

# On being awarded a National Teaching Fellowship

Julie Hughes, one of ESCalate's Academic Consultants talks about being awarded an NTF and the impact it has had on her professional life.

I was driving when I got the phone call on a Friday afternoon in late June 2005. I pulled over and took the call. It was the Higher Education Academy calling to congratulate me on receiving a National Teaching Fellowship Award. I was shocked because the only 'prize' I'd ever won before was a set of Virago publications when I was a mature student on an Access course.

The reception from my colleagues was mixed – some were very pleased for me and proud of this achievement where others ignored it – a reaction reported by many NTFs. Most colleagues were completely unaware that I had been nominated by the University of Wolverhampton and many had a limited knowledge of the NTF scheme. In 2005 the fund was a life changing amount – £50 000 –and I felt a huge sense of responsibility. Unlike some other NTF's experiences of managing their funds, my institution was highly supportive of the funds being used to impact directly upon teaching, learning and my own professional



development. I was granted complete autonomy to use my fellowship to enhance the learning experience of my students and to support my colleagues in the development of their teaching practices.

So, I used most of my funds to invest in my students. Over a period of three years I employed former PGCE students as teaching and research assistants. The students, who were all qualified teachers, supported my research and mentoring activities both within my own institution and increasingly in external settings. As I was growing in confidence as an e-portfolio teacher and mentor to my colleagues, I was 'growing' the next generation of e-portfolio teachers. I am incredibly proud that my former students, Emma Purnell and Paul Towers, now hold central staff development roles in a newly formed Blended Learning Unit.

My journey as an NTF has been supported by a series of individuals who became powerful role models, who opened doors, real and metaphorical, at key points of my personal and professional development. The allocation of an NTF mentor was life-changing for me. Through her encouragement I plucked up the courage to submit a paper to an international SOTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) conference. Just knowing that my mentor and other NTFs

would be at the US-based conference made up for losing my suitcase on my first ever plane journey alone. What's more, attending the conference gave me access to a community of people who were passionate about teaching and learning.

My paper was at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning and one of the attendees was the Director of ESCalate. This meeting and the ensuing conversations over several months were to provide me with the opportunity to be seconded to this HEA subject centre and to be involved with exciting initiatives such as the HELP CETL (Plymouth), the AfL CETL (Northumbria) and the ESRC-funded TERN (Teacher Education Research Network) project. My secondment to ESCalate has proved to be highly rewarding and wonderful for my professional development. I feel very lucky to have been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship and I hope that I have done it justice.

Professionally I feel that I have grown in confidence through exposure to others who are deeply committed to learning and teaching. The award granted me time and space to develop my practice, my thinking and my research into e-portfolio-based learning. It has encouraged me to be braver and to take more risks and allowed me to support others to take risks.



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Julie Hughes is passionate about the transformative learning potential in new technologies and their attendant pedagogies. Julie has been exploring e-portfolio-based learning since 2004 in the School of Education at the University of Wolverhampton. Her practice and research are keen to explore the user/learner/colleague experience of learning, teaching and assessment within a personal learning space such as PebblePad.