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Inside

- Quality and Teaching: a partnership with a future
- IMHE news
- Publications of interest
- IMHE calendar

QUALITY AND TEACHING: A PARTNERSHIP WITH A FUTURE

Why promote teaching quality in higher education? How should it work? Which initiatives succeed and what results should be expected?

In 2008, IMHE launched a review into the quality of teaching to better determine the diversity of initiatives and the different responses of institutions. Twenty-nine completed a questionnaire online and were asked about their practices. This article examines the initial results, which were presented at a conference organised with Oberta Universitat de Catalunya in Barcelona in December 2008. The full report will be available in spring 2009.

One engine: the context

For the debate on teaching quality in higher education to become more widespread within establishments, it must be supported by national policies or strengthened by a favourable international context. For example, establishments have been encouraged to guarantee quality in the courses they offer, particularly by improving teaching quality, as part of national reforms to strengthen institutional independence. Similarly, pressure from trans-border integration and harmonisation processes, following the example of the European Higher Education Area, have forced establishments to pay particular attention to teaching quality. Such processes have put teaching quality on the national agenda. Furthermore, competition between establishments, often stimulated by governments through selective funding for training and research, has forced establishments to provide an indication of their performance in terms of results. To meet this requirement, they are adopting ongoing quality improvement policies that often include a section on teaching quality. Thus, as regards courses competing

on the world market, establishments ensure quality by, for example, paying special attention to the recruitment of staff or assessing employers' opinions of the courses.

These developments also involve universities known for their research that have progressively invested in teaching quality. As the professional outlook for academics is diversifying and ties between laboratories and the economic world are being strengthened, universities want to check the teaching skills of their staff, over and beyond their regularly assessed scientific excellence.

Finally, the development of quality assurance systems is encouraging establishments to make a commitment to teaching quality. Assessments and accreditations repeatedly force establishments to think about the relevance of the courses they offer, the suitability of staff profiles by discipline, ways to assess students and the quality of equipment and premises.

However, quality remains an elusive, multi-dimensional area and the assessment and accreditation systems are struggling to grasp its complexity. They assess how courses are organised and operate rather than learning processes.

A long, turbulent process

The introduction of quality policies by establishments is a long and complex process that sometimes follows divergent paths. The time factor is still crucial in establishing a coherent institutional policy.

Often, establishments that invest in teaching quality offer staff a range of training courses to improve their methods or their understanding of the IT tools being used in class. Establishments have also tended to systematically assess courses and teaching in order to garner students' opinions of the organisation and relevance of the teaching received. Considerable work has also been personally initiated by heads of department or staff in most establishments. Without wanting to contest the effectiveness or originality of this kind of work, it is difficult to sustain and tends to disappear when its champion leaves the establishment.

From practice to theory

As it is sometimes difficult for an establishment to find out about initiatives created in a particular department or led by individuals, some establishments have sought to identify good practices in departments in order to improve their efficiency. Others have identified the most relevant levers for action within global quality improvement policies.

To achieve this, these establishments have defined a conceptual quality framework to explain the function of teaching in the learning process and jointly define the goals. Teaching then



Fernando Leon Garcia

The quality of teaching initiative at City University of Seattle (CityU) places particular attention on the preparation and contributions of part-time faculty. Since CityU launched this initiative, the institution has completely revamped its training and orientation process for new faculty. The first part is offered before faculty start teaching for CityU and involves an online based training module. The second portion is scheduled as faculty are teaching their first course and involves mentoring and coaching by experienced and proven CityU faculty. So far this year, a total of 71 faculty have successfully gone through this process.



becomes a subject for debate between the various groups involved, such as the academic body and students. Discussions cover several dimensions, such as teaching methods, the added educational value of staff, the physical conditions that encourage learning (the work environment for example) and students' learning practices. Once a consensus has emerged on the definition of quality, the concrete resources to be deployed in the institution to assist staff in accomplishing their tasks can be envisaged.

Institutional momentum, implementation on the ground

Concerted intervention at institutional level prevents resources being scattered, makes work that can emerge at departmental or programme level sustainable, and sanctions global management and assessment of the initiatives carried out.

For example, the creation of an internal department dedicated to teaching quality, such as a Professional Development Office, marks an important stage in an establishment's commitment to teaching quality. Often small, these departments ensure that the initiatives offered by the establishment are coherent, they collate the needs and feelings of staff and they offer them specific training courses or help them implement programme assessments. Beyond this technical support role, some departments develop education research and thus participate in the establishment's deliberations on teaching quality. However, these departments alone cannot compensate for an institution's low level of commitment or encourage a real culture of teaching quality.



The University of La Laguna is currently involved in the process of restructuring all of its degrees and qualifications to suit the European Higher Education Area standards. A key feature of this reform is the design of a customised Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) that has, among its main goals, the systematic, structured and

continuous teacher quality assessment and enhancement. Included in this IQAS are guidance and tutoring programs and teacher's guides. A program for teacher performance evaluation (DOCENTIA) and a comprehensive teacher training program with particular impact on e-learning (DPDU) are being carried out at the same time.



Small institutions manage quality initiatives with staff more easily because decision-making is quicker and information flows more freely. Medium-sized and specialised establishments (such as colleges and applied science schools) or departments offering professional training courses have logically sought to support the teaching skills of their staff who often come from outside academia.

As regards the large, multi-discipline universities, they are also deploying ambitious policies in this area. The heterogeneity and size of an establishment are not an obstacle when the organisational system is well thought out, the role of each person is clear and the practical conditions are well put together (premises, timetables). The success of a teaching quality policy lies in both the unfailing support of management and the involvement of heads of department. The latter ensure that the direction of the policy is coherent through their role as cogs between central management and staff. Heads of department and programme directors roll out the policy. However, a feeling

Institutions in Spotlight

- UNNE – Universidad Nacional del Nordeste (Argentina)
- Macquarie University (Australia)
- UCL- Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium)
- McGill University (Canada)
- Université de Montréal (Canada)
- Université de Sherebrook (Canada)
- CBS - Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)
- Arcada - University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
- Laurea - University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
- Université de Lille 2 Droit et Santé (France)
- Université de Pau et des pays de l'Adour (France)
- Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (Germany)
- Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland)
- Tohoku Fukushi University (Japan)
- Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania)
- UADY – Universidad Autónoma De Yucatàn (Mexico)
- VU University - Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
- State University, Higher School of Economics (Russia)
- UOC-Open University of Catalonia (Spain)
- University of Geneva (Switzerland)
- Istanbul Technical University (Turkey)
- The Institute of Education – University of London (UK)
- University of Teesside (UK)
- Alverno College (USA)
- City University of Seattle (USA)
- University of Arizona (USA)
- U21 Global (Online University)

of acceptance among those involved in the quality process (teaching and administrative staff) remains the other crucial element if such policies are to succeed.

Teaching quality: the keys to success

The review carried out by IMHE confirms that most initiatives encouraging quality combine:

- A vision centred on input (putting stress on the quality of staff recruitment, the resources given to teaching and university success) with
- A knowledge-based approach with regard to the needs of society (to this end institutions have redefined programmes, strengthened ties with the professional world or sought training quality labels).

Despite this combination, establishments are struggling to understand the connection between the quality of input and the quality of results, and are not managing to demonstrate its synergy: the relationships of cause and effect remain difficult to assess.

Establishments have therefore created new assessment systems that seek to understand the relationship between resources, processes and the results obtained. These establishments have been able to show (without necessarily proving) an impact in various ways. Strengthening of staff-student interaction, modernisation of teaching methods or the adaptation of teaching conditions appear to be positive concrete results. Generally speaking, the study concludes that institutional support for teaching quality tends to generate an awareness of staff responsibility in the learning process. This demonstrates an overwhelming need to assist staff in carrying out their mission.

For more information:

www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/qualityteaching

If you are interested in this work or would like to join IMHE, contact: fabrice.henard@oecd.org

The IMHE welcomes the following new members:

- > Medical University of Vienna – Austria
- > Manitoba Department of Advanced Education and Literacy – Canada
- > Ministry of Education and Research – Estonia
- > Eötvös Loránd University – Hungary
- > Università di Milano-Bicocca – Italy
- > Waseda University – Japan
- > Ministry of Education and Science – Lithuania
- > National Commission for Higher Education – Malta
- > National Association of Technical Tertiary & Professional Educators of Trinidad & Tobago – Trinidad and Tobago

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES (AHELO)

Decades of rapid growth in the numbers of students and institutions in higher education have increased the need for greater attention to quality and relevance in higher education. IMHE, with the support of both governments and institutions, has embarked on a feasibility study to explore the scope for developing an international Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO). The purpose is to gauge whether such an assessment is scientifically and practically feasible. For the sake of a feasibility study, it is not necessary to develop a comprehensive assessment. Rather, a feasibility study provides an opportunity to explore different approaches, methodologies and instruments that might eventually be envisaged as parts of a fully-fledged assessment. The work will be divided into four distinct strands of work to be undertaken separately,

but coherently. First, the AHELO feasibility study will involve three small scale pilots of instruments to assess *generic skills* and discipline-specific assessments in two disciplines (*engineering* and *economics* have been chosen for the feasibility study). Each international pilot is expected to involve about 10 HEIs from a small number of countries representing a breadth of languages, cultures and geographic backgrounds, to assess the international validity and reliability of the instruments used. As part of each of these assessments, contextual data, as well as indirect proxies of higher education quality will be collected to add essential analytic dimensions to AHELO, and to underline the potential danger of conducting an outcomes assessment without taking account of systemic, institutional and individual characteristics. In addition to these assessment pilots and the contextual data collections embedded into them, another

strand of work will explore the issue of *value-added measurement in higher education* – i.e. the learning gain that takes place during the higher education experience irrespective of previous abilities. This last strand of work is deemed to provide input for the longer term development of an AHELO, should the feasibility study demonstrate the scientific and practical viability of such an endeavour.

As of April 2009, 11 countries have already joined or are supporting the AHELO feasibility study and several countries are still studying the possibility of joining the project. A group of national experts met on 17-18 December 2008 to allocate participating countries to the various strands of work.

For more information please visit:
www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo or contact:
karine.tremblay@oecd.org

INNOVATION THRIVES ON HUMAN CAPITAL

FIFTEEN REGIONS JOIN THE REVIEWS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN REGIONAL AND CITY DEVELOPMENT

There are wide disparities between OECD regions in innovation outcomes. OECD data shows that human capital is by far the strongest determinant of innovation output: there is a strong correlation between educational attainment and the level of innovation. Overall, the impact of human capital is near double that of R&D. Large urban areas usually generate more innovation than regions with lower population density. In addition, innovative regions tend to be located next to one another, particularly in Europe. Even if innovation outputs



Amsterdam City-Region participates in the OECD review of higher education in regional and city development.

“spill over” and benefit other regions, the spatial decay is very rapid and the rates of co-invention and co-patenting fall away sharply even over a short distance. Regions need to develop their own endogenous innovation capacity.

Reviews of higher education in regional development are the OECD’s vehicle to promote higher education for regional and city development. One of the issues that the reviews focus on is the impact of HEIs on business innovation. The reviews, launched in 2004 by IMHE and the Directorate of Public Governance and Territorial Development, aim to make higher education institutions more open, active and responsive. In 2009-10 fifteen regions and city regions will be reviewed by the OECD. They are: two regions in the United States – Southern Arizona and the Paso del Norte Region, a cross-border region with Mexico; regions in Australia (State of Victoria), Chile (Bío Bío Region), Brazil (Campinas), Mexico (State of Veracruz), Malaysia (Penang) and Israel (the Galilee); and European regions: Amsterdam, Andalusia, Berlin, Lombardia and Rotterdam.

More information on the individual regions is available on the region-specific web pages.

For more information, see
www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/regionaldevelopment
 or contact: jaana.puukka@oecd.org

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

In 2009, IMHE members have access to all OECD publications online.

To access this service, contact Emily Groves, emily.groves@oecd.org for the user name and password.

This user name and password, valid until the end of 2009, is meant for your personal use only.



OECD Factbook 2009: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics.

OECD Publishing, ISBN: 9789264056046

OECD Factbook 2009 is the fifth edition of a comprehensive and dynamic statistical annual from the OECD. More than 100 indicators cover a wide range of areas: economy, agriculture, education, energy, environment, foreign aid, health and quality of life, industry, information and communications, population/labour force, trade and investment, taxation, public expenditure and R&D. This year, the OECD Factbook features a focus chapter on inequality. Data are provided for all OECD member countries with area totals, and in some cases, for selected non-member economies.



Governing Regional Development Policy: The Use of Performance Indicators.

OECD Publishing, ISBN: 9789264056282

This report examines both the challenges and the opportunities associated with designing and using indicator systems as a tool for the governance of regional development policy. It draws on the experiences of a number of OECD countries and provides an in-depth look at the cases of Italy, the United Kingdom (England),

the United States and the European Union. It builds on previous OECD work on the governance of regional development policy by extending lessons about contractual relations among levels of government to performance indicator systems.

Higher Education Management and Policy, Vol. 20, No. 3.

OECD Publishing, ISBN: 9789264043190

A journal addressed to leaders, managers, researchers and policy makers in the field of higher education institutional management and policy. Covering practice and policy in the field of system and institutional management through articles and reports on research projects of wide international scope. It appears three times a year.



Education, Science and Public Policy. Ideas for an Education Revolution.

Edited by Simon Marginson and Richard James, MUP

When will the "education revolution" really begin? Is the nation ready for the challenges of the global knowledge economy and the emerging centres of innovation around the world? What are the key problems and where are the policy solutions?

MUP e-store: <http://web.mup.unimelb.edu.au/e-store/>.

IMHE CALENDAR

Find all our meetings on
www.oecd.org/edu/imhemetings

29 - 30 June 2009 *Higher Education at a Time of Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities* in co-operation with Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.
Contact: oecd2009@cbs.dk

Autumn 2009 "What Works" on Quality Teaching, Istanbul, Turkey.
☞ Contact: fabrice.henard@oecd.org

Autumn 2009 *Facilities for Higher Education*, organised by the CELE. Venue to be confirmed.
☞ Contact : alastair.blyth@oecd.org

Autumn 2009 *Universities and Regions*, Kansas City, USA. By invitation only.
Date to be confirmed.
☞ Contact: jaana.puukka@oecd.org

13-15 Sept. 2010 IMHE General Conference, Paris, France.
☞ Contact: valerie.lafon@oecd.org

September 2010 *Higher Education and Regions* (time and place to be confirmed).
☞ Contact: jaana.puukka@oecd.org

OTHER MEETINGS OF INTEREST

20-22 April 2009 IAU 3rd Global Meeting of Associations of Universities Guadalajara, Mexico.
www.unesco.org/iau/conferences/upcoming.html

22-24 April 2009 CONAHEC, HACU, IOHE joint conference. *An Inter-American Higher Education Collaboration: Working together to Shape the Future of our Communities*, Guadalajara, Mexico.
www.conahec.org

23-26 August 2009 EAIR conference. *Fighting for Harmony*, Vilnius Lithuania.
<http://www.eair.nl/>

16-19 Sept. 2009 21st Annual EAIE Conference, Madrid, Spain.
www.eaie.org/conference/futureconferences/2009.asp

5-6 November 2009 IAU Annual Conference. *The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Understanding*, Beirut, Lebanon
www.unesco.org/iau/conferences/upcoming.html



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