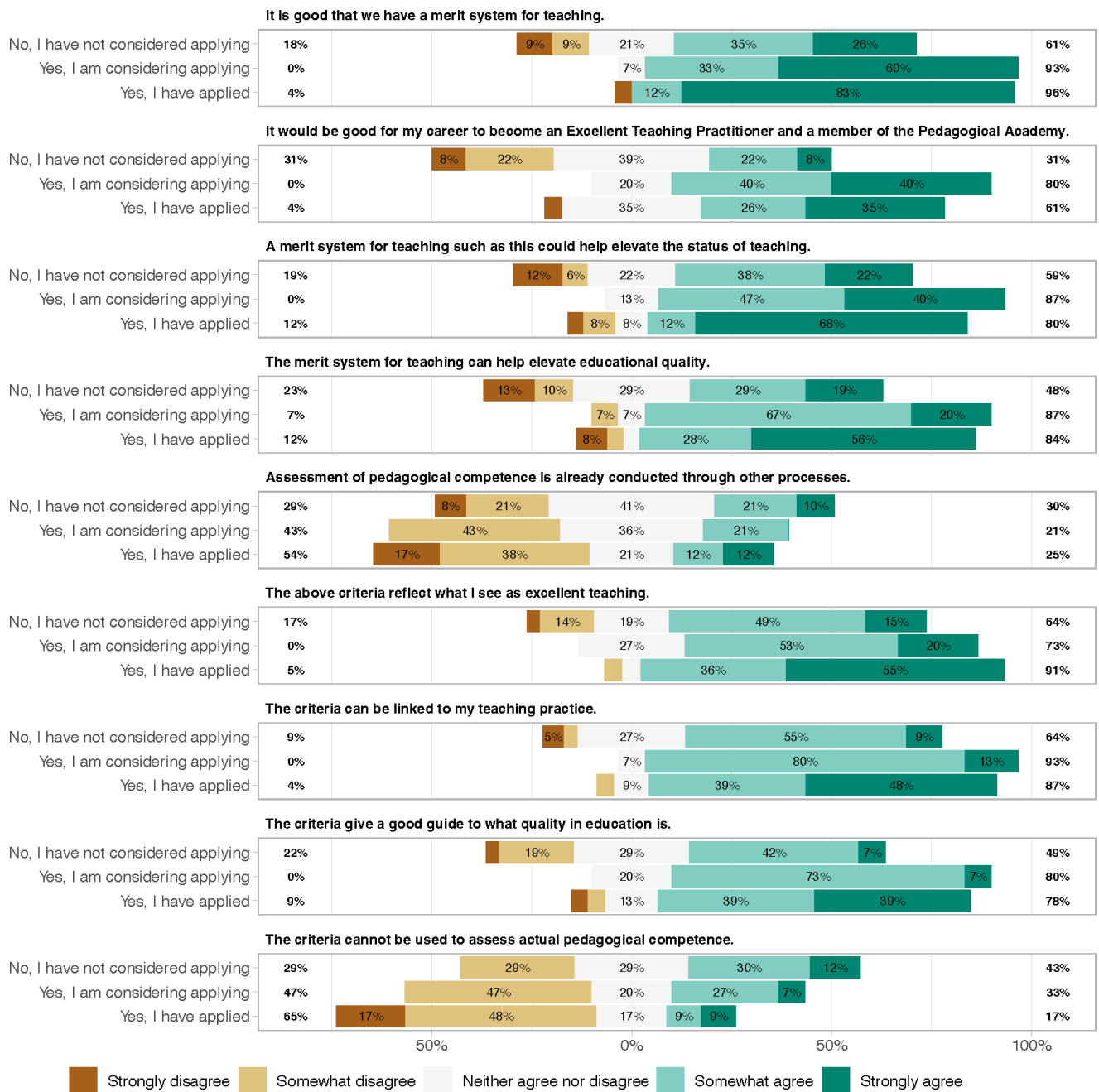


Figure 1. Respondents report to which extent they agree with statements about the merit system and the assessment criteria (see Table 1), on a scale from strongly disagree (left) to strongly agree (right). Results are reported for three categories of respondents: not considered applying (63% of total respondents, N for items 67 - 70), have applied (23% of the respondents, N for items 23 - 25), and considering applying (14% of respondents, N for items 14 - 15). Percentage negative (somewhat disagree, strongly disagree) and positive (somewhat agree, strongly agree) for each category of respondents are given to the left and right of the bars respectively.

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