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An apple for the teacher?

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Abstract
In this paper the current status of teaching as a profession and the morale of teachers in Australian schools in the current era provide a framework for the examination of the intent and outcomes of teaching excellence awards. The introduction of teaching excellence awards into the school education sector is found to be a reflection of the economic era in which the current education system is situated with the awards process viewed as potentially politically manipulative. A research study carried out in NSW public schools between 2000 and 2002 suggests teachers’ experiences and attitudes range from optimism to negativism, exhilaration to cynicism, and empowerment to constraint. Teachers report concerns over the status of teaching in the community with many also identifying a slump in teacher morale over recent times. This paper provides an opportunity to reflect upon the issues of teacher morale and the status of the teaching profession in the current era in Australian schools while reviewing the teaching excellence awards process.

Introduction
Dinham and Scott (2003) concluded in a recent study that teaching excellence awards ‘can result in a range of outcomes both intended and unintended and both positive and negative’ (p. 17) although they maintained that the benefits demonstrate a powerful argument in favour of awards. Teaching excellence awards were not part of the teaching culture when I joined the teaching profession in 1977. Given that the majority of Australia’s teachers are now aged between 40-50 (Australian College of Education 2001a) this would be the same for most teachers within the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). My own experience as an award recipient in 2001 suggests that awards can have a positive impact on recipients. However, as the result of a study conducted between 2001 and 2003 I now question the impact of awards presented to so few from such a large profession and suggest that the outcomes of awards are not always positive.

Background and Context
There have been many major ‘social, economic and political’ changes in Australia over the last century, impacting upon Australians in different ways. Many of Australia’s current demographic statistics ‘point to radical change’, with a small number of Australians ‘experiencing record levels of personal wealth’ (Mackay 2003, p.22) while at the same time there is an increase in poverty and homelessness. Houston (1999) advises that economics now occupies ‘centre stage with all other concerns being considered satellites’ (p.1) while Mackay (2003) claims that the insecurity and confusion many Australians are experiencing is the result of four simultaneous revolutions: technology (predominantly information technology), gender, cultural and economic (in particular the rise of economic rationalism). These revolutions, have led to an Australia, which is ‘characterised by a renewed sense of caution, uncertainty and above all, a sense of disengagement from the national agenda’ (Mackay 2003, p.22). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD 2000b), this situation is not unique to Australia, with all western societies ‘undergoing a transformation as important as the industrial revolution’ (p.11).
Education systems globally are, according to the OECD (2000b), being pressured by a need to adapt to changes and rising expectations as society ‘becomes a learning society’ (p.11). Despite this, education in Australia is no longer a ‘fashionable value’ (P. Kelly, 2000, p.9) with ‘growing evidence that our education system is sliding down the international comparison ladder’ (p.9). This is supported by a report to the Chifley Research Centre (Considine, Marginson, Sheehan & Kummick 2001), which proposes that ‘Australia has fallen behind most of the OECD in investment in knowledge and become an ‘old economy’ (p. iv). Considine et al., (2001) also suggest that while other nations are moving ahead with public investment in ‘Research and Development’ and ‘Education’, Australia is stuck in the cost cutting and privatization policies of the previous era (p.iv). While it may appear that Australia is moving towards a knowledge economy or ‘Clever Country’ (Lowe 1998) with increased numbers of students in higher education, government spending on education ‘shrank from 4.9 percent of gross domestic product to 4.4 percent in the five years to 1998’ (Colebatch 2000 cited in Smyth 2001, p.20). As the world enters a ‘phase in history in which education is the central figure’ (ACDE 2004b, p.1) Australian politicians appear to view education as a low priority: a ‘cost rather than an investment’ (ACDE 2004b, p.1).

During the 1990s the education landscape was ‘irreversibly re-contoured to conform with the new orthodoxies of economically dominated public policy, rather than with the best collective wisdom of educators’ (Beare 2003, p.15). With a shift in focus to economic policy, the work of teachers is, according to Smyth (2001), increasingly determined by forces outside schools with an emphasis on achieving ‘acceptable end products’ (p. 6) resulting in state wide testing and performance appraisal techniques aimed at ‘value for money’ (p.6). The OECD (2000b) reports ‘a strong political drive towards “school improvement”,’ based on the assumption that education is not fulfilling its potential’ (p.31). Apple (2000 cited in Smyth et al 2000) adds to the discussion describing a trend towards ‘neo-liberal marketized solutions’ to educational problems, promoted by ‘neo-conservative intellectuals’ who wish to see a ‘return’ to higher standards and a ‘common culture’ in order to provide the educational conditions.

Australian teachers in the early 21st century – a profile
Although there is some variation across the states and territories, Australia’s teachers are older than at any time in the past 40 years. The median age of teachers in Australia increased from 34 to 43 years over the 15 years to 2001, during which time the proportion of teachers older than 45 years rose from 17 percent to 43 percent. The proportion of Australian teachers under the age of 34 years is currently less than 29 percent. Sixty per cent of Australian male teachers and 50 percent of Australian female teachers are older than 45 years (DEST 2003a, p.70). Australia’s teachers are highly qualified’ with an expectation of teaching as an ‘all-graduate profession’ in the near future (Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future, 2003a, p.75). In 1963, 48 percent of Australia’s teachers were men and 52 percent were women (DEST 2003a, p.72). This trend had changed dramatically by 1999 when only 35 percent of Australia’s teachers were men and 65 percent women (DEST 2003a, p.72). Data from the 1999 National Survey: Teachers in Australian Schools (ACE 2001a) also indicates that while female teachers outnumber male teachers by 2:1 overall, of the teachers in the 21 to 30 years age bracket women outnumber men by 3:1. Female teachers are still most highly concentrated at the early childhood and lower primary years, while most male teachers are working within secondary schools (DEST 2003a, p.72). Few teachers are from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is despite the fact that Australia is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse countries in the world (DEST 2003b, p.15). There are few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers despite initiatives designed to recruit and train more teachers from this group.

Employment and career prospects
The majority of Australian teachers (88.2 percent) are permanently employed on a full-time or part-time basis by education authorities, either State/Territory government authorities or Catholic diocesan authorities (DEST 2003a, p.75). In independent and Order-owned Catholic schools, teachers are usually employed directly by the schools at which they teach. Victoria is the only State where individual government schools may make offers of employment to individuals (DEST 2003a, p.75). Younger teachers are more likely to be employed on a contract basis (ACE 2001a). Beginning teacher salaries in Australia compare favourably with most other professions, however, teaching is less financially attractive the longer a teacher remains in the profession (DEST 2003a, p.176). The majority of teachers reach the top of their salary scale within ten years. Promotion opportunities are limited, in most cases lead out of the classroom and continue to favour males (A Class Act 1998, p.iii). Despite the predominance of female teachers, 45.9 percent of male teachers are in executive or managerial
positions, while only 24.3 percent of female teachers hold executive or managerial positions (DEST 2003a, p.73).

The status of the teaching profession
Hoyle (2001) claims that the formal occupational status of teaching in official statistics is that of a profession (p.144), but warns that the recognition of teaching as a profession by political and related reference groups continues to remain ambiguous despite meeting many of the alleged criteria of a profession: practitioner autonomy; higher education; knowledge-based practice; a self-governing body; and a code of ethics (p.145). Ventimiglia and Reed (2004) assert that educators ‘who are trained and certified view themselves as professionals, yet they are seldom accorded the respect commonly given to those in other professions’ (p.228).

Hill (1998 cited in O’Donnell 2000) reports that by the end of the 1990s teaching had become ‘the occupation of last choice among those seeking to enter the professions’ (p. 1). The lowering of the status of teaching and other ‘people work’ is, according to Scott (2001a) and White (2001), the result of the values associated with ‘economic rationalism’, that is, of ‘individualism, materialism and the search for personal security and well-being over more social aims’ (Scott 2001a, p.2). The report, A Class Act (1998) made the claim that status and power were ‘usually economic’ and that the status and power of teachers was reduced because teachers work with children and ‘children have no economic or political power’ (p.3). This view is supported by Hoyle (2001) who adds that the large percentage of female teachers, the lack of professional mystique (most members of the population have had lengthy, required exposure to teachers) and the fact that a teacher’s clients are children who they face on a daily basis in large groups as a matter of routine, all count against teaching in terms of status (p.141). This is maintained by Johnson (2000) who argues that the public persists in believing that anyone can teach, with teaching regarded in the community as ‘women’s work – a half-step above child care’ (p.21).

Crowther (2001) introduces another perspective, however, when he asserts that by the early 1990s ‘curricula, administration and policy processes’ had become more important than teaching, thereby affecting the political influence, public image and ascribed status of teaching (p.5). Crowther (2003), however, suggests that after two generations of being ‘under a cloud’ teaching ‘is a profession whose time has come’ (p.2). Lovat (2003) supports this arguing that teaching is ready to move into a new era of professionalism with accreditation a key element in this revolution.

Teacher Morale
Smyth (2001) describes teacher morale as currently very low, with teachers feeling ‘frustrated and prevailed upon’ (p.11). According to Hicks, the President of the Association of Professional Teachers (2003),
badly behaved students, an excessive administrative workload, large classes, poor/indifferent leadership, yearly or short-term contracts, and too many government initiatives, are damaging morale and pushing more teachers out of schools (p.1)

Positive teacher morale is identified as a useful indicator of healthy effective schools (OECD 2000a; Young 1998). Alternatively, low morale for teachers can lead to decreased productivity and a detachment from the teacher role, colleagues and students. Teachers with low morale may begin to ‘lose heart’, take increased sick leave, look for alternative employment and develop a cynical approach to students, teaching and the education system (IEU 1996, p.2).

Hicks (2003) claims that there is evidence to suggest that too many young teachers who initially begin their career with enthusiasm and positive expectations are looking for a change in direction after only 3-5 years despite having studied for 4-5 years to become teachers while O’Donnell (2001) suggests that teachers ‘suffering from low morale are retiring early or leaving the profession to seek other employment’ (p. 1). Contributing factors include a perceived lack of support from parents and departmental authorities, ‘internal politics’, new initiatives which increase teacher workload and principals taking advantage of the goodwill of teachers by asking them to take subjects for which they have no training (Hicks 2003, p.1). Eltis (1997) suggests that ‘no other group in our society faces such challenges with so little extrinsic reward’ (p.3) as teachers. One way of lifting morale may be the recognition of individual teachers, schools or programs, through extrinsic awards (Commonwealth Government Quality Teacher Initiative, 2001, p.1; Dinham 1995b). Scott (2001b, p.1) suggests however, that while teachers justifiably complain that ‘authentic recognition is rare for members of their profession’, not all teachers ‘enthusiastically endorse awards schemes’.
Extrinsic Teaching Excellence Awards

Although there is little research into the impact of teaching excellence awards on teachers in schools, the need to recognise the accomplishments of teachers has been discussed in the literature for almost two decades and more particularly in the last three or four years (Cummings 2003; Dinham & Scott 2003; Fitzgerald 2002; Boston 2002; Beare 2002; Dinham 2002; Galbally 2002; McCulla, Hayne & Stone 2002; O’Connell 2002; Scott 2001b; Scott & Bergin 2002; Ingverson 2001). Cummings (2003) describes ‘a rapid expansion in the growth of award schemes and other forms of professional recognition’ as a result of a ‘seismic shift in attitude’ with regard to ‘acknowledging and rewarding teachers’ work’ (p.7) with 650 teachers across Australia receiving awards of some kind in the twelve months leading up to World Teachers’ Day on October 2003 (p.7).

Kemp (Australian Federal Minister for Education, 1996-2001), proposed in a speech at the presentation of the Australian Excellence in Education Awards in 1996, that it was ‘important to honour outstanding achievement’ suggesting that ‘recognition lifts the sights of everyone and provides the positive models we all need’ (1996, p.2). Boston (2002) also supported the use of awards, arguing that ‘professions such as law, medicine and architecture have tangible and widely understood types of accomplishment: cases won, cures effected, buildings well-designed’ whereas ‘the accomplishments of teachers are, both historically and currently, less tangible and less well understood’ (p.2). Boston (2002) advised the need to ‘uncover and perceive qualities which already exist, but which have previously gone unnoticed’ (p.2) with individual teaching excellence awards being a possible way to do this. Beare (2002) took this a step further and identified a strong link between public prestige and the awards process suggesting that if the teaching profession, ‘wants to command public prestige’, it must ‘draw attention to its most able and respected members and to its major achievements’ (p.27). According to Beare (2002) the profession needs the awardees as much as the awardees need the honour of receiving an award. Awards allow the profession to announce ‘publicly and collectively that it owns such eminent people’ (Beare 2002, p.27) and to highlight that ‘these people are our role models, the ones who embody for us excellence in our field’ (Beare 2002, p.27). Beswick (2002) suggests that extrinsic rewards ‘can play a positive role provided that they function to provide information relevant to people achieving their own standards of excellence’ (p.9). Galbally (2002) comments ‘that a professional organisation’s awards system has the opportunity to promote excellence across the profession’ and if done properly ‘to promote a positive image of the profession to the wider community and to reinforce the massive difference that teachers’ pursuit of excellence makes to all our lives’ (p.47). In contrast, Fitzgerald (2002) questions whether the awards that are currently being presented are ‘likely to encourage an enhanced sense of confidence in education or are observers likely to be persuaded to the view that there are winners and losers in education?’ (p. 33).

It is the desire to recognise, applaud and reward teachers who are making a difference to the future of young Australians that appears to be the motivation for a number of extrinsic teaching excellence awards currently being conferred on teachers in Australia including: The National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NeiTA 2003), and The Quality Teaching Awards (ACE 2001). The Australian College of Education, which sponsors and coordinates the Quality Teaching Awards, admits to also using the awards to learn from and about those teachers who are identified as excellent (ACE 2001). The Quality Teaching Awards provide a unique opportunity to work with teachers in exploring a standards-referenced framework for professional learning while, at the same time, researching and drawing a clearer picture of what accomplished teachers do (McCulla, Hayne & Stone 2002, p.20).

However, in 1975, Lortie, identified three types of possible teacher rewards, ‘extrinsic, ancillary and intrinsic’ but was strong in his recommendation that ‘intrinsic rewards’ were more ‘important for teachers than extrinsic rewards’ (cited in Schmoker 1996, p.106) arguing that the ‘traditions of teaching make people who seek money, prestige or power somewhat suspect’ (p.101). Scott (2001b) advises that not all in the teaching profession are supportive of the use of extrinsic teaching excellence awards and suggests that some teachers may be suspicious about their use. Some observers invoke the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ to explain resistance among teachers to awards and prizes. However, the suspicion is that this is an attempt to ‘talk up’ the profession in order to address problems like staff shortages, by ‘buying them off’ cheaply with a few awards, instead of the pay rises or improvement in conditions due to all staff. That teachers spend all their working day dispensing praise and ‘smiley stamps’ to children, as a way of increasing their motivation to work, may also cause them to come to see awards as nothing more than attempts to manipulate them (Scott 2001b, p.1). Another perspective on awards may be gleaned from a recent article by the head of communications for the Catholic Education Office,
Sydney, Ted Myers, who suggests a link between a school’s marketing orientation and student outcomes (Myers 2003). In this light, teachers receiving awards may be seen as another way of marketing a school or system, which reflects an economic rationalist approach to education.

The study
The study reported in this paper involved an examination of the intent of extrinsic teaching excellence awards, the awards process and the impact of these awards as viewed through the eyes of award designers/providers, award recipients and their non-recipient colleagues. Teacher morale and the status of teaching in current times provided a frame of reference for the study. Data were gathered between 2001 and 2002 from 101 volunteer teachers working in NSW DET schools using questionnaires and interviews. Schools were identified as those schools with a staff member who had received a significant extrinsic teaching award between 2000 and 2002. Both award recipients (44% of sample) and non-recipients (56% of sample) contributed to the data. Participant profiles may be reviewed in Table 1 (below). Data were gathered in two stages, 12 months apart. Document analysis, using public documentation regarding extrinsic awards added to the data and provided the perspective of award designers/providers.

Table 1
Participant profiles and participation details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
<th>Types of awards received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>&lt; 30</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&gt;51</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&gt;51</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>&gt;51</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Participant profiles and participation details

Study Findings: Is the apple ripe and juicy or does it hide a worm?
Documentation analysed in this study indicated that teaching awards generally aim to recognise and applaud excellent teachers and promote the teaching profession in the community. Both the literature and the study participants acknowledged that the conferring of awards is a relatively new phenomenon. The pattern of response emerging from the data in regard to awards was disparate, with experiences and attitudes ranging from optimism to negativism, exhilaration to cynicism, and empowerment to constraint. Although no respondent suggested that having a teacher receive an award could be negative for a school there was evidence to indicate that in many instances awards added to the complexity of the micro-politics (Hoyle 1988) within schools.

Positives
In some instances awards had a very positive effect on recipients, providing them with access to resources previously unavailable, and enabling them to take on new opportunities as can be seen in the following statements.

[The impact has been] significant . . . I have been involved in meetings re: quality standards at both national and state level, included in National Council representation for a well-respected professional organization. Spoken to Uni [sic] students and colleagues . . . for the first time I have been asked my opinion [I17/MM/RS].

[Receiving the award] . . . opened doors like you wouldn’t believe. I’ve been offered all sorts of lecturing opportunities in the Universities which has been really well accepted and I’ve had a ball doing it . . . I’ve had lots of opportunities like this too . . . [I3/MM/RS].

Other award recipients suggested that receiving an award had vindicated their role with their family [S90/PM/RS] while some questioned the motives behind the awards suggesting they were a ‘cheap’ way of scoring political points during a time when public education is experiencing depression.

I was honoured to receive the award but remain cynical about the circumstances surrounding the creation of the awards and the criteria for their distribution. I was not previously aware of the existence of these awards and could only speculate, certainly with a degree of job-induced
cynicism, that they were established at a time when there began a great wave of concern over the depression in public education. I could imagine a bureaucrat envisaging an award to celebrate the vast numbers of highly skilled but unrecognised teachers in the system and to publicise the process of recognition as widely as possible. (S58/MM/RS).

What about me?
If we accept the positive impact of awards on those recipients who were empowered by receiving an award, we are required to also consider the impact upon those who are not offered access to these same rules and resources (Giddens 1984) who may in fact be disempowered by not receiving an award. One principal described how she was blamed for not nominating two staff members with one of these teachers asking for a transfer because she could no longer work in what she called a ‘divisive atmosphere’ and because ‘she no longer felt respected’ (I7/MM/NR). Another recipient believed that his status had been diminished because he had not received an award (S9/MM/NR).

Pressure to perform
A number of recipients described feelings of constraint and pressure to perform as a result of receiving an award while still others claimed no change in situation.

The award became an ‘albatross’ as I felt that I had standards to live up to (S91/PM/RS).

I have found since the award, more is expected of me . . . more work – no extra pay (S37/MM/RS).

Other’s expectations are now always high and I feel a level of pressure not there before receiving the award (S98/PP/RS).

Negatives
While most recipients felt that the impact of their award had been positive, some negative experiences were also shared with mixed reactions from colleagues common.

Mixed reaction – one colleague said it was ‘bullshit’ . . .there was a degree of negativity from some teachers (I21/PP/RS).

Most were positive about it - a couple that were rather jealous some had their noses put out . . . a little bit of professional jealousy if you like (I5/MM/NR).

Some award recipients, as illustrated by the following, experienced quite negative responses, including jealousy and resentment.

An air of apathy and even resentment. No one really wanted to know (29/MM/RS).

There were two executive members who decided to make life difficult (S90/PM/RS).

Two staff members who hadn’t been nominated were very upset – I was blamed (I7/MM/NR).

Local awards
Despite the growth of awards, it is likely that by the end of 2003, less than 0.5 % of the teachers employed by the NSW DET to fill the more than 50 000 ‘full time equivalent’ teaching positions (NSW DET Annual Report, 2003, p. 26) had received a national or state teaching excellence award, demonstrating the ‘newness’ and ‘exclusiveness’ of this phenomenon to date. While ‘Local awards’ may be accessible to more teachers, these did not appear to have been as positive in their impact on recipients as state and national awards with embarrassment cited as an unintended outcome by a number of recipients of local awards.

It was an embarrassment to tell people what the award entailed. Eventually it became a joke. Students from other primary schools received the same award as me for being good at athletics. I felt like my efforts were not meaningfully acknowledged at all (S55/MM/R).

The rewards are juvenile – like getting a merit certificate in year 2. It is not an appropriate acknowledgement. Surely the department [sic] can do better (S55/MM/R).
Conclusions

Documents analysed which relate to specific teacher excellence awards suggest that awards are largely designed to ‘encourage, recognise, honour and reward the work of excellent, dedicated, talented, innovative and inspiring teachers’, ‘strengthen public recognition of teaching excellence’, encourage ‘good students’ to become teachers and ‘improve the experience of schooling for children and parents’ (NEiTA 2003, p.1). Research into the impact and outcomes of teaching excellence awards is limited, however, with no theoretical or research based rationale for the teaching excellence awards currently offered. Although ‘tall poppies’ may draw attention to the whole field of poppies (O’Connor 2004), too few of the quarter of a million educators, will ever be publicly honoured by state or national awards to see awards as having a significant impact upon the status of the profession. Although local awards have been accessible to more teachers the evidence gathered in this study suggests that at best these awards have little effect and at worst are considered by teachers as embarrassing.

While some award recipients reported positive outcomes from their awards, others described quite negative outcomes. Some awardees described empowerment and increased opportunities, while others described increased pressure, discomfort and resentment. If we accept that the culture of an organization ‘controls the patterns of organizational behaviour by shaping members’ cognitions and perceptions of meanings and realities’ (Ott 1988, p.69), that the culture of teaching is complex (Smyth 2001; Hargreaves 1992) and that the culture of each school is unique, awards may be accepted in some schools, in others they may upset the existing staff dynamics. Awards may in fact work against a culture of collaboration by identifying and promoting teachers who act in ‘self-sufficient and individualistic ways’ (Grimmett & Crehan 1992) and encouraging competition despite the research which supports the need for schools to develop a positive climate and culture which permits all teachers to perform effectively (Johnson, 1998) during times of change and increased workload (ACDE 2004b). Awards have failed to take into account the impact that identifying individuals for awards has on school culture.

If, however, we accept the positive impact of awards on those recipients who are empowered by receiving an award, we are required to also consider the impact upon those who are not offered access to these same rules and resources (Giddens 1984) and may in fact be disempowered by not receiving an award. More research is needed to gauge the impact on individuals of not ever being nominated for a teaching award and the impact of individuals being singled out for awards on staff dynamics and school culture.

As there is no evidence to indicate that either teachers nor parents initiated the introduction of teaching excellence awards, awards may be seen by some teachers as a politically motivated ‘neo-liberal’, ‘economic rationalist’ (Apple 2000 cited in Smyth et al 2000, p.xi) response to a crisis in community confidence in education along with a perceived need to raise educational standards, improve international competitiveness (Houston 1999) and avoid an impending teacher shortage. While it has been suggested that education professionals are increasingly prepared to nominate their outstanding colleagues for awards, (O’Connor 2004) this study concluded that the educational professionals initiating award nominations are almost always administrators, with teachers rarely nominating other teachers for awards.

While publicity may allow awards to achieve more of their stated goals, the data analysed in this study suggest that this has not been the case thus far in the short history of teaching excellence awards. While in some cases this may be due to a lack of planning or interest on the part of the media, in other instances the lack of publicity is quite deliberate. One award recipient participating in this study accepted nomination for an award only after receiving assurance from his principal that there would be no publicity and the new school he was moving to would not be informed [S12/PM/RS] indicating that some ‘tall poppies’ may not be ready to be seen to stand above the field. This reluctance to be seen as ‘tall poppies’ may be linked to individual differences, the culture of particular schools or the culture of the profession, which may still see awards as something teachers use to motivate students in classrooms (Scott, 2001b). This may limit publicity and restrict the impact of the award to the individual recipient rather than flowing over onto the profession. There is no evidence to indicate that the publicity surrounding teaching awards has improved the status of the profession or encouraged ‘good students’ to become teachers. What is needed is a strong government commitment to teaching and education in general which includes improved teacher salaries and working conditions.
Research evidence produced in this study does not show that overall in anything but a limited and idiosyncratic way teaching awards have substantially improved morale or raised the status of the profession, during the decade they have been conferred. Given the absence of sufficient research to indicate whether the aims of teaching excellence awards are being met, it may be that the awards process is either implicitly or explicitly serving significantly different ends. In this case the awards process may be seen as reflecting an economic rationalist approach to education leading to schools and teachers competing with one another.