



Review on Quality Teaching in Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW ON QUALITY TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1. In the context of the sustained growth and diversification of higher education systems, society's concerns about the quality of the programmes offered to students are increasing. Public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions are receiving increasing attention. However these comparisons tend to over-emphasize research, using research performance as a yardstick of the institutions' value. If these assessment processes fail to appropriately address the quality of teaching it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging.

2. Institutions may support and implement schemes, processes or evaluation mechanisms in order to identify, promote and/or reward good teaching practices. The institutional environment of higher education institutions or organizations can also lead to enhancement of the quality of teaching in higher education through various means. A national policy run by the public authorities, or recommendations and statements issued by quality assurance agencies, is likely to help university leaders to phase in a culture of quality that includes teaching within their institutions.

3. The goal of the OECD-IMHE study on Quality teaching is to highlight effective quality initiatives and mechanisms and to push forward reflection or practices that may in turn help other institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and thereby, the quality of their graduates. The role of the faculty members, of the department, of the central university and of State was analyzed, as well as the goals and scope of these initiatives. The study aimed to identify long-term improvement factors for staff, decision-making bodies and institutions, and to contribute to reflection on outcomes indicators for higher education.

4. This study draws from a review of 29 higher education institutions across 20 OECD and non-OECD countries. In participating in the project, the institutions took part in an international review that collected information and benchmarks for their own purpose regarding the quality of their teaching. Through a questionnaire, the participating institutions were offered the possibility to set out and analyse their own practices on the support to the quality of teaching. The sample of institutions represents the diversity of higher education institutions, from technological and vocational institutions to the business and economic ones, from small sized undergraduate institutions to those specialized in postgraduate courses.

5. The areas of primary concern are:

1. The drivers and debates underlying a growing attention towards quality teaching.
2. The aims of the institutions when fostering quality teaching, the options and guiding philosophy taken up by the institutions when embedding a quality approach.
3. The types of concrete application of quality teaching initiatives, the challenges in the implementation, the actors to involve, the needs to be met and the problems to be resolved.
4. The dissemination of practices, the measurement and monitoring of progress.

5. The impacts of quality teaching on teaching, research and institutional quality culture.
6. The combination of approaches to enhance quality teaching in a sustainable way within the institution.

6. After an overview of the profile of the institutions involved (Part 1), the quality teaching initiatives are reviewed and include illustrations of the 46 initiatives (Part 2). Then the conclusions and the implications for leaders, faculty, quality units and students are featured. Separate annexes consist of the review of literature on quality teaching and of the set of initiatives presented by the 29 institutions.

7. The main findings of the review are the following:

- Teaching matters in higher education institutions. Although quality teaching encompasses definitions and conceptions that are highly varied and in constant flux, the initiatives (actions, strategies, policies) aimed at improving the quality of teaching are spreading within the institutions.
- The vast majority of the initiatives supporting teaching quality are empirical and address the institutions' particular needs at a given point in time. Initiatives inspired by academic literature and research on the subject 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 allowed quality teaching to expand as beneficial in pedagogy improvement and student-teacher interactions.
- The quality teaching must be thought of dynamically, as a function of contextual shifts in the higher education environment, such as the internationalisation of studies and the additional missions that higher education is being asked to fulfill – innovation, civic and regional development, producing an appropriately skilled workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
- The sustained commitment by senior management is hence necessary to capture all the dimensions that affect quality teaching. The involvement of students is equally determinant, not only through the evaluation of programmes, but also in the design of curricula and in teaching delivery.
- To introduce an effective institutional policy for the quality of teaching involves harnessing synergy between two groups of factors:
 - Factors external to institutions, at the national and in many cases international levels (e.g. the Bologna process in Europe), which may foster a general climate conducive to the recognition of teaching quality as a priority.
 - Internal institutional factors: the institutional context and specific circumstances (e.g. the appointment of a new chief executive) are likely to affect the pace to the development of quality teaching initiatives.
- Along with a strong commitment by senior management, a strong capacity of leadership at executive levels is a success factor. The participation of faculty deans is vital insofar as deans,

being at the interface between an institution's decision-making bodies and teachers on the job, 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 the involvement of the institution's management is manifest and ongoing, and sufficient funding and adequate facilities are earmarked for the quality of teaching on a long-term basis.
- The deployment of policies for the quality of teaching also hinges on an institution's capacity to strike a balance between technical aspects of quality support (e.g. development of course evaluation questionnaires) and the fundamental issues raised (e.g. assessing the added value of the teaching initiatives in achieving curriculum objectives).
- Regarding tangible impacts, quality teaching initiatives have thrown light on the role of teaching in the educational transformative process, have refined the interaction between research and teaching and have nurtured the culture of quality within the academic community.
- The institutions need to develop innovative evaluative approaches to measure the impact of their support on quality teaching. They are still struggling to fully appraise the causal link between their engagement in teaching and the quality of learning outcomes. Exploring the correlation between inputs, processes and outcomes of higher education calls for pioneering and in-depth evaluation methods and instruments.
- The support for quality teaching usually generates awareness of the responsibility of teachers in the learning process and justifies the institutional need for helping them to fulfill their mission.

8. These findings are developed below.

9. Higher education is becoming a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy. The imperative for countries to raise higher-level employment skills allows awareness of quality teaching to emerge and expand within educational institutions. National and transnational debates like the Bologna process, direct state regulations or incentives, competition among private and state owned institutions contribute to prompt and support 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.

10. The institutions have built-in reasons to engage in quality teaching:

- The need for institutions to be recognized as providers of good quality higher education.
- The attempt to ground institutional reputation on different criteria and to find out new ways of exhibiting performance in higher education.
- A way to recognize that competing on the basis of research only is not sufficient to ensure the performance and reputation of the university.

- The response to students' demand for a valuable teaching: students want to ensure that their education will lead to job insertion or will prepare them to develop adaptable and personal skills 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.

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

1. Institution-wide and Quality Assurance policies: this category includes global scale projects for the improvement of quality which aim to develop a quality culture at institutional level, like policy design, support to organisation and to internal quality assurance systems.

2. Programme monitoring: the actions taken deal with the design, the content and the delivery of the programmes or their assessments (through programme evaluation notably).

3. Teaching and Learning support: this category includes the initiatives affecting the learning and teaching process and target the students (on the learning side) or the teachers (on the teaching side) or both (e.g. on the work environment) and consist of a multiplicity of actions like support for teaching and learning environment, continuing education for faculty, pedagogy enhancement, student's support (e.g. mentoring and career advice), support for student learning (focussed on inputs, such as the introduction of new pedagogical tools, or on outputs such as development of certain abilities for the students).

12. The **value of the institutional commitment** to quality teaching - at top leadership level and at departmental level - is to detect benchmarks, promote good practices scaling them up across departments, and think up effective support matching teachers' expectations with the students'. An institutional policy reflects the will of the leaders and heads of departments to better understand the teaching process and to have an overview of the various experiences initiated by teams or individual teachers. Setting a quality teaching framework allows the institution to better monitor support, to keep track of teachers' satisfaction and to consider the impact on the learning process.

13. 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 or a strategy to serve the community as a whole. Close monitoring of quality teaching support has been necessary to encourage emulation within the academic community, avoiding the risk of attracting only the most motivated teachers. A flexible institutional framework, a higher education level of teachers' autonomy, a collaborative working with students and staff are all conducive to improving the teaching and learning process.

14. In many cases, institutions tend to multiply 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 gain once graduated and the types of learning outcomes the programmes should provide to ensure economic and social inclusion of students. Institutions working in this way have collaboratively 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.

15. After the initial stage, an institution willing to pursue an effective quality teaching policy often sets up a **specific organization**, supported by a 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 organizational chart of the institution provides a valuable advantage to ensure legitimate interventions across departments and to enhance the recognition of the service.

16. The success of quality initiatives supported by the institution depends mainly on the commitment of the **heads of departments** who help the quality teaching spirit to spread and allow operational implementation. In large multidisciplinary institutions that have shifted to highly decentralized systems, departments have ownership of their activities and this underpins their high level of accountability to the central university. Impetus and coordination of the heads of departments by institutional leaders through appropriate facilities and platforms for discussion are crucial.

17. Even if accepted in principle, the **evaluation** of quality teaching is often challenged in reality. All the institutions have implemented evaluation instruments in order to monitor their action. But teaching is primarily appraised through activity and input indicators and 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. One of the difficulties for them is to isolate -and thereby support- the right factors that most impact learning outcomes. In the absence of appropriate evaluation tools, some institutions have been imaginative, for instance by designating more qualitative indicators that can reflect the more qualitative changes. Given the multiplicity of quality teaching initiatives, a holistic approach could help the institutions to better address the synergy of actions and appraise their intertwined impacts on learning.

18. Quality teaching initiatives have a tangible **impact** in three major areas: on **teaching**, on **research** and on the **quality culture**:

- Teachers become more aware of the aim pursued by teaching beyond their own knowledge area, they understand their role as individuals but also as components of a collective mission, managing to 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 enlighten the beneficial function of information technology in pedagogy improvement and analysing student-teacher interactions. In the institutions that are fully autonomous in programme design, the main impact of the quality teaching initiatives consists in helping teachers and institutional leaders to thoroughly refine the aims and the content of the programmes. A thorough reflection on quality teaching is also likely to raise questions on the learning and work environment, which is the primary responsibility of the institution.
- Instruments and policies that are intended to foster quality teaching are likely to be beneficial to research activities, and not only to research in education. The commitment to quality teaching has provided the institutions with an opportunity to investigate the consistency of the bridge between research and teaching and an increasing number of institutions are convinced that they will make quality teaching progress by combining professional orientations and research-led investigations.
- Finally quality teaching might become a pillar of a burgeoning institutional quality culture; value-driven institutions with a long-standing established identity rely on quality teaching to promote the identity of the institution.

19. In order to attain the expectations on quality teaching initiatives, institutions need to foster **synergies** between institution-wide policies. A vast majority of the institutions sampled link their commitment to quality teaching with IT policies, as the possibilities offered by intranets and discussion forums are seen as a powerful communication tool 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 students' learning and the initiatives aimed at improving quality of the teaching delivery is developing steadily although it could be further stimulated.

20. 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 characterize them. However, the large size of some institutions can be an asset for quality teaching as it allows for a variety of thoughts, conceptions and approaches to innovation. What is vital for the institution is to ensure that all the departments go in the same direction, that they fully adhere to the strategy to be implemented and lastly that they stick to a certain time frame. Whatever the size and types of programmes offered, dissemination and consolidation are undeniably extended and coherently sustained when the institution and in particular the **institutional leaders** commit themselves to quality teaching. The dissemination of a quality culture at institutional level can be better attained through the streamline of diverse initiatives, the consolidation of bottom-up initiatives, small-sized experiments at course or programme level, replication of success stories, using the evaluation of quality teaching as a vehicle of discussion, and involving technical and administrative staff to provide mediation between academia and students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS OF AN ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY TEACHING

For institution's leaders

21. Institutional leadership and decision making bodies have a fundamental role to play in shaping the institutional quality culture. They are often the initiators of quality teaching initiatives and their approach directly affects the outcome of these initiatives.

- A sustained, effective and explicit commitment to quality teaching by senior management is necessary for successfully leading the whole institution towards the common goal of enhancing the quality of teaching. Defining a conceptual approach of teaching at institutional level consists in making explicit the meaning of teaching from the institutional viewpoint.
- Leaders should be attentive to motivating deans and heads of department who, being at the interface between the institution's decision making bodies and teachers on the job, encourage the cross-fertilisation of strategic approaches and nurture innovation in everyday practice. In addition they can discuss the means for implementing and operating, measuring progress and identifying problems.
- Top down and bottom up approaches need to be combined and balanced, so as to exploit all the possible drivers and synergies of quality teaching initiatives, and to foster a dynamic and engaging process.
- Effectively involving teachers in the definition of quality teaching initiatives ensures that the initiatives are responsive to perceived needs and promotes a vital sense of ownership. It is vital to ensure that adequate time, people, funding and facilities are dedicated to the tasks of planning and implementation of an initiative: this includes the provision of an effective vehicle for discussion and for sharing experiences and may be aided by the creation of a specific unit or other means of focussing organisational support. Opportunities can stem from external factors and events which can encourage institutional reflection on quality: periodical institutional evaluations, international rating or rankings, a national reform or a transnational process can be opportunities to launch and strengthen reflection on quality teaching and find out new ways of improvement.
- Engaging the whole community, including administrative staff and students, is vital. This can be facilitated when leaders convey the relevance of everyone in the implementation of the quality culture. The students should be mobilized putting emphasis on their opinions and on the inputs that they can supply in the definition of quality of teaching and in the design of a specific initiative.

22. For teachers

23. Teachers are the focus of many quality teaching initiatives. Much of the success of quality teaching support depends on acceptance by the teachers and the use of the instruments at their disposal in their teaching activities.

24. Quality teaching initiatives constitute an occasion for teachers to think about their own actions and role in the enhancement of quality: these help in understanding how to teach better and more effectively and more efficiently, that is an upgrading of their pedagogical skills. Gaining acceptance of, and commitment to, reflective practice and consequential adaptation and innovation is vital.

- Technology-based teaching, intranets and discussion forums are pedagogical tools which can be used to improve the students-to-teacher interaction (e.g. the e-learning platform) and to better assess the students' progress.
- It is important to link practices, methods and tools with the institutional quality teaching policy, and relate the expectations of teachers to the programme or institution's expectations in terms of learning outcomes.
- Teachers are the central actors for a reflection on the evaluation criteria of quality teaching: which practical aspects have to be addressed and which changes have to be put in practice? A collaboration with the quality units in the design and implementation of curricula can be a good starting point.
- The definition of quality teaching is related to each teacher's values, aptitudes and attitudes: teaching is a dynamic activity, which has strongly subjective aspects which depend on personal and collective philosophy and values.
- Teachers' career progression may be influenced as quality teaching issues gain greater relevance at institutional level. Institutions are seeking ways of rewarding teachers who commit themselves to quality teaching.

For students

25. Students are increasingly becoming a force promoting quality teaching. They are the primary beneficiaries of quality teaching initiatives, and they can play an active role in developing the awareness of quality teaching in the institution.

- Students can collaborate with the teachers and leaders in the definition of the initiative and of the quality teaching concept itself, keeping the interaction alive and raising concerns on teaching, on learning environments, on the quality of content and on the teachers' attitude. They can better function as active players if invited to serve on governing bodies or used as evaluation experts of equal status to academic peer reviewers.
- Associations and students group can bring new ideas and influence the institutional policy on quality teaching, by creating discussions and raising problems with which they are directly concerned.

For quality teaching units

26. These special bodies dedicated to the implementation and monitoring of quality teaching policies play a pivotal role in supporting, explaining and advocating institution-wide policy on quality teaching.

- Quality units help the faculty members to use the instruments and concentrate on their core mission. They ensure that the institutional policy on quality teaching is understood and implemented properly by the faculty members.
- If their final mission is to promote the institution, the intermediate roles are to communicate the importance of quality teaching, to disseminate a quality culture in the whole institution and to facilitate the collaborative work and information fluidity.
- Quality units should reconsider their reflection role (e.g. in the definition of quality) in addition to the more technical one. Involving experts such as educational developers and psychologists may add value to the activities in the field of quality teaching.
- The definition of practices can usefully be combined with the research in educational sciences to facilitate understandings of the link between the teaching process with learning outcomes.
- Experimenting is useful to develop new measurement and evaluation methods. The difficult task of tackling the critical link between learning and teaching can be furthered by careful testing of innovative methods and attention to indicators.
- Being receptive and enhancing the communication tools to get teachers' and students' suggestions helps continuous improvement. Keeping in touch with each department and teachers will allow them to facilitate appropriate attention to the disciplinary specificities and enable teachers to translate typical needs into the most accurate tools.
- External inputs and good practices examples can be captivated through an open oriented approach that is creating a communication network with quality assurance agencies and external partners, and fostering the interplay among various internal or external actors.

Implications for institutional actors of an engagement in quality teaching

TEACHERS

- Exploit the new technological tools to improve the students-to-teacher interaction and to better assess the students' progress
- Link practices, methods and tools with the institutional global quality teaching policy
- Collaborate with the quality units in the design and implementation of curricula
- Take the opportunity to reflect about their own actions and role in the enhancement of quality, gaining acceptance of, and commitment to, reflective practice and consequential adaptation and innovation.
- Consider the possible consequences in teacher's career progression

INSTITUTION'S LEADERS

- Sustain quality teaching in a continuing, effective and explicit way
- Motivate the head of departments
- Combine and balance top down with bottom up approaches
- Ensure the adequate time, people, funding and facilities for planning and implementing the quality teaching initiatives
- Engage the whole community, including administrative staff and students

STUDENTS

- Collaborate actively with the teachers and leaders in the definition of the initiative and of quality teaching concept itself, keeping the interaction alive and raising concerns on teaching, on learning environments, on the quality of content and on the teachers' attitude.
- Use associations and students group to bring new ideas and influence the institutional policy on quality teaching

Implications for

QUALITY TEACHING UNITS

- Ensure that the institutional policy on quality teaching is understood and implemented properly by the faculty members
- Disseminate a quality culture in the whole institution and to facilitate the collaborative work and information fluidity
- Reconsider their reflection role in addition to the more technical one
- Combine the research in educational sciences with the definition of practices
- Experiment to develop new measurement and evaluation methods
- Be receptive and enhance the communication tools to get teachers' and students' suggestions helps continuous improvement
- Keep an open oriented approach towards external inputs and good practices examples, creating a communication network with quality assurance agencies and external partners