

LEARNING & TEACHING PAPER #3

Continuous Development of
Teaching Competences
Thematic Peer Group Report

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Introduction

For the past 20 years, the Bologna Process has been promoting the enhancement of learning and teaching, with ministers committing in the 2018 Paris Communiqué to “promote and support institutional, national and European initiatives for pedagogical training, continuous professional development of higher education teachers and explore ways for better recognition of high quality and innovative teaching in their career”.¹ Being complementary to the Bologna Process, the European Commission has stressed multiple times the importance of continuous professional education.² EUA’s position paper on learning and teaching in Europe’s Universities,³ released in January 2018, also underlines the need to promote staff development and recognise teaching as central to the academic profession.

To support the enhancement of learning and teaching in European universities, the EUA Council furthermore endorsed in 2017 the European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching,⁴ which are an outcome of the EU-funded EFFECT (European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching⁵) project. This document also emphasises staff development, stating as one of its key principles: “Teaching is core to academic practice and is respected as scholarly and professional”.

Despite high-level commitment to the scholarship on learning and teaching, the challenge of holistically and effectively addressing the enhancement of teaching competences for academic staff remains.

The Thematic Peer Group (hereafter ‘the group’) ‘Continuous development of teaching competences’ was thus invited to focus on institutional policies and practices that support teachers in developing their pedagogical skills and exchange experience with other faculty members. The starting premise was that teaching quality is one of the main determinants for the outcomes of students’ learning and success. Continuous development of teaching competences is not solely a teacher’s responsibility, and all recommendations presented should be seen in light of the golden triangle ‘student – teacher – organisation’. Education is a two-way street – teachers and students have a responsibility towards each other, which is differentiated by the type of programme – in a safe environment provided by the organisation, at all levels: institution, faculty, department, programme, and course level.

This report is the product of the discussions and conclusions of the group (see a list of group members in Annex 1).⁶ The report aims to stimulate further debate and is an invitation to reflect on this topic.

As chair of this Thematic Peer Group, Tim McIntyre-Bhatty guided the group’s work and facilitated the discussions during the three meetings. He is also the author of the framework presented in Annex 2 and of the template for the collection of institutional practices that underpin the proposed recommendations.

Findings

CHALLENGES

As a first step, the group mapped aspects pertaining to the supranational, national and institutional level that could influence the enhancement of teaching competences, such as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) or recommendations from the European Commission, and measures taken by public, regulatory and statutory bodies in various countries (see Annex 2 for such a mapping exercise model).

Different obstacles in terms of initial teacher training and continuous professional development were put forward, and the group came up with three clusters of challenges.

1. Teaching qualifications, reward mechanisms and the motivation of staff to engage in continuous professional development;
2. Evidencing and measuring impact of the development of teaching competences, within the evolved quality assurance/quality enhancement cycle, linking to stratified innovation⁷ as part of quality enhancement;
3. Inter-disciplinary development of methodological approaches to learning and pedagogy.

The following recommendations drafted to answer to each of these clusters are underpinned by effective practices drawn from different institutional contexts. Different national and institutional frameworks might, however, preclude the mainstreaming of any recommendation or best practice proposed by the group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CHALLENGE #1

Teaching qualifications, reward mechanisms and the motivation of staff to engage in continuous professional development

Currently, the higher education sector emphasises the value of research over teaching, with a limited parity of esteem between the two. Although there has been a growing recognition of the importance of teaching, research still plays a more important role for the career development of academics.⁸ While there are substantial incentives for staff to engage in research activities, this is not the case for teaching. The parallels in mechanisms for academic staff development such as critical self-reflection, peer review and peer assessment are clearly relevant for both research and teaching, but recognition of these parallels tends to be lacking, except when the institutional ethos values and honours teaching.

In this context, starting from a global perspective and ending at the individual level, the group recommends the following:

Recommendation #1

National/government support is important, hence national education strategies should promote teaching qualification attainment for academic staff as professional educators.

This is now the case, for instance, in Norway, where the Ministry of Education decided that as of September 2019 all newly appointed university teachers would need to prove basic pedagogical competences, worth 200 hours of a course standardised by the National Council for Higher Education. In the Netherlands, all university staff are expected to receive a University Teaching Qualification, while the Comenius grant scheme, a national initiative, provides substantial funding for academic staff with highly novel approaches to learning and

teaching. In Latvia, national regulations oblige academic teaching staff to undergo continuous professional development during their academic appointment. It remains very important that policies and measures are set up in close cooperation between higher education institutions and government bodies to reach a state of mutual trust and ensure that both parties strive to achieve similar goals using mutually reinforcing instruments.

Recommendation #2

Institutional tone and culture are most significant and absolutely necessary, and institutional leaders should consider how best to support and/or fund learning and teaching initiatives and staff support mechanisms, informed, if present, by proactive national education strategies, and driven by cross-fertilisation with research.

The group discussed several case studies, for example the development programme for Junior Lecturers established by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, or the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Higher Education, a part-time continuing education programme for academic staff at the University of Zurich. At the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) teaching staff are required to have a pedagogical qualification equivalent of at least 10 ECTS. The university supports its teaching staff by offering study modules in university pedagogy, adult education and teaching academic content through English. Another example is the initial pedagogical training offered by the Université libre de Bruxelles to any newly recruited teachers. It includes, after one semester of practice, a three-day off-campus residential event that helps foster a community of practice spirit among the participants. Finally, the University of Padova (Italy) has launched a faculty development programme for new teachers and in the first year, 75% of those eligible participated. In addition, a training of 50 hours is offered to faculty leaders (change agents) to promote faculty development in their departments.

In many institutions, issuing teaching awards to outstanding teachers is common practice, as well as having education innovation schemes by which teachers can acquire funding for innovative teaching approaches.

Recommendation #3

Institutional criteria for promotion should be reviewed to ensure that evidence of effectiveness in learning and teaching is taken into account for career advancement, in a balanced way with research outcomes.

This kind of evidence can consist of student/unit and programme feedback, peer/critical friend observation and mentoring, or a learning activity portfolio demonstrating best practice, to name but a few. Several national and institutional professional frameworks were analysed in this context, such as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)⁹, the Framework for the evaluation of teaching achievements for academic career progression¹⁰ and the overarching Teaching and Learning Charter¹¹ at the Université libre de Bruxelles, the Framework for Teaching Performances at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam¹² or the peer observation¹³ models set in place by the University of Padova. The

University of Padova also introduced a certification for teaching innovation and training through Open Badges, which feature on the institutional CVs of academic teaching staff. Recently, Ghent University also stressed the importance of equal attention in carrying out research and teaching in career development.

Recommendation #4

Academics are expected to engage in continuous professional development and critical self-reflection throughout their career. These should include activities that support the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching as well as research and academic career development.

The University of Latvia is currently working on such a systematic, yet dynamic and flexible offer for continuous professional development as part of the university's internal quality assurance. As mentioned above, peer and/or critical friend-based support to instructors through shared reflection, observation, review and mentoring should inform teaching portfolios, demonstrating the iterative evidence-based evolution of teachers' practice, and transforming continuous professional development into Continuous Professional Learning.

CHALLENGE #2

Evidencing and measuring impact of the development of teaching competences, within the evolved quality assurance/quality enhancement cycle, linking to stratified innovation as part of quality enhancement

The development of teaching competences of academic staff is intended to facilitate and enhance student learning. Although challenging to measure, the relationship between student success and teaching competences can be analysed from two perspectives: (a) by assessing the practicalities of learning processes (such as assessment and feedback) while promoting the quality of learning and teaching, and (b) through a pedagogical perspective based on good practice in facilitating learning. Research shows that teacher training leads to a more student-focused approach¹⁴ which, in turn, is conducive to a deeper approach to learning by the students.¹⁵ Deep learning means that students attempt to make sense of the content, as opposed to a surface approach, where students try to memorise and remember content. It is proven that students who take a deep approach to learning have superior learning outcomes, particularly in terms of understanding and developing new and more sophisticated conceptions of the subject. Changing the teachers' approach can therefore lead to positive learning outcomes for students.

Formative feedback for students, but also ongoing formative feedback for staff on student learning activity, has substantial educational benefits, including facilitating staff as critical practitioners and fostering students' responsibility for their learning process. To limit the risks associated with experimentation and innovation, higher education institutions can support centres of excellence that understand levels of maturity of innovation and the needs of academic staff. In addition, higher education institutions could support developmental practices, teaching innovation funds and incentivisation/engagement mechanisms.

To address this challenge, the group recommends the following:

Recommendation #1

National quality assurance systems and agencies should support the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching activity, and higher education institutions should actively learn from participation in voluntary international accreditation which support both quality and standards. Institutional reviews should be data-informed rather than data-driven, depending on institutional context and geography.

Moreover, the same should apply to institutional quality assurance systems. Many institutions organise internal programme and institutional evaluations organised in between those carried out externally as part of the national quality assurance system. At Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam these are called “midterms” and they are structurally organised (at the programme level) by implementing peer reviews by programme directors and members of the Education Quality Steering Group – a group that advises the University Executive Board on general matters concerning quality assurance and the quality of applications for new programmes.

Recommendation #2

Institutional culture and values should foster collegiality, transparency and trust and provide an environment where ongoing review of data, student analytics and student feedback are valued and acted upon as part of quality enhancement. Value-added analysis is an important consideration in student achievement and higher education institutions should be vigilant with respect to student achievement for differing demographics among an increasingly diverse student population.

Institutional quality assurance systems should systematically drive initiatives for the improvement of the quality of learning and teaching, at any structural level. Participative learning workgroups, organisations or committees should bring together all stakeholders to coordinate the different learning and teaching initiatives and to set priorities among them.

Recommendation #3

Programme approval and evaluation are continuous activities and should link back to academic development and the continuous development of teaching competences to induce higher quality of learning outcomes. Programme approval should contain in a constructive perspective a range of internal and external reference points and externality/academic independence such as internal and external academic colleagues, external academic boards and/or industry advisory boards.

All types of evaluations – whether from a student perspective or an organisational perspective – should not only focus on the individual teacher but also on teams of teachers.

In the Netherlands, for instance, programme committees bring

together students and teachers of the programme in question, who advise programme directors on how to enhance the quality of education.¹⁶

Recommendation #4

As members of a community of learners, the student voice and student feedback contribute to the continuous development of teaching competences and quality enhancement and are often richer and more meaningful if qualitative and/or facilitated by focus groups and informed by and triangulated with other student/staff/outcomes/data sources. Such approaches should be formative and iterative.

The impact of quality enhancement may be seen, for example:

- in solving perceived learning and teaching problems and ensuring that they are non-repeatable;
- through better achievement of learning outcomes and student assessment;
- in aiding graduate employability and graduate skills development, in dialogue with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- in broadening and deepening the potential impact of student and graduate contributions to society.

Higher education institutions should consider evaluation of teaching by students as a way of guaranteeing a regular and precise feedback on teaching activities, with the objective of improving their quality. At the Université libre de Bruxelles, teaching evaluations are an online process, organised twice a year at the end of each semester, in February and in mid-June/mid-July. It concerns each course as soon as it is fully completed, including the final evaluation of students' learning. Each student is invited by notification to answer a questionnaire about the courses of their individual programme. The questions are adapted to the type of course activities and cover the three dimensions of the pedagogical alignment principle: course organisation, course sessions, and learning assessment. A fourth part of the questionnaire concerns the individual performance of members of the pedagogical team. Teaching evaluations may help to detect perceived problems in some courses, but they are also an important source of positive feedback to the instructors, as it encourages them to maintain a reflexive approach to their teaching activity in a similar way as most of them do towards their research.

Each year, the University of Padova organises a week for pedagogic improvement, where academic staff, institutional leadership and students discuss quality of learning and teaching. During the same week, deans of departments, coordinators of schools, programme coordinators and student delegates organise events and activities to disseminate good practices in learning and teaching and to discuss the results of the student evaluations. The University of Latvia is also working on involving students in the overall design of and feedback on the study process, moving beyond a teacher-student dialogue that concerns only the content of their studies.

CHALLENGE #3

Inter-disciplinary development of methodological approaches to learning and pedagogy

Higher education practitioners do not only have a duty, but also a moral imperative, to share knowledge and good practices, including effective learning and teaching practices and pedagogy. Due to an increased demand for higher education, as well as growing participation and diversification of student cohorts, higher education stakeholders have started to stress the importance of the enhancement of pedagogies in ensuring student success and a positive student experience. In this context, the development of academic communities of practice, the sharing of effective practices (either based on small-scale experiences or more large-scale repeated experiments), and the establishment of fora for meetings, discussions and peer learning for academic staff are necessary.

In this context, the group recommends that:

Recommendation #1

Higher education institutions should ensure that academic staff are challenged and supported to engage in the development and furtherance of pedagogical content knowledge and their own disciplinary development of learning/pedagogy.

Institutions are encouraged to create or reinforce institutional learning and teaching centres or services, regrouping faculty developers and technological support agents, both active in needs-driven, pedagogical action-based research on their own practices or on practices of a set of disciplinary or methodological communities of teachers. These learning and teaching centres or services should belong to all members of the teaching teams and should be deeply embedded in the local culture. For instance, after 13 years of experience with the programme, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Poland) has gathered together a team of almost 30 academic teaching staff specialised in pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge who conduct training courses for the rest of the university staff.

Recommendation #2

Higher education institutions should facilitate and encourage the development, training and sharing of best practice via multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary team development of learning/pedagogy, ensuring suitable grounding/information from colleagues within disciplines with respect to standards/competences to support the learning activity.

The experiences shared in the group emphasised that interdisciplinary exchange of education practices result in a better understanding of the similar challenges in learning and teaching. This is felt to be mutually beneficial and encouraging.

The emergence of communities of practice in learning and teaching should also be supported and resources made available for their implementation. In this context, informal teacher communities are increasingly emerging. These networks disseminate innovations in education, share knowledge and practices. As

such, they are a driving force in increasing the motivation of staff to continuously professionalise their education and personal development. These communities, often organised as networks, combine online and offline activities and as such they contribute to a university-wide quality culture regarding education, performance and innovation in education. Examples are KnowVU (Knowledge Network Education Vrije Universiteit)¹⁷ and TAUU (Teaching Academy Utrecht University)¹⁸ in the Netherlands. The Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO, which is part of the Ministry of Education)¹⁹ is currently in the initial phase of a large project to establish a national platform where innovations can be shared and where a community of users and innovators per education theme will be started. The University of Jyväskylä hosts and facilitates a pedagogical peer network for teachers (Pepe) to foster cross- and interdisciplinary collaboration and sharing. The University of Latvia offers a continuous education programme known as “Promoting the colleague experience of academic staff”, based on non-formal and informal learning, which encourages collegiality, trust and openness. Teaching4Learning@Unipd²⁰ is a programme established by the University of Padova in 2016, which fosters a faculty-learning community, where teachers experiment and discover together new tools and strategies for student-centred teaching innovation. This programme is now complemented by an initiative of the University of Padova focusing on change agents/academic teaching staff who commit to serving their departments in bringing about change and innovation in teaching practices.

Recommendation #3

Institutions should embed principles related to an academic community of learners, where staff and students co-create learning and engage in activities that blend research and teaching and reinforce and develop the interactions between them.

In this respect, informal, collaborative and bottom-up institution-wide initiatives between institutional stakeholders should be encouraged (such as seminars, thematic meetings, working lunches, etc.) For instance, since February 2018, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has its own Education Cafe where everyone, from policy advisors, teaching staff from all disciplines and administrative staff can meet and discuss education and pedagogy issues and developments. A Community of Learners also asks for a thorough rethinking of the architecture of buildings and furnishings related to education and its environment. The design of a room, of a hallway, of the entrance hall, etc. should foster new educational techniques and approaches: team-based learning, new types of blended learning, new techniques made possible through ICT (such as 3D printers, drones and virtual reality), require non-classic rooms and different types of furnishings. In general, rooms, walls, tables and computers should be flexible. These informal ‘hang-outs’ might also connect groups that are somewhat dogmatic in their view of the relationship between teaching and research; a common base might be found on which ‘tribal’ differences could be solved. Also, peer teaching and learning might bridge the gap.

Conclusions

The discussions within this group show that higher education institutions throughout Europe are confronted with similar challenges in learning and teaching, irrespective of their national and institutional frameworks. Although the group is aware that not all suggestions can be streamlined due to the diversity of educational settings across Europe, it invites higher education stakeholders to ponder the following key reflections and main recommendations:

- Commitment to the systematic development of teaching competences is needed at all levels, i.e. national, institutional and individual. Institutional criteria for promotion that emphasise teaching should be complemented by pro-active government strategies that enhance learning and teaching.
- Higher education institutions should embed continuous professional development in their institutional strategies and consider pedagogical development as a systematic process with which academics engage throughout their careers.
- Continuous professional development of teachers should consider student voice and student feedback, through which academic staff and students co-create learning. Student feedback should be complemented by other qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop a holistic and formative approach.
- Continuous professional development should be regarded as part of the quality assurance-QE cycle, where both external and internal quality assurance supports the enhancement of quality of learning and teaching activities.
- The inter-disciplinary development of methodological approaches to learning and pedagogy asks for a safe environment (digital & physical) that is dedicated to specifics of this inter-disciplinary development. Development of academic communities of practice for academic staff and students is needed. Formal and informal arrangements may encourage this.

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 mid-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.

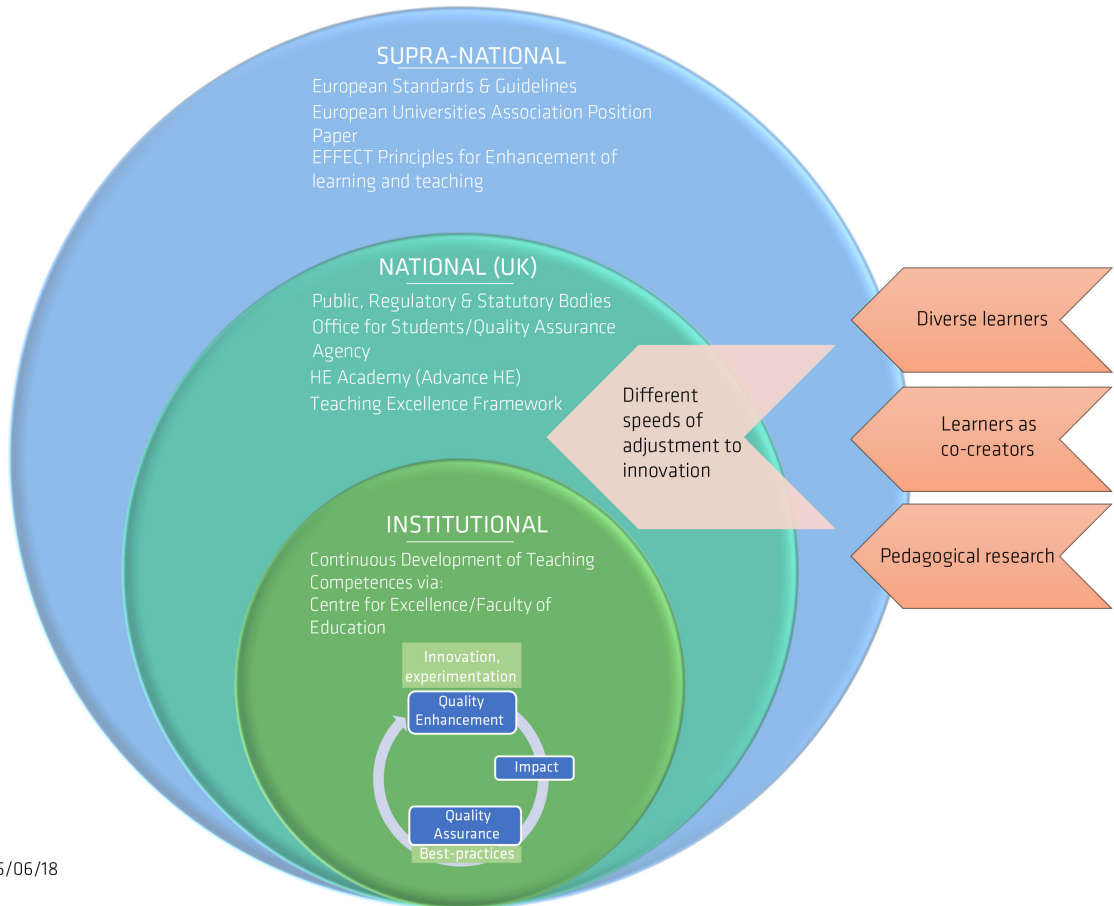
Each group was chaired by one university and supported by a coordinator from the EUA secretariat. The groups met three times to discuss key challenges related to the theme, how to address the challenges through innovative practices and approaches, and what institutional policies and processes support 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 'Continuous development of teaching competences'

- Bournemouth University, United Kingdom: Tim McIntyre-Bhatty (chair)
- University of Göttingen, Germany: Andrea Dorothea Buehrmann
- University of Padua, Italy: Monica Fedeli and Daniela Mapelli
- The Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland: Iwona Maciejowska
- University of Jyväskylä, Finland: Anna Grönlund, Marja-Leena Laakso, Peppi Taalas
- Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (INN), Norway: Ingeborg Amundrud, Fredrik Graver, Stine Grønvold and Yngve Nordkvelle
- University of Latvia, Latvia: Sanita Baranova and Anita Trapane
- University of Zurich, Switzerland: Ulvi Doguoglu and Anja Pawelleck
- Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Gerhard van de Bunt and Silvester Draaijer
- Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium: Philippe Emplit and Laurent Licata
- Group coordinator: Luisa Bunescu, Policy & Project Officer, EUA

ANNEX #2: MODEL OF A FRAMEWORK FOR CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING COMPETENCES

Continuous Development of Teaching Competences



Professor Y T McIntyre-Bhatty, 05/06/18

Endnotes

- 1 _____ Paris Communiqué, 25 May 2018. <https://bit.ly/2A6LIMN> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 2 _____ See, for example, High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, 2013, Report to the European Commission on improving the quality of teaching in learning in Europe's higher education institutions. <https://bit.ly/2ALnthe> (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 _____ European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching (EFFECT), Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. <http://bit.ly/EFFECTprinciples> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 5 _____ For more information on the project visit the project website: <http://bit.ly/EFFECTproject> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 6 _____ The group would like to thank the Université libre de Bruxelles, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the University of Zurich for hosting the three meetings of the group. 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.
- 7 _____ This term is based on the group's understanding of innovation in higher education as (naturally) proceeding at different speeds and occurring on different levels or strata.
- 8 _____ Cf. Sursock, A., 2015, Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities (Brussels, EUA). <http://bit.ly/EUATRENDS2015> (accessed 21/12/2018). As part of the EFFECT project (see Introduction and note above), EUA has also produced the following report: Bunescu, L. and Gaebel, M., 2018, National Initiatives in Learning and Teaching in Europe (Brussels, EUA). <http://bit.ly/NationalInitiativesLT> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 9 _____ The UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education, 2011. <https://bit.ly/2vDDJPE> (accessed 21/12/2018).
- 10 _____ Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), 2018, Evaluation of teaching achievements for academic career progression: General framework and indicators. <https://bit.ly/2D9GzzE> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 11 _____ ULB, 2017 (2012), ULB Teaching and Learning Charter: Teaching & Learning Services (DSEA). <https://bit.ly/2QMhVsl> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 12 _____ Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2017, Framework for Teaching Performances at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. <https://bit.ly/2VWB8LY> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 13 _____ <https://www.unipd.it/en/teaching4learning> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 14 _____ Gibbs, G., Coffey, M., 2004, 'The impact of training university teachers on their teaching skills, their approach to teaching and the approach to learning of their students', Active Learning in Higher Education 5 (1), pp. 87-100. <https://bit.ly/1D-WNwxq> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 15 _____ Trigwell, K., Prosser, M., Waterhouse, F., 1999, 'Relations Between Teachers' Approaches to Teaching and Students' Approaches to Learning', Higher Education 37, pp. 57-70. <https://bit.ly/2RNh9Qj> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 16 _____ For useful practices concerning programme committees, see <https://opleidingscommissies.nl/en/> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 17 _____ <https://knowvu.nl/> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 18 _____ <https://tauu.uu.nl/> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 19 _____ <https://www.nro.nl/en> (accessed 02/01/2019).
- 20 _____ <https://elearning.unipd.it/t4l/> (accessed 02/01/2019).

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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.