

**LEARNING & TEACHING PAPER #2**

Career paths in teaching  
Thematic Peer Group Report

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# Introduction

## WHY ADDRESS CAREER PATHS?

This report is the result of the work carried out by the EUA Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Group (hereafter 'the group') "Career paths in teaching".<sup>1</sup> The group discussed how teachers' professional career paths can contribute to the overarching goal of continuous improvement of teaching, and what can be done to better promote teaching as an important factor in career progression.

Attention to career paths in teaching and staff development, in order to enhance learning and teaching, has gained importance in the European policy arena in the past years. In their Communiqué issued in May 2018 in Paris, the European Ministers for Higher Education of the Bologna Process acknowledged the role of quality teaching for building academic career progression, and committed to exploring ways for better recognising high quality and innovative teaching in careers.<sup>2</sup> At EUA, a 2018 position paper on learning and teaching pointed to the importance of staff development and better recognising teaching as central to the academic profession.<sup>3</sup>

Although some initiatives and measures are already in place in many institutions, there is still room for improvement. Most importantly, institutions and their staff commonly find the current role of teaching expertise in determining academic career

paths, especially at the assistant-, associate- and full professor or equivalent levels, unsatisfactory. The first round of EUA Thematic Peer Groups, in 2017, already identified the imparity of esteem between teaching and research as an overarching challenge to enhancing learning and teaching.<sup>4</sup>

Interviews with doctoral candidates and postdocs<sup>5</sup> also confirmed that teaching is not valued as much as is research in academic careers towards professorship. Although the scope and number of interviews was limited, they showed strong common trends. All interviewees were aware that if they want to progress in an academic career, they have to demonstrate outstanding achievements in research. They also brought up the matter of increasing pressure due to multiple requirements relating to academic life (research, teaching, commitment to society and to their institution). Many found it unrealistic to combine and excel at requirements in all these areas. The resulting, overwhelming feelings were insecurity, instability, competition, and stress. However, teaching itself was mostly described as rewarding and interesting, and a way to spread knowledge about their research.

The following section identifies some characteristics of situations across Europe, lists common challenges to place greater value on teaching in careers, and formulates recommendations for changes that will give value to the quality of teaching.

# Career paths in teaching

## SITUATION ACROSS EUROPE

Careers in academia emphasise teaching differently across staff categories, institutions, countries, and sometimes across disciplines. Depending on countries and higher education systems,<sup>6</sup> and the degree to which academic professions are regulated by law, there can be different career paths for teachers in academia (e.g. through a tenure track starting with a doctorate, or through qualifying as a docent with a specific focus on teaching, and with or without a teaching qualification). In most career paths, research experience is required, whereas teaching and pedagogic qualifications are valued in only some career paths.

National or system-level regulations are often developed for careers and employment regimes, and career paths can be defined by broader national regulations. In countries where institutions have limited capacity to act on careers and salary levels, maintaining the intrinsic motivation of staff for teaching may be difficult. But public authorities can promote teaching by providing a national incentive system or creating conditions to generalise teaching enhancement and professional development.

All staff categories do not, and are not, required to take part in continued professional development (CPD) in the same way. While existing pedagogical development programmes typically target early-stage academics,<sup>7</sup> the interviews with doctoral candidates and postdocs revealed that they see training and support for teaching as limited or non-existent when starting to teach. Often, the only experience they relied on was their own experience as students. For advanced staff the number of programmes in place is also typically very limited.<sup>8</sup>

The extent to which institutions could address career paths and staff development strongly depends on the institutions' autonomy in their national and academic culture contexts. In some countries, institutions would not be able to act on status or salary levels, while in others, their capacity to act would need to take into account the professors' strong teaching autonomy.

## IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

The group identified two main challenges to better develop career paths in teaching:

1. The respective value of teaching and research in academic careers is unbalanced and favours research. This imbalance is deeply rooted in cultural aspects of academic life, institutions and communities.
2. Teaching, although intrinsically rewarding, is often viewed as a private activity with no commonly accepted criteria of quality: a common notion seems to be that what cannot be measured does not play any role in external recognition or promotion. At the same time, teaching has become increasingly collaborative and a collective responsibility, and individual courses need to contribute to the curriculum level. The ultimate focus should be on learning: how teachers facilitate and act on student learning on the one hand, and how teachers themselves are continuously learning, in a developmental perspective, on the other hand.

In order to address these challenges, higher education institutions need to:

- **Create a common language or framework for addressing development and expertise in teaching.** Universities may have developed a framework for teaching for their own staff, which is not necessarily compatible with other institutions' or national<sup>9</sup> frameworks. As careers become less limited to one institution and international staff mobility becomes the norm, the absence of a common language or framework hinders possibilities of dialogue and shared acceptance of requirements for recognition for teaching. A shared framework will also provide grounds to motivate academics to invest in their teaching.

- **Create an open educational environment in order to support and enable the establishment of a cultural shift.** Teaching development can be hampered by a lack of training, support, peer advice, opportunities for exchange, recognition and visibility among peers and within the institution. An open educational environment could also strengthen the intrinsic motivation of academics to develop their teaching expertise and make challenges related to teaching less of a private matter.
- **Ensure that the respective roles of institutional and individual levels, which are interconnected, are clear.** In order to trigger change at individual level, action is needed at institutional level – which is responsible for defining policies – and could be proactive in cross-fertilising individual initiatives that emerge from different parts of the institution. Also, change only happens if structural changes are shown to be taken seriously by all institutional managers, including deans and department heads. Institutional policies, organisation of development activities, assessment measures, and other measures at institutional level should also be aligned towards the same goals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic careers are multifaceted and include all aspects of the academic profession (education, research, society outreach, administration and governance, and others depending on contexts). Therefore, institutions cannot address challenges related to careers in teaching alone, in an attempt to better value teaching. In order to embrace the holistic mission of universities, careers – first and foremost – should be **balanced between and value all aspects of the academic profession**. This overarching, first recommendation from the group is a prerequisite for all following recommendations 1 to 5. Research and teaching, for instance, should be equally valued in academic career paths, and their importance should be clear through selection and career promotion criteria. Career paths and promotion criteria should also offer sufficient flexibility to enable different emphases in the course of a career, so that periods with increased attention on research could alternate with periods of increased attention on teaching. The institutions' leadership should embrace and promote this balanced view of academic career paths. In order to achieve this, institutions need to have and embrace sufficient autonomy to act upon career progression and staff development.

The group also recommends that the institutions:

### Recommendation #1

Discuss and adopt **a task-domain-based framework for teaching expertise and expertise development**, as a common language for an open conversation about teaching, and to clarify needs and expectations towards teachers.

- A framework for identifying and documenting teaching (and other) expertise needs to be flexible enough to cater to diverse groups, faculties and departments, yet reflect the institution's distinctiveness (i.e. the institution's priorities and what it tries to achieve; its vision of education). Such a framework should be aligned with the institution's mission, vision, strategy, and internal processes (e.g. in human resource and staff development).
- The framework would serve as a common reference tool for institutions and their academic communities, as well as for individual teachers to reflect on their teaching expertise and practices.
- Such a framework emphasises and provides value to continued professional development. The perceived top-level achievement should not stand as a goal per se, but rather support continuous development for teachers and a community for teaching.
- The group's proposal of a **model for such a framework can be found in Annex 2**. It is based on preliminary results of research across existing frameworks by van Dijk, van der Schaaf, van Tartwijk and Kluijtmans (in preparation).<sup>10</sup>
- This framework should not be used as a check list: instead, it is up to each institution to tailor it, and to specify the expected and available tasks within each task domain, as well as the desired ways for teachers to develop their expertise in that domain. While doing so, institutions should examine the meaning and role of all domains in their own context, depending on their vision of education, distinctiveness, and level of flexibility granted to faculties and departments. They may also wish to include criteria from existing measures (e.g. student or peer feedback) or relate to the institution's key performance indicators.

- A participatory process to define the local interpretation and implementation of the framework is crucial for ownership and acceptance. Institutions should engage stakeholders (university community, teachers, leadership, students, staff working in services such as human resources and learning and teaching centres) in defining the exact content of such a framework.
- The group focused its work on a framework for teaching expertise, but institutions should also consider designing an integrated framework with all aspects of the academic profession reflected in their institutional mission. Interconnection between different aspects could be emphasised. For instance, a better connection between teaching and research could mean valuing research-based learning in both teaching and research aspects of the framework.
- In order to reach a common language on teaching expertise, a conversation about a shared framework on teaching expertise should be initiated between institutions of the same system, as well as internationally. It is only with a common language that teachers' positions, and the tasks they are expected to master accordingly, could be fully understood in other institutions and countries, thus helping international mobility.

### Recommendation #2

Design **balanced career stages**, which are envisaged in an encompassing way, and include all aspects of the academic profession that are valued at the institution. Such career path stages should also allow for differences in emphasis for different scholars and varying emphases in a career over time.

- The different task domains and axes for action in the framework (Annex 2) can be linked to positions in careers. All stakeholders should be involved in the process of integrating career progression into such a framework.
- Continued Professional Development should be part of career progression and also be available to doctoral candidates. Early-stage academics would be able to better cope with increased pressure if teaching support and development were available to them from the beginning of their careers.

### Recommendation #3

Devise methods/approaches for **assessing teaching achievements** that could be widely accepted in the academic community.

- Assessment of teaching should be widely accepted in the academic community. The group recommends using a **peer review-based approach**, as it is already commonly accepted in the research assessment framework, and in the European quality assurance framework.

- A peer evaluation community should be built up and could serve a double purpose: assessing teaching achievement and as a feedback/mentoring/guiding pool. Institutions need to define rules of procedure and ways to achieve this (involving international or only internal peers, having discipline-based or staff category-based pools or not, etc.).

- Institutions should propose tools for reflection and self-development in teaching, for instance through a **teaching portfolio**. Such portfolios could include a variety of evidence for teaching achievement (e.g. evaluation, self-evaluation, teaching materials, peer feedback).<sup>11</sup>

- There is a dichotomy between summative and formative purposes of such tools: what serves to be assessed may not be the best material for openly reflecting on progress in teaching. But a portfolio could serve both approaches: some parts may be used for reflection and self-development, others for assessment.

### Recommendation #4

Create or further develop **incentive systems** to showcase, value and celebrate good teaching.

- Incentives should play a driving role at different levels: motivating teachers to invest more time and attention to their teaching, and at the same time engaging teachers into openly discussing learning and teaching.

- Alignment and complementarity between differently sized measures to recognise, support and reward teaching is key. Besides recognition through career progression, simple and attainable measures could be small budgets allocated to individuals or groups of teachers to achieve a concrete teaching project, or differently sized teaching prizes targeting individuals and groups. Innovation in teaching should be supported and should not appear as out of reach or too complex to be recognised.

- In designing such incentive systems, institutions should define the respective aims and expected impact, and balance how they wish to allow and reward risk-taking and experimentation, both at teacher level (in the classroom) and at institutional level (in the curriculum and the institution at large).

- Support measures should include development programmes as well as peer and mentoring systems throughout the academic career. In particular, early-stage academics need peer exchange opportunities and community building, for instance by attending each other's lectures for peer feedback. Doctoral candidates' supervisors could also play a role in providing guidance and support to their doctoral candidates' teaching, with a system that rewards such contributions. However, there should be development programmes for all stages of the academic career.

## Recommendation #5

Provide appropriate **resources and structures** for supporting learning and teaching, and empowering teachers.

- Such resources could be related to time, funding, or support: through learning and teaching centres, teaching/research-free semesters, professional development programmes, training courses, short programmes enabling peer exchange for first-time and advanced teachers, funds for innovation and scholarship in education, allocating additional teaching assistants, etc.
- Staff with different profiles are involved in teaching and attention should be granted to all, with a special focus on early-stage academics. In this regard, doctoral schools and programmes may play a role as change agents and environments.

- Institutions should identify the role that different groups and structures could play and use their complementarity (e.g. between training offers from learning and teaching centres, and supervisors acting as mentors). Creating a community of practice and an environment that is teaching-friendly would allow to reach a critical mass to trigger change. This would build mutual trust, provide a place to discuss teaching, and enable practices such as peer feedback. Such a community could share material in an open education perspective and organise informal moments for community building.
- An Education Leadership programme, at institutional or national level, could create a community where peers support each other and act as change agents.<sup>12</sup>

# Conclusions

Academic careers need to find a balance between, and value of, all aspects of the academic profession, including valuing teaching as an essential mission in higher education. A cultural shift within European higher education institutions, where research is still more valued than teaching for career progression, would be required to achieve this. In order to address such a change, a

common language on teaching expertise is needed. In this regard, the group proposes a flexible model of a framework, which would work together with defined and balanced career paths, a commonly accepted approach for assessing teaching, incentive systems to value teaching, and resources and structures that empower teachers.



# Annexes

## ANNEX #1: EUA LEARNING & TEACHING THEMATIC PEER GROUPS

As part of its work on learning and teaching, EUA carries out activities with the aim to engage with university communities in charge of learning and teaching. One of these activities is coordinating the work of a set of Thematic Peer Groups. The groups consist of universities selected through a call for participation to:

- discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing learning and teaching in European universities
- contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching by identifying key recommendations on the selected theme.

The 2018 Thematic Peer Groups, active from March to November, invited participating universities to peer-learning and exchange of experience, while at the same time they contributed to EUA's policy work as the voice of European universities in policy debates, such as the Bologna Process.

Each group was chaired by one university and supported by a coordinator from the EUA secretariat. The groups met three times to discuss key challenges related to the theme, how to address the challenges through innovative practices and approaches, and what institutional policies and processes support the enhancement in learning and teaching. In addition, the groups were welcome to discuss any other issue that was relevant to the theme. Outside the three meetings, the groups were free to organise their work independently.

Members of the groups also attended a final workshop, where they had the opportunity to meet and discuss the outcomes of other groups and address synergies. The workshop was hosted by the University of Porto, Portugal, on 19-20 November 2018.

### Composition of the Thematic Peer Group 'Career paths in teaching'

- Utrecht University, the Netherlands: Susan te Pas (chair), Wim Kremer and Esther van Dijk
- KU Leuven, Belgium: Saartje Creten, Pieter-Jan De Grieck, Ann Gevers and Caroline Gilbert
- Copenhagen Business School, Denmark: Jakob Ravn and Mia Stelsig Haagensen
- Nord University, Norway: Hanne Solheim Hansen
- Camilo José Cela University, Spain: Eva Cano
- University of Rijeka, Croatia: Marko Turk
- Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary: László Zentai
- University of Bucharest, Romania: Romiță Iucu
- Group coordinator: Thérèse Zhang, Deputy Director, Higher Education Policy, EUA

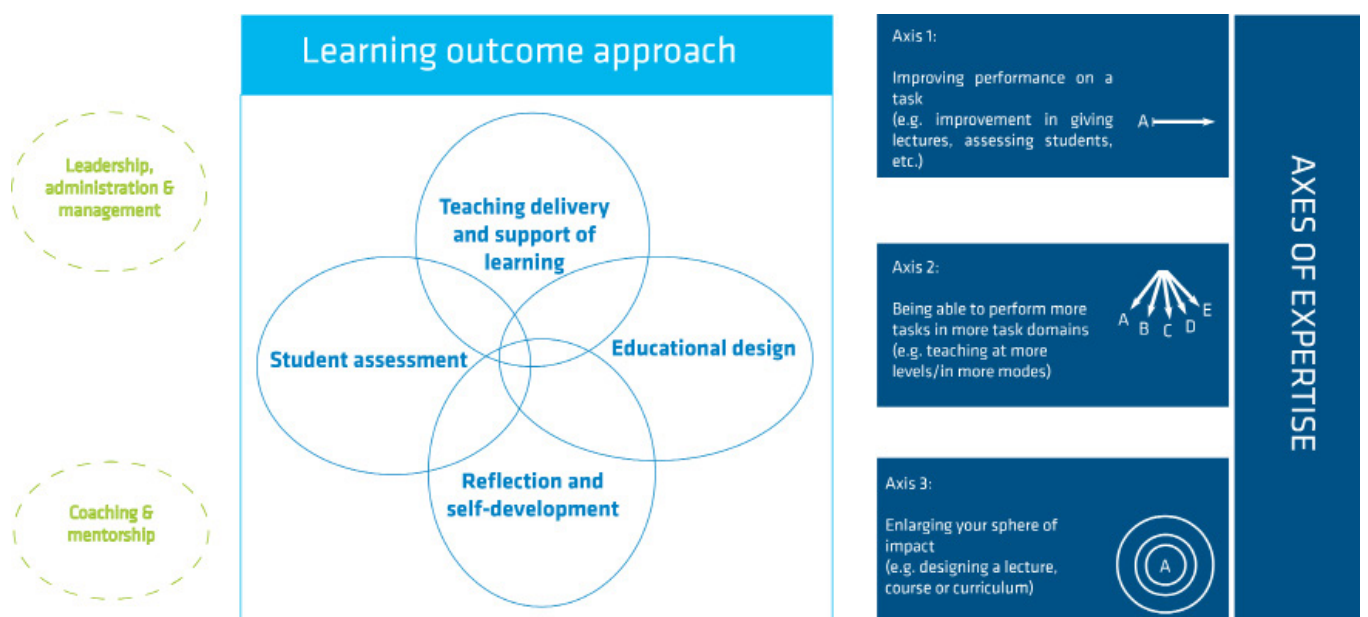
## ANNEX #2: PROPOSAL FOR A TEACHING EXPERTISE FRAMEWORK

This proposal is inspired by preliminary results of a systematic review of existing frameworks for teaching expertise in higher education by van Dijk, van der Schaaf, van Tartwijk and Kluijtmans (in preparation).

- **This model conceptualises teaching expertise from a task-domain-based perspective**,<sup>13</sup> which means teaching expertise is determined by performance in different teaching task-domains. Defining teaching expertise aims to guide the development of individual academic teachers, design professional development schemes and policies for rewarding and promoting staff. The group chose to address teaching “expertise” rather than teaching “excellence”, so as to emphasise the importance of development attitudes, and not reinforce the overall pressure of producing outstanding performance.
- This model proposes **four core task-domains**, three of which correspond to the principle of constructive alignment by Biggs and Tang.<sup>14</sup> This model clearly positions itself in a learning outcome-based paradigm. It was a parti pris to endorse the general consensus in the European Higher Education Area that higher education should be student-centred and learning outcome-based.

- The core task-domains are:
  - ◇ Teaching delivery and support of learning
  - ◇ Student assessment
  - ◇ Educational design, including curriculum design
  - ◇ Reflection and self-development, including research and scholarship of learning and teaching, evidence-based teaching, practice-based research.
- Institutions are also encouraged to consider the meaning and role of **two additional task domains** to be included in their frameworks. These are:
  - ◇ Leadership, administration & management
  - ◇ Coaching & mentorship.
- In addition to task domains, **three axes of expertise** are proposed to describe how teachers can develop their expertise:
  - ◇ Improving performance on a single task (e.g. improvement in giving lectures, assessing students, etc.).
  - ◇ Being able to successfully perform more tasks in more task domains (e.g. teaching at more levels/with more modes).
  - ◇ Enlarging the sphere of impact (e.g. designing a lecture, a course or a curriculum).

The four core task-domains, two additional task domains and three axes of expertise are represented in the figure below.



# Endnotes

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ See Annex 1 for information on EUA's TPGs and the composition of this TPG. The group wishes to thank Utrecht University, the Copenhagen Business School and the University of Rijeka for hosting their three meetings. The group is also grateful to the members of the other three EUA TPGs for their feedback and inputs during the joint workshop organised in Porto, in November 2018.
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Paris Communiqué, 25 May 2018. <https://bit.ly/2A6LIMN> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ European University Association (EUA), 2018, Learning and Teaching in Europe's Universities: An EUA position paper (Brussels, EUA). <http://bit.ly/EUALTposition> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Dakovic, D. and Loukkola, T., 2017, EUA's Learning and Teaching Initiative: Reports from the Thematic Peer Groups (Brussels, EUA), pp. 4-8. <http://bit.ly/LTTTPG2017report> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ The group members conducted 88 interviews with PhD candidates and postdocs at their home institutions to complement the group discussions. The interview questions addressed their perception of a good higher education teacher, their perception of themselves, challenges identified at the beginning of an academic career, preparation and support received for teaching, their definition of competences important for teaching, and their needs and wishes for further support in developing teaching competences.
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ "National" and "system" level are used interchangeably in this report. "System" applies to countries where several higher education systems and authorities responsible for higher education co-exist (to various extents: Belgium's Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities, the UK's nations, and Germany's Länder).
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ Gaebel, M. and Zhang, T., 2018, Trends 2018: Learning and Teaching in the European Higher Education Area (Brussels, EUA), Chapter 5. <http://bit.ly/EUATRENDS2018>
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ Grunefeld, H., Prins, F., van Tartwijk, J., van der Vaart, R., Loads, D., Turner, J. and Poder, K., 2017, 'Faculty development for educational leadership', in Stensaker, B., Bilbow, G. T., Breslow, L. and van der Vaart, B. (Eds.), Strengthening teaching and learning in research universities (Springer), pp. 73-101.
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ Commonly known frameworks include the UK Professional Standards Framework, the Integrated Framework for Teaching and Learning developed by the University of Calgary and, more recently (2018), the Career Framework for University Teaching developed by Ruth Graham. Examples provided by TPG members include the REEAD model designed by the Copenhagen Business School, which integrates the areas of research, education, external fundraising, academic citizenship, and dissemination.
- 10 \_\_\_\_\_ The group would like to thank Esther van Dijk, PhD candidate at Utrecht University, who conducted a comparative research on existing frameworks for teaching expertise and presented it during the third meeting of the group. Her findings contributed to shaping the model for a framework presented in Annex 2.
- 11 \_\_\_\_\_ Some examples from TPG member institutions that use portfolios to assess teaching expertise are Utrecht University, KU Leuven and CBS.
- 12 \_\_\_\_\_ See example at Utrecht University: <https://bit.ly/2Ha3aQz> (accessed 21/12/2018). See also Grunefeld, H., van Tartwijk, J., Jongen, H. and Wubbels, T., 2015, 'Design and effects of an academic development programme on leadership for educational change', International Journal for Academic Development, 20(4), pp. 306-18.
- 13 \_\_\_\_\_ Ericsson, K. A., Hoffman, R. R., Kozbelt A. and Williams, A. M., 2018, The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- 14 \_\_\_\_\_ Biggs, J. and Tang, C., 2011 (1999), Teaching for Quality Learning at University. What the Student Does. 4th edition (Berkshire/New York, Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press).

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The Association provides a unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

This paper is one of a series of reports specifically focused on learning and teaching. It is designed to gather the knowledge and experiences of experts on the topic from across Europe. EUA's activities in learning and teaching aim at enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education provision, underline the importance of learning and teaching as a core mission and advocate for learning and teaching activities to be geared towards student learning and success.