

## Executive Summary

Higher education is becoming a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy. The imperative for countries to improve employment skills calls for quality teaching within educational institutions. National and transnational debates like the Bologna Process, direct state regulations or incentives, competition among private and state-owned institutions all prompt institutions to put quality teaching on their agenda. Moreover, national quality assurance agencies push for reflection on the subject, even if their influence is controversial.

As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes. Much attention is given to public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions. However these comparisons tend to overemphasise research, using research performance as a yardstick of institutional value. If these processes fail to address the quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging.

Institutions may implement evaluation mechanisms in order to identify and promote good teaching practices. The environment of higher education institutions can enhance the quality of teaching through various means. For example, a national policy run by the public authorities or recommendations issued by quality assurance agencies are likely to help university leaders to phase in a culture of quality that encompasses teaching.

The OECD Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) study on quality teaching highlights effective quality initiatives and promotes reflection; this may in turn help other institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and thereby the quality of their graduates. The study analysed the role of the faculty members, the department, the central university and the state. It identified long-term improvement factors for teaching staff, decision-making bodies and institutions. The study is designed to contribute to reflection on outcomes indicators for higher education.

This study reviewed 29 higher education institutions across 20 OECD and non-OECD countries, collecting information and setting benchmarks on the quality of their teaching. A questionnaire gave participating institutions the chance to set out and analyse their own practices. The sample of institutions represents

the diversity of higher education institutions, from technological and vocational institutions to business institutions, from small-sized undergraduate institutions to those specialised in postgraduate courses.

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### *Primary areas of concern*

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- The drivers and debates sparking a growing attention to quality teaching.
- The aims of the institutions when fostering quality teaching and their guiding philosophy when embedding a quality approach.
- The concrete application of quality teaching initiatives: the implementation challenges, the actors, the needs to be met and the problems to be resolved.
- The dissemination of practices, and the measurement and monitoring of progress.
- The impacts of quality teaching on teaching, research and institutional quality culture.
- The combination of approaches to enhance quality teaching in a sustainable way within the institution.

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### *Main findings*

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- Teaching matters in higher education institutions. Although quality teaching encompasses definitions and concepts that are highly varied and in constant flux, there is a growing number of initiatives (actions, strategies, policies) aimed at improving the quality of teaching.
- The vast majority of initiatives supporting teaching quality are empirical and address the institutions' needs at a given point in time. (Initiatives inspired by academic literature are rare.)
- For a university to consolidate the varied initiatives coherently under an institutional policy remains a long-term, non-linear effort subject to multiple constraints.
- Technology has improved pedagogy and student-teacher interactions.
- Quality teaching must be thought of dynamically, in light of contextual shifts in the higher education environment. Studies are becoming internationalised, and higher education is being asked to contribute to new areas (such as innovation, civic and regional development) in order to produce an appropriately skilled workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
- Senior management must be committed to capturing all the dimensions that affect quality teaching. Students must be committed to providing feedback on curricula and teaching through programme evaluation.

- An effective institutional policy for the quality of teaching brings together:
  - ❖ External factors at the national and international levels (*e.g.* the Bologna Process in Europe) that may foster a climate conducive to the recognition of teaching quality as a priority.
  - ❖ Internal institutional factors such as institutional context and specific circumstances (*e.g.* the appointment of a new chief executive) that are likely to affect the pace of development of quality teaching initiatives.
- Leadership at executive levels is a success factor. The participation of faculty deans is vital, as they are at the interface between an institution's decision-making bodies and teachers on the job. They encourage the cross-fertilisation of strategic approaches, build and support communities of practice, and nurture innovation in everyday practice in the classroom.
- Encouraging bottom-up initiatives from the faculty members, setting them in a propitious learning and teaching environment, providing effective support and stimulating reflection on the role of teaching in the learning process all contribute to quality teaching.
- Neither the size nor the specificity of an institution poses a major obstacle to the development of institutional policies as long as there is strong involvement of the institution's management, and sufficient funding and adequate facilities.
- Educational institutions must strike a balance between technical aspects of quality support (*e.g.* development of course evaluation questionnaires) and fundamental issues (*e.g.* assessing the added value of the teaching initiatives in achieving curriculum objectives).
- The institutions need to develop innovative approaches to measuring the impact of their support on quality teaching. They are still struggling to understand the causal link between their engagement in teaching and the quality of learning outcomes. Exploring the correlation among inputs, processes and outcomes of higher education calls for pioneering and in-depth evaluation instruments.

Institutions want to be recognised as providers of good quality higher education. They understand that competing on the basis of research only is not sufficient to ensure the reputation of the university. As such, they want to find new ways of demonstrating performance. They respond to students' demand for valuable teaching: students want to ensure that their education will lead to jobs and will give them the skills needed in the society of today and tomorrow. Mobility of students and growth of fees increase the consideration given by students to the quality of the teaching.

Support for quality teaching in the sample encompasses a wide range of initiatives that are grouped under three major headings:

1. **Institution-wide and quality assurance policies:** including global projects designed to develop a quality culture at institutional level, like policy design, and support to organisation and internal quality assurance systems.
2. **Programme monitoring:** including actions to measure the design, content and delivery of the programmes (through programme evaluation notably).
3. **Teaching and learning support:** including initiatives targeting the teachers (on the teaching side), the students (on the learning side) or both (e.g. on the work environment). Examples include continuing education for faculty, pedagogy enhancement, student support (e.g. mentoring and career advice), support for student learning (focused on inputs, such as the introduction of new pedagogical tools, or on outputs, such as the development of certain abilities for the students).

An **institutional commitment** to quality teaching at top leadership level and at departmental level calls for leaders and staff to identify benchmarks, promote good practices and scale them up across departments, and think up effective support that meets teacher and student expectations. An institutional policy reflects the will of the leaders and heads of departments to better understand the teaching process and the experiences initiated by teams or individual teachers. A quality teaching framework allows the institution to monitor support, track teacher and student satisfaction, and study the impact on the learning process.

The institutions recognised that initiating an institutional policy to support quality teaching remains an **adventurous, lengthy but potentially rewarding project**. In many institutions, dealing with quality teaching is a new, somehow rather vague and often controversial idea. How then should institutions proceed? By experimenting and proceeding step by step, institutions can avoid outright rejection by faculty members and shape a consistent policy that serves the community as a whole. Close monitoring of quality teaching support has been necessary to encourage broad endorsement within the academic community, avoiding the risk of attracting only the most motivated teachers. A flexible institutional framework, a higher level of teacher autonomy and a collaborative relationship with students and staff are all conducive to improving the teaching and learning process.

In many cases, institutions tend to offer programme evaluation or training sessions for faculty though the **notion of quality** remains vague and unshared internally. A better approach is to first explore the kind of education students should possess upon graduation and the types of learning outcomes the programmes should provide to ensure economic and social inclusion of students. Institutions working in this way have defined what quality means

and what the role of the faculty in the learning process could be. This reflection requires time, conviction, motivation and openness. Lastly, the support that the faculty would need to accomplish their educational mission and the conditions that would allow the students to fulfil the learning objectives can be more clearly defined.

After the initial stage, an institution willing to pursue an effective quality teaching policy often sets up a **specific organisation**, supported by technical staff for the design of the appropriate instruments. The creation of a service dedicated to quality teaching is a first step paving the way to a more ambitious policy. Granting the quality teaching service an official status in the organisational chart of the institution ensures recognition and legitimate interventions across departments.

The success of quality initiatives supported by the institution depends mainly on the commitment of the **heads of departments** who promote the quality teaching spirit and allow operational implementation. In large multidisciplinary institutions that have shifted to highly decentralised systems, departments have ownership of their activities and therefore a high level of accountability. Impetus and co-ordination of the heads of departments by institutional leaders through appropriate facilities and platforms for discussion are crucial.

Even if accepted in principle, the **evaluation** of quality teaching is often challenged in reality. All the institutions have implemented evaluation instruments to monitor their action. But as teaching is primarily appraised through activity and input indicators, the institutions struggle to create reliable evaluation instruments of the impact of quality teaching. The demonstration of the causal link between teaching and learning remains challenging for most institutions. Although quality teaching is an influential factor on learning outcomes, it is difficult to isolate (and thereby support) the right factors that most affect learning outcomes. In the absence of appropriate evaluation tools, some institutions have been imaginative, for instance by designating more qualitative indicators.

Quality teaching initiatives have a tangible **impact** on **teaching** and on **research**:

- Teachers become more aware of the aim pursued by teaching beyond their own knowledge area, they understand their role as individuals and as components of a collective mission, and can better relate their own expectations to the programme or institution's expectations in terms of learning outcomes. The impact on pedagogy is discernible despite the small number of quantitative measurements. In particular, quality teaching initiatives enhance information technology in pedagogy improvement and analysing student-teacher interactions. In institutions that are fully

autonomous in programme design, quality teaching initiatives help teachers and leaders to refine the aims and content of programmes.

- Instruments and policies that foster quality teaching are likely to be beneficial to research activities. An increasing number of institutions are convinced that they will make quality teaching progress by combining professional orientations and research.

Institutions need to foster **synergies** among institution-wide policies. A vast majority of the institutions sampled link their commitment to quality teaching with information technology (IT) policies, as intranets and discussion forums are powerful communication tools within the academic community and with the students. The connection with human resources policies is the second synergy that is most often quoted by the participating institutions. New types of educational delivery have led the institutions to think about appropriate learning facilities. The interaction between the support for student learning and the initiatives aimed at improving quality of the teaching delivery is developing steadily although it could be further stimulated.

The institutions that are better able to **disseminate** quality teaching initiatives are the small- or medium-sized institutions, because of the information fluidity and straightforward decision-making process that characterise them. However, the large size of some institutions can be an asset for quality teaching as it allows for a variety of approaches to innovation. Regardless of size, all departments should go in the same direction, fully adhere to the strategy and respect the time frame. A quality culture at institutional level can be better achieved through diverse initiatives: the consolidation of bottom-up initiatives, small-sized experiments at course or programme level, replication of success stories, the evaluation of quality teaching as a vehicle of discussion, and the participation of technical and administrative staff to provide mediation between academia and students.