

Forum Insights for Managers in Higher Education

REPORT

High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education

Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions (June 2013)

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/modernisation_en.pdf

Key insights for Managers

Introduction:

This Forum insight paper provides a very brief summary of the High Level Group Report on the Modernisation of Higher Education. For full details, please refer to the link to the full report, provided above. We have highlighted the parts of the report that we think are particularly useful for managers and leaders in higher education to consider. The summary provided below is not exhaustive – but simply provides a brief flavour of the themes and priorities emphasised in the report.

Background:

The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, multilingualism and sport, Androulla Vassiliou set up the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe. This group (chaired by Prof Mary McAleese) was asked to put the quality of teaching and learning at the top of their agenda for change and it makes a range of important recommendations that provide a strong guide for the ways in which teaching and learning in higher education can be enhanced throughout European Higher Education Institutions. The work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education work will be guided and informed by these recommendations.

'Every institution should develop and implement a strategy for the support and on-going improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, devoting the necessary level of human and financial resources to the task, and integrating this priority in its overall mission, giving teaching due parity with research.'

Some important aspects of the report:

The report highlights the importance of positioning teaching as a core mission of higher education, the wisdom of supporting and professionalising teaching, the need to recognise and reward excellent teaching, the imperative associated with engaging actively with students and of improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education:

Teaching as a core mission of higher education

- 'Teaching is a core mission and therefore a core responsibility' of higher education institutions (p.13).
- 'Institutions need to ensure there is [...] parity of esteem for teaching and research in their core identity and culture and expressed in their systems of rewards, incentives, promotions, and priorities' (p.23).

- Every institution should develop and implement a teaching and learning strategy (p.27).
- 'Public authorities [...] should ensure the existence of a sustainable, well-funded framework to support higher education institutions' efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning' (p.25).

Professionalisation of teaching

- 'Within the context of the EU's target of ensuring that 40% of all young people graduate from higher education by 2020', 'the essential challenge for the higher education sector [...] is to comprehensively professionalise its teaching cohort as teachers' (p.12).
- 'All staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training. Continuous professional education as teachers should become a requirement for teachers in the higher education sector' (p.31).
- 'Higher education institutions [...] should support their teachers so they develop the skills for online and other forms of teaching and learning opened up by the digital era' (p.49).

Recognising and rewarding teaching excellence

- 'Academic staff entrance, progression and promotion decisions should take account of [...] teaching performance alongside other factors' (p.33).
- Institutions should recognise and reward excellence in teaching (e.g. through fellowships or awards).

Engaging with students

- 'Active student involvement is essential in governance, curricular design, development and review, quality assurance and review procedures' (p.15).
- 'Higher education institutions should encourage, welcome, and take account of student feedback in order to monitor and enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience (p.29).
- 'Curricula should be developed and monitored through dialogue and partnerships among teaching staff, students, graduates and labour market actors, drawing on new methods of teaching and learning, so that students acquire relevant skills that enhance their employability' (p.41).
- 'Higher education institutions and national policy makers in partnership with students should establish counselling, guidance, mentoring and tracking systems to support students' (p.45).
- Institutions need to provide clear [...] information on courses of study, including module descriptions and learning outcomes' (p.71).

Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning

- 'Higher education institutions should introduce and promote cross-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, helping students develop their breadth of understanding' and skills-base (p.47).
- 'Higher education institutions [...] should exploit the opportunities presented by technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning' (p.49).
- 'Higher education institutions should develop and implement holistic internationalisation strategies' to include, inter alia, 'student and staff mobility (incoming and outgoing), the international dimension of curricula, the internationalisation of the campus, [and] transnational delivery of courses' (pp.50-51).

Questions for institutional leaders and managers – raised in the report

Teaching and learning as part of the institutional profile

- What strategies or benchmarks do I use for enhancing the quality of teaching in my institution? How do I incorporate these into my institution's profile and mission, to make it clear to staff and students that my institution is affirming the importance of teaching and developing its quality?

Support to teaching staff

- What steps do I take to ensure that an individual teacher feels empowered and supported in developing their teaching skills and making the most of new modes of teaching and learning?
- Is there an in-house forum for enriching the teaching/ learning experience, either at institutional or departmental level? Is there a distinct place or person within my institution to whom a teacher can address issues related to developing or improving his/her teaching skills, methods and outcomes?
- How does the institution support its teaching staff in their efforts to cater for diversifying student needs, by offering flexible learning paths and speeds, e.g. through blended learning?

Support to students

- How far does my institution offer transparent information on learning opportunities to prospective and actual students to help them choose the learning offer most appropriate to them?
- How and through which structures (e. g. counselling and mentoring services, platforms for exchanges with teachers and fellow-students) does my institution support students during the entire student life cycle?
- How does my institution monitor student success, i.e. dropout rates, time to degree, employment rates after graduation? How is the data collected, evaluated and used for constant quality enhancement?
- How does my institution provide for and respond to real-time student feedback on the quality of teaching and learning, i.e. not just end of semester or course feedback but in-course feedback for early adjustment where necessary of programmes and methodologies?

