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Sociology lecturer wins national teaching excellence award

An academic from Northumbria University, Newcastle, has won the National Award for Excellence in Teaching Sociology for her innovative approach.

Dr Carol Stephenson, Programme Director and Principal Lecturer in Sociology, was presented with the award by the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) at the annual BSA Conference in Leeds.

The award aims to recognise individual staff or teams of staff, share best

practice and raise the profile of learning and teaching activity in Sociology within higher education. Dr Stephenson's award is in recognition of her innovative teaching approach and the introduction of a new Sociology module entitled Life Stories.

Life Stories encourages students to take a sociological approach to biography, to see that people's lives are about more than choices and personal decisions, but also about social inequalities, divisions and ideologies.

Through this module teaching staff share their own biographies, the choices they have made and how they were influenced by their wider social context of, for example, class, gender, ethnicity, geography and sexuality.

Dr Stephenson explains: "This approach allows students to 'do' sociology – even in their first year of study, through biographical and autobiographical research. They reflect on research methods, theory and ethics and develop transferable skills of presentation and critical self-reflection."

Helen Jones, Discipline Lead for Sociology at the Higher Education Authority, said: "I was delighted to present the National Teaching award to Dr Carol Stephenson for her work with first year sociology students at the University of Northumbria. Her application for the award focused on developing what C. Wright Mills coined 'the sociological imagination'.

"Carol has developed a module with colleagues called 'Life Stories' to support the development of the sociological imagination among students and to encourage their confidence in thinking independently and critically. Surely this goes to the heart of the sociological enterprise, locating the individual within the social, finding the personal within the structural and turning cases into issues. We need more cases of excellent teaching and my hope is that more teachers will feel similarly inspired to apply next year."

To find out more about studying Sociology at Northumbria University visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/socialsciences or sign up to the open days on 27 and 28 June by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday.

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