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Enhancing teacher engagement and expanding staff development opportunities

Thematic Peer Group Report

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Introduction

As a primary objective, the Learning & Teaching activities of the European University Association (EUA) aim to "enhance the quality and relevance of higher education provision [and to] underline the importance of learning and teaching as a core mission [of higher education]".[1] In recent years, EUA's work on these goals has consistently pointed to the need for higher education institutions to focus more closely on *how* they intend to enhance the quality and relevance of their education provision, notably through staff development.

For example, reports issued by EUA Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups on such diverse topics as "Evaluation of learning and teaching,"[2] "Flexible learning and teaching,"[3] and "Exploring strategies for institutions to leverage the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning"[4] have all stressed the need to invest more comprehensively and strategically in continuous professional development for teaching staff. At the same time, convincing academic staff – beyond those who already participate – to engage in (voluntary) continuous professional development has repeatedly been identified as a challenge.[5]

In this context, the 2025 Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Group "Enhancing teacher engagement and expanding staff development opportunities" (henceforth "the group," see Appendix for the group's mission and member institutions) was tasked with exploring different approaches to organising, sustaining, and expanding staff engagement in development opportunities. It also aimed to address how these approaches may help to increase the relevance of the development offer and, ultimately, to support teachers and their wellbeing, for example by addressing the need for adequate recognition of quality teaching.

1   https://www.eua.eu/our-work/topics/learning-teaching.html (accessed 12/11/2025).

2   Dewhirst, C. & Gover, A., 2019, *Evaluation of learning and teaching: Thematic Peer Group Report* (Learning & Teaching Paper #4). (Brussels, European University Association).https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/evaluation-of-learning-and-teaching-thematic-peer-group-report.html (accessed 12/11/2025), p. 7.

3   Brekke, M. & Zhang, T., 2024, *Flexible learning and teaching: Thematic Peer Group Report* (Learning & Teaching Paper #21). (Brussels: European University Association). https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/flexible-learning-and-teaching.html (accessed 12/11/2025), p. 17.

4   Emplit, P. & Biaggi, C., 2025, *Exploring strategies for institutions to leverage the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Thematic Peer Group Report* (Learning & Teaching Paper #25). (Brussels: European University Association). https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/exploring-strategies-for-institutions-to-leverage-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning.html (accessed 12/11/2025), p. 8.

5   See for example Costa, M. J. & Peterbauer, H., 2024, *Development and strategic benefits of learning and teaching centres: Thematic Peer Group Report* (Learning & Teaching Paper #23). (Brussels: European University Association). https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/development-and-strategic-benefits-of-learning-and-teaching-centres.html (accessed 12/11/2025), p. 13. See also Fitzpatrick, M. & Morrisroe, A., 2023, *Collaborative teaching practice: Thematic Peer Group Report* (Learning & Teaching Paper #18). (Brussels: European University Association). https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/collaborative-teaching-practice-thematic-peer-group-report.html (accessed 12/11/2025), p. 6.

The group was organised in the context of the Erasmus+ co-funded 'Staff development for learning and teaching at European universities' (STAFF-DEV) project,[6] which analyses how staff development and academic assessment are conducted at European higher education institutions. Another aim of the project is to strengthen institutional capacity and strategies with regard to staff development.

This report summarises the group's findings, based on the 10 institutional group members' experiences and practices. The group applied the term "staff development" in its broadest sense, though with a primary focus on development offers that aim to enhance the quality, relevance and innovativeness of teaching practices (e.g. courses on assessment methods or on using artificial intelligence in the classroom). Discussions were geared towards various organisational levels, with a view to anchoring staff development and teaching quality in institutional culture. While development offers geared towards individual staff members' personal and career development (e.g. courses on time management or leadership skills) were not explicitly excluded from the group's discussions, they did not arise as a dominant topic.

The report begins by outlining the fundamental, typically systemic challenges underlying limited staff engagement in development opportunities. It then continues with recommendations of measures that institutions can take to address and potentially overcome these challenges. These recommendations are illustrated with practice examples from the group members, though the group is very mindful of the fact that in many institutional and national contexts, increased engagement in staff development might require a broader cultural shift rather than single measures or quick fixes, since a lack of parity of esteem between teaching and other higher education missions was found to be the single greatest reason for limited interest in staff development for learning and teaching. The group thus urges institutions to adopt a sound and context-sensitive ecosystem of approaches aimed at increasing this parity of esteem, and hopes that this report may be useful in that process.

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6 For more information about the STAFF-DEV project, visit https://www.eua.eu/our-work/projects/eu-funded-projects/staffdev.html (accessed 12/11/2025).

Why engagement in staff development needs enhancing

During its meetings, the group members recounted similar experiences of a typical staff development course, where the front rows are usually filled by early-career academics for whom such courses might be mandatory, as well as by more experienced staff members with a local reputation of being leaders in educational innovation (i.e. "the usual suspects"). Other participating staff members are often found towards the back, perhaps after having received a suboptimal teaching review and being prompted to join the course, and may appear reluctant to engage in the course content and follow-up. Finally, most senior academics are likely to avoid participating either in individual courses or teaching development offers more broadly, due to the widespread notion that an excellent researcher will automatically make for an excellent teacher.

This familiar picture raises the following question: **if teaching is a fundamental aspect of the academic profession, why do academics need to be convinced to continuously seek to innovate and enhance this part of their work, while they require no such convincing with regard to research?**

The reasons for this imbalance are complex and deeply entrenched in academic culture. The biggest underlying factor is a lack of parity of esteem between a university's teaching and research missions, which in practice often means that many staff members will see no tangible reward – for example in their career progression – for making an effort to improve or innovate in their teaching. This situation has manifold consequences, which can be summarised as a lack of professionalisation in teaching. This is derived from the widespread view that teaching in academia is still considered an individual, almost "private" business, much in contrast to the community and peer review-based approaches in research.

In addition, staff development for teaching is frequently perceived as an optional add-on rather than an integral component of academic work, and it competes with numerous other responsibilities that higher education teachers must balance. Teaching itself is often viewed primarily as a practice rather than as a set of systematic competencies and skills that require intentional development. Together, these factors tend to hamper the advancement of a more professionalised, scholarly approach to teaching practice.

Another typical challenge is that leadership and staff members alike sometimes view and approach staff development for teaching as an ad-hoc corrective measure, rather than as a form of continuous professional development, which would require a long-term vision and institution-wide commitment to quality teaching. This challenge raises questions about how investment in staff development can remain a strategic institutional priority despite pressure on resources and potential changes in leadership, as well as how an institution communicates the purpose of its staff development offer.

To tackle this complex web of challenges, the group identified three priorities:

1. Recognising the key role of quality teaching, as well as efforts undertaken to achieve it, and related successes;
2. Supporting community-building and peer-exchange in teaching;
3. Communicating positively and purposefully about staff development for teaching.

These three priorities will be explained and illustrated through examples of tried-and-tested practice from the group members in the following section.

Towards the professionalisation of teaching
The role of recognition, community and communication

Priority #1

Recognising the key role of quality teaching, as well as efforts undertaken to achieve it, and related successes

In order to spark greater interest in quality teaching and the measures required to provide it, a university first needs to recognise teaching as an integral part of the academic profession, on a par with research. The underlying challenges and the proposed solutions seem equally complex, yet there are tangible steps a university can take to gradually achieve a more balanced recognition of the teaching profession and the effort required to boost staff development.

Career paths, benefits and working conditions

At the institutional level, there is an unavoidable need for career paths, benefits, and working conditions that acknowledge the crucial contribution of teaching to academia. Achieving this may require a substantial, multi-year reform in many areas, but measures can start out relatively small, for example by granting equal access to study leave and sabbaticals to academics regardless of whether they are on a research, teaching or mixed track.

In parallel, institutions can integrate staff development achievements into their promotion and evaluation criteria to signal that teaching enhancement is an essential dimension of academic excellence. Explicitly recognising participation in pedagogical training, completion of teaching certificates, or evidence of innovation in learning and teaching within annual reviews or tenure processes ensures that staff development contributes tangibly to career progression. Such alignment between professional learning and institutional reward structures helps embed teaching enhancement within academic identity rather than treating it as voluntary or peripheral.

Revising the institution's overarching framework for staff development and assessment in order to strengthen recognition of teaching may constitute an even more substantial undertaking, but has an arguably higher impact. This is no niche endeavour either – universities across Europe are in the process of reforming their research assessment frameworks in the context of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).[7] These reform processes can be used as an opportunity for broader reflection on how to better assess the full spectrum of academics' work, achievements, and development needs, including in teaching. The University of Graz, for example, is currently in the process of reforming its framework for staff evaluations based on the CoARA commitments and long-term internal processes. The university's new Activity Framework[8] is a transparent and multi-perspective tool to redefine expectations and enhance the recognition of scientific work. It acknowledges the diverse aspects of academic contributions beyond publications and projects. It is designed to provide clarity on the requirements of scientific work, support career planning, and improve the visibility of individual achievements including teaching and the third mission. The

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7   https://www.coara.org/ (accessed 18/11/2025).

8   https://activity-framework.uni-graz.at/en/implementation-at-the-university-of-graz/ (accessed 20/11/2025).

framework is not a performance evaluation tool, does not set quantified targets, and carries no contractual consequences. Instead, it serves as a basis for discussions during annual employee meetings, fostering shared goal-setting between staff and supervisors. By emphasizing the intrinsic link between research and teaching, the Activity Framework aims to foster a culture where excellence in one area enriches the others.

Just as quality teaching needs to be adequately recognised, so does the effort required for impactful staff development for teaching. Otherwise, it will be difficult to shake off the notion of development work as "going the extra mile", especially in terms of workload. Formally acknowledging that staff development takes time signals that such efforts are a core part of staff's work. At Izmir University of Economics, the commitment to pedagogical excellence is reflected in a structured staff development programme offered by the Teaching and Learning Centre, which recognises pedagogical training as a formal component of academic duty. For research assistants, this is organised as a mandatory preparatory phase. By requiring teachers to complete teacher training before they assume teaching responsibilities, the university ensures that pedagogical development takes place prior to full instructional engagement. In this way, the initial stages of the academic career path are deliberately structured to allow protected time and focus for developing student-centred and evidence-based teaching practices.

Showcasing and celebrating teaching innovations and achievements

Granting greater visibility to teaching innovations and achievements in academic life is a crucial step towards raising the profile of teaching. One way to generate visibility is through teaching awards, which may be organised at (inter-)institutional, faculty, departmental or even disciplinary level, for example through staff and/or student nominations. Awards may be literal rewards with a financial focus, but the group found that the more crucial benefit of awards was the public acknowledgment and attention given to teaching. Izmir University of Economics, for example, hands out Innovation in Education awards, covering five categories: innovation in pedagogy, assessment, technology-enhanced teaching, environmentally sustainable learning, and micro-credentials. They are open to individual academics or interdisciplinary teams including students and staff. Applications are reviewed against criteria such as originality, effectiveness, and pedagogical relevance, with winners announced at the university's academic opening ceremony. By publicly celebrating creative and evidence-based teaching, the initiative raises the visibility of educational innovation and reinforces the institutional value placed on quality teaching.

Yet how can an institution ensure that staff and students are aware of the award ceremonies and indeed attend them? The University of Rijeka solved this challenge by integrating such awards in student graduation ceremonies, thus raising the level of visibility and celebration of excellence. The awards handed out during graduation ceremonies are part of the university's *Dies Academicus*. Despite its name, this "day" is in fact a week-long celebration of academic excellence and university life, which includes social events intended for the entire academic community (e.g., opening of important facilities such as student sport venues, theatrical performances and recitals, or presentations of notable university projects), academic panels and workshops (e.g. on mindfulness and wellbeing, career paths for students, or study programme quality assurance), graduation ceremonies (e.g., PhD), and award ceremonies (e.g. Chancellor's awards for best students, certificates for tenured professors, or Honorary Professorship awards).

At HTW Berlin, the teaching award is deliberately given visibility over an extended period rather than episodically. All award recipients are interviewed and portrayed through personal narratives developed by the university's Teaching and Learning Centre as part of institutional communications. In these features, recipients describe their teaching approach and the concrete steps they took in their innovation. Over time, this has resulted in a curated collection of "Inspiring Practice" examples[9]

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9 https://www.htw-berlin.de/lehre/lehrinnovation/preis-fuer-gute-lehre/ (accessed 15/12/2025).

that continuously showcase excellent teaching and keeps the award present in the institutional consciousness.

Other activities can include regular teaching newsletters, seminars, or poster sessions to showcase new projects, innovative approaches, successes and other lessons learnt. The University of Glasgow, for example, supports a wide range of teaching-focused activities designed to showcase and support colleagues engaged in education-focused activities. The university's Adam Smith Business School hosts a Learning and Teaching summer school[10] each year as well as an annual Celebration of Scholarship poster session. The School of Social and Political Sciences has an Innovative Pedagogy Hub[11] where colleagues can trial creative ideas or approaches, discuss teaching successes and failures, and discuss the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. They also host an annual International Best Practice in Social Sciences teaching conference.

In the same vein, the University of Barcelona promotes the design, implementation and evaluation of learning and teaching research through its REDICE programme, developed by the University's Institute of Professional Development. In this programme, teams of lecturers conduct research on their own teaching practices. The results are shared at an annual interdisciplinary conference and through workshops, which foster discussion and debate among teaching staff on how to improve the quality of their teaching.

External stakeholders such as employers and the local community also have a role to play in fostering a culture of appreciation for teaching, as they, too, have a well-founded stake in students receiving an excellent education. Thus, involving external stakeholders more closely in measures to acknowledge and showcase innovative teaching, for example by inviting them to nominate staff for teaching awards when they have worked on a joint project, could help to build a stronger and broader culture of appreciation for teaching. Alumni could be involved in a similar way, for example by nominating a university teacher whose classes were particularly insightful or transformative.

Finally, an even more low-key but equally impactful way to highlight teaching is to integrate it into the agenda of regular leadership, faculty, and departmental meetings and seminars, which often tend to focus on research. Regularity and persistence are key to achieving a long-lasting impact and moving towards parity of esteem. Regular in-person opportunities to exchange on teaching practice can be particularly helpful in highlighting the value an institution places on teaching, while also helping to kickstart a community of interested staff members.

Priority #2

Supporting community-building, peer-exchange and a feedback culture in teaching

Teaching can offer deeply rewarding experiences to academics, but in many institutional contexts it is not common practice to share these experiences, including the accompanying challenges, successes and lessons learnt, be it through formal or informal channels. This can also have a negative effect on attitudes towards staff development opportunities: teaching staff who are not used to sharing their teaching experiences may primarily view teaching development courses as a risk in terms of exposing their teaching to criticism, and may thus be hesitant to attend.

Peer observations, mentoring and feedback culture

The group found that instilling a more community- and peer-based culture in institutional teaching practices, for example through co-teaching, can significantly change attitudes towards staff development as well. At the same time, community and peer approaches can in themselves be part of staff development. Peer observations are, for example, used at Comenius University Bratislava,

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10 https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/learningandteaching/news/headline_1111757_en.html (accessed 26/11/2025).

11 https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/innovative-pedagogy-hub/ (accessed 26/22/2025).

which promotes this practice through its voluntary staff development courses. An introductory 60-minute workshop explains the purpose and format and gives participants a chance to ask questions. Each participant then invites a peer to observe their teaching – someone from the course, their department, or anyone they feel comfortable with. During the peer visit, the observer records their impressions on a form provided by the development course facilitators. Afterwards, the participant and observer meet to discuss their perspectives. Finally, the participant writes a reflective paper on what went well, what could be improved, and how they plan to improve it. Course participants frequently invite one another, which fosters a sustainable collegial relationship through constructive friendly feedback.

A similar example is the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona, which has developed an initiative that uses simulation as a teaching methodology to develop transversal competences in teaching staff. This includes co-teaching, by which two or three lecturers from different course units participate in the same simulation session. These lecturers are accompanied by at least one expert in simulation methodology who, after the session, facilitates a meta-debriefing process as a peer feedback strategy among teaching staff. This process opens up a space for reflection and analysis, enabling participants to identify strengths and areas for improvement for subsequent sessions. During these meta-debriefing moments, students also take part by sharing their experience and proposing improvements to the simulated cases, the teaching approach, coordination and other aspects. Building on this, teachers are encouraged to disseminate and publish the results through conference presentations, articles and other scholarly outputs.

At the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, co-teaching is an established practice for onboarding new teaching staff. New staff members are paired with experienced ones for the practical parts of courses (e.g., labs, projects), in order to foster learning from observing and teaching in tandem. New teaching staff are also invited to attend lectures by more experienced staff and discuss their questions with the experienced staff.

However, approaches like peer observations in particular need to be carefully designed, introduced, and communicated, since in some cultures there may be a deeply engrained resistance to the notion of having one's work "spied" on. In this context, it is crucial for the institution to show openness and empathy when addressing staff concerns while also clearly distinguishing quality considerations from academic freedom.

In addition, the institutional feedback culture has a key role to play in encouraging teaching staff to have a more open attitude towards sharing their personal successes and failures, and towards acting upon them. For example, cementing student feedback in an institution's understanding of its teaching enhancement culture can help staff to feel more comfortable hearing constructive criticism and new ideas. Institutional policies and strategies, but also initial teacher training, can be the most powerful levers to instil a robust feedback culture. To achieve the desired results, however, students need to be equipped with strong feedback skills throughout their learning path, especially as potential future academics themselves.

Communities of practice

A more continuous engagement from academics wanting to exchange on their teaching can be achieved by establishing communities of practice. These can be established at faculty, institutional, or cross-institutional level, with academic discipline serving as the unifying factor. Educational developers, too, can play a key role as bridge builders in these communities and supra-disciplinary experts in teaching.

While such communities of practice should be self-sustaining to a maximum degree, they will still require dedicated support from their institution(s), which can provide initial assistance in setting up the community. Another vital task for the institution in this regard is continuous support in raising

awareness of the community's existence and activities. Once the community is up and running, it is crucial to maintain a clear purpose and a well-defined coordinating structure and division of responsibilities. Where possible, activities should offer tangible benefits; however, the community's intrinsic impact on its members' sense of connection and wellbeing should not be underestimated, even when meetings or other activities may not offer concrete take-aways.

At HTW Berlin, community-building around teaching has become an integral and sustained part of the university's staff development landscape. The Teaching and Learning Centre facilitates several communities of practice that bring together instructors interested in exchanging ideas, exploring new approaches and developing shared perspectives on teaching and learning. These communities address cross-cutting themes such as digital and AI-supported teaching, education for sustainable development, and innovative curriculum design. The university provides initial support for launching these communities, but their long-term vitality stems from a clear purpose, shared ownership, and lightweight coordination structures. Regular meetings, peer-exchange formats, and thematic spotlights ensure tangible benefits for members, while the Teaching and Learning Centre's ongoing communication efforts help maintain visibility and attract new participants.[12]

At Tallinn University, the Centre for Learning and Teaching organises events to support community building and collegial learning. Examples include the Lunch and Learn initiative and the Collaborative Learning Days for academic staff. Lunch and Learn is a collaborative learning format that takes place during lunch and includes snacks. Discussion topics are set for each meeting, such as belonging, AI, or students' special needs. Academic developers prepare a one-pager to start the discussion, and then participants share their experiences. Similarly, the university's Collaborative Learning Days, KoosÕppeJõud,[13] foster collegial learning through structured dialogue. The initiative enables academic staff to exchange experiences, co-develop innovations, and build professional learning communities. By promoting dialogue within and between different academic units, it aims to overcome institutional fragmentation and support professional growth. The initiative is structured around an annual thematic focus on professional learning, guiding development seminars within different academic units. The process culminates in an institution-wide Collaborative Learning Day, where participants share best teaching practices and co-develop new pedagogical insights. Outcomes are documented in a publication titled "The Educator Learns,"[14] promoting sustainable professional development.

A community-building initiative established at the Jagiellonian University is Didactic Digressions, a biweekly series of online seminars designed to strengthen a culture of teaching excellence and foster meaningful engagement among academic staff. Managed and coordinated by the Ars Docendi Centre for Teaching Excellence, the initiative serves as a regular, low-threshold meeting point for teaching staff interested not only in improving their pedagogical practice but also in cultivating a sense of belonging to an active, sustained community. The thematic strands of the series – including assessment literacy, methods of teaching, academic identity, intercultural classroom dynamics, and digital tools – reflect ongoing interests and the most frequently requested topics identified in an annual needs survey. This responsiveness to "popular demand" has further strengthened participants' perception that the seminars address authentic, bottom-up needs.

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12 www.htw-berlin.de/lehre/lehrinnovation/curriculum-innovation-hub/community-building/ (accessed 15/12/2025).

13 https://www.tlu.ee/koosoppejoud (accessed 16/12/2025).

14 https://www.tlu.ee/sites/default/files/%C3%95PEK/A5 O%CC%83ppejo%CC%83uAjakiri-2025-interaktiivne.pdf (accessed 16/12/2025).

Priority #3
Communicating positively and purposefully about staff development for teaching

The recommendations and practices outlined above will only succeed if there is also a sustained commitment to the quality of teaching and the value of staff development in enhancing that high quality, from both leadership and staff. Hence, bi-directional – top-down and bottom-up – communication about the key role of staff development is needed to ensure that activities have a wide reach and engage individual academics beyond the usual suspects, as well as having a deep impact on the institution's overall culture.

Besides finding the right mix of media to reach relevant target groups of staff development opportunities, the group found that the right language is also key to achieving buy-in from staff. Regardless of whether it is mandatory or voluntary, staff development needs to be (re-)framed as a positive learning opportunity and a support mechanism, rather than a chore or, worse yet, punishment for poor performance. High-quality staff development allows teachers to better address potential challenges in their practice (e.g. by using new tools or more authentic assessment methods), thus helping them make the most of their valuable and limited time.

To communicate this message effectively, an institution may want to systematically revise the language it uses to talk about teaching and staff development. To facilitate communication at Tallinn University, for example, academic developers at the Centre for Learning and Teaching compiled a one-page document about the university's learning-centred approach to teaching.[15] Throughout its university-wide communication, the Centre changed the language used to discuss teaching and staff development and exchanged the learner-centred discourse for a learning-centred one. The one-page overview also includes important know-how and stories from teaching staff's experiences.

In addition, a university may benefit from a professional communications department that supports its communication strategy. The University of Glasgow, for example, has the support of a Projects and Communications Engagement Lead (PCEL) from the University's Transformation Team. The PCEL drafts communication plans including monthly newsletters to staff, with featured events and resources and individually designed communications materials for strategic projects and development workshops. They also coordinate with various teams and departments on campus to ensure compliance with the university's wider communications strategy and maintain clear and consistent messaging. The PCEL's support helps staff make the connection between the staff development events and the university's broader goals.

However, this kind of communications department is a resource that needs to be backed and ensured in the long term by top-level leadership. Hence, it is equally crucial to convince university leaders that investment in staff development, including related professional communications, serves the institution's interests. Impactful staff development is crucial for an institution's overall teaching quality; it should thus be considered a key part of a university's mission and identity. This alone should be reason enough for institutional leadership to make a long-term investment in staff development; however, to anchor it even more deeply in an institution's core business, staff development needs to be understood as a change management process and a lever for comprehensive reform.

At the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, for example, the shift to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic prompted the introduction of a voluntary certification course to help professors teach effectively in online and blended formats. This structured programme, delivered through expert-led workshops rather than peer sessions, was designed to rapidly build teaching staff's know-how and confidence in using digital tools and methods. By awarding a formal certificate upon completion, the initiative provided recognition for newly acquired skills and underscored the institution's commitment to supporting innovation in teaching. This

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15 https://www.tlu.ee/milleks-oppimiskeskne-opetamisviis (accessed 16/12/2025).

approach led to broad participation by academic staff, including many who had not previously engaged in voluntary pedagogical training, thereby strengthening overall teacher engagement in professional development.

Adopting a more long-term perspective, the University of Graz has approached staff development by organising its reform through study panels for evidence-based educational development. Study panels are strategic platforms aimed at enhancing study success and the appeal of academic programmes, among other things. They bring together key stakeholders of a study programme or faculty, such as deans, curriculum members, and teaching staff, to discuss progress and challenges across study phases. Supported by service departments, panels use student data for evidence-based analysis to identify areas for improvement. The discussions result in study-specific enhancements and the implementation of improved teaching practices, often involving teaching support services. Typical outcomes include tailored staff development measures, such as targeted workshops to enhance teaching skills.

Universities may also consider conducting study panels in cooperation with other institutions at the national or international level, for example through talks by invited experts or learning designers. Just as community-based approaches may lead to greater impact on the development of individual teaching staff, interinstitutional peer exchange may equally lead to an even more deeply entrenched cultural shift towards greater appreciation for and investment in staff development throughout the institution.

Conclusions

The group hopes that the recommendations and practices in this report will inspire other institutions to make a strategic, long-term commitment to strengthening the recognition of teaching in academia and to staff development, thus helping to expand teacher engagement in development opportunities.

This is indeed the right moment for such an investment, as there are multiple national and European-level initiatives showing that the full breadth of competences and achievements among academic staff require more nuanced and fairer acknowledgement, as well as greater development support. Besides the CoARA initiative which, as outlined above, has kickstarted several research assessment reforms at institutional and national levels, EUA's five *Key principles for attractive and sustainable academic careers* argue for "[c]learly elaborated and communicated institutional policies for continuous professional development" as an investment in "[a]cademic quality, understood as the pursuit of excellence in research, innovation, teaching and other university missions".[16] Similar efforts are ongoing at the EU level, for example through the publication of the European Research Competence Framework,[17] which includes a section on teaching in academic and vocational contexts, as well as plans to develop a separate European competence framework for academic staff.[18]

These developments are part of a broader societal debate about European competitiveness, and skills needs and gaps, which has recently thrown a brighter spotlight on the need for highly skilled teachers in education. National policies and strategies reflect this debate and can thus provide a welcome boost to initiatives at the institutional level. Universities can only benefit from capitalising on this momentum.

16 European University Association, 2025, *Key principles for attractive and sustainable academic careers: Final report of the EUA Task-and-Finish Group on Academic Careers* (Brussels, European University Association). https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/key-principles-for-attractive-and-sustainable-academic-careers.html (accessed 21/11/2025), p. 7.

17 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/jobs-research/researchcomp-european-competence-framework-researchers_en (accessed 21/11/2025).

18 European Commission, 2024, *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education*. https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-03/Proposal%20for%20a%20Council%20Recommendation%20on%20attractive%20and%20sustainable%20careers%20in%20higher%20education.pdf (accessed 21/11/2025), p. 12.

Appendix

EUA LEARNING & TEACHING THEMATIC PEER GROUPS

As part of its work on learning and teaching, EUA carries out activities with the aim of engaging with university communities responsible for 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 considerations or recommendations on the selected theme.

The 2025 Thematic Peer Groups, active from March 2025 to February 2026, invited participating universities to engage in peer learning and exchange of experience; 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. They were organised in the context of the Erasmus+ co-funded STAFF-DEV project (Staff development for learning and teaching at European universities).

Each group was chaired by one university and supported by a coordinator from the EUA secretariat. Each group had three base meetings, either online or at a member university, to discuss 1) key challenges related to the theme; 2) ways to address these challenges through innovative practices and approaches; and 3) the institutional policies and processes that might support improvements in learning and teaching. Outside the three meetings, the groups were free to meet online for shorter meetings or organise their work independently. Members of the groups also attended a final workshop, where they had the opportunity to discuss the outcomes of other groups and address synergies. The workshop was hosted by Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon on 11 February 2026, and was followed by the 2026 European Learning & Teaching Forum from 12-13 February, where focus groups based on the work of the Thematic Peer Groups were organised to obtain feedback on their results.

Composition of the Thematic Peer Group "Enhancing teacher engagement and expanding staff development opportunities"
(starting with the group chair and by alphabetical order of the country name):

- **University of Glasgow, United Kingdom (chair)**
  - Duncan Ross, Dean of Learning and Teaching and Deputy Head, College of Social Sciences
  - Amanda Sykes, Head of Learning and Teaching Strategy Unit
  - Kimberly Davis, Principal Academic Development Adviser

- **University of Graz, Austria**
  - Gudrun Salmhofer, Head of Academic Services and Competence Center for University Teaching
  - Beatrice Kogler, Academic Developer and Instructional Designer, Competence Center for University Teaching

- **University of Rijeka, Croatia**
  - Irena Jurdana, Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Faculty of Maritime Studies
  - Neira Toric Malic, Vice Dean for Education and Student Affairs, Faculty of Civil Engineering
  - Vanja Slavuj, Vice Dean of Studies and Students, Faculty of Informatics and Digital Technologies

- **Tallinn University, Estonia**
  - Kaire Povilaitis, Head of the Centre for Learning and Teaching
  - Katrin Aava, Expert for Academic Development of the Centre for Learning and Teaching

- **HTW Berlin, Germany**
  - Angela Weißköppel, Head of Teaching Support Centre
  - Nadja Bajerksi, Director of Future Professors Programme

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