

Enhancing the education mission of European universities: A proactive response to change

Since their foundation, universities have led the discovery and development of new knowledge through research, and disseminated and applied that knowledge through education, teaching and other forms of knowledge transfer. But the world is changing, largely because knowledge is developed, transmitted and applied at an ever faster pace. Universities need to lead this process, and to ensure that an increasingly diverse range of students and learners are supported so they can access, understand and interpret this knowledge in new and innovative ways.

Over the past two decades, European higher education has successfully undergone fundamental change at system and institutional levels, linked to national reforms, the Bologna Process, and European Union initiatives. As a result, student-centred learning, quality assurance (QA) and a learning outcomes approach are key elements of higher education in Europe today. There is also strong consensus on the need to further enhance accessibility and inclusion, and to provide a broader and more diversified educational experience. Enhancing the profile of teaching and innovative pedagogies, strengthening the link between education and research, promoting the use of new technologies for teaching and learning, and communicating the overall importance of higher education for individuals and society: these topics are all on the agenda and are discussed and explored actively at national and institutional levels across Europe.

European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching

In order to support the enhancement of learning and teaching in European universities, and to inspire and facilitate ongoing exchange and cooperation in this field among universities and between national and European initiatives, the following set of ten Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching is proposed.

These Principles underpin the need to re-emphasise the education mission of the university. They aim to serve institutional leaders working with staff, students and external stakeholders to ensure the quality, relevance and attractiveness of higher education.

While the main responsibility for the design, implementation and continuous enhancement of learning and teaching resides with each university, national authorities also play an important role in providing frameworks that enable and support universities in their efforts. National and European policy makers, as well as other relevant stakeholders, are therefore also invited to consider these Principles in their work.

The Principles have been developed through discussion with a broad range of European higher education institutions and their representatives. They are non-prescriptive, cherish diversity of purpose, content and methods, commend other ongoing sectoral initiatives, and respect fully the fundamental tenets of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. They also promote the values of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and embrace the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

1 The higher education learning experience nurtures and enables the development of learners as active and responsible citizens, critical thinkers, problem solvers, equipped for life-long learning.

Higher education equips people with the confidence and skills to live and learn in a changing world, able to proactively address their own and the world's grand challenges.

2 Learning and teaching is learner-centred.

The university should provide learning opportunities tailored to the needs and capabilities of diverse learners. It should nurture a culture and an environment in which reciprocal learning between students and teachers can take place. Students are actively engaged as co-creators in all aspects of the learning experience, and share the responsibility for their own learning, in partnership with the staff of the institution.

- 3 Commitment to learning and teaching is integral to the purpose, mission and strategy of the university.**

Enhancing learning and teaching requires that the mission reflects the educational purpose and values of the institution. Comprehensive, values-based institutional strategies are needed to guide the learning and teaching initiatives, and enhance their impact and sustainability.
- 4 Senior leadership actively promotes and enables the advancement of learning and teaching.**

An institution-wide strategy requires the institutional leadership team to drive, support and maintain the focus on learning and teaching.
- 5 Learning and teaching is a collegial process involving collaboration across the university and with the wider community.**

The entire institution, including administrative and technical staff, are actively involved in learning and teaching. Opportunities in the private, public and voluntary sectors are essential to enable students and graduates to fulfil meaningful roles in an ever-changing society. Learning and teaching processes ultimately promote social responsibility.
- 6 Learning, teaching and research are interconnected and mutually enriching.**

Connection between research and education is essential to stimulate innovation and creativity in the learning experience and to advance knowledge. Learning and teaching in universities is informed by research and encourages students to engage in research and creation of new knowledge.
- 7 Teaching is core to academic practice and is respected as scholarly and professional.**

As a core function of higher education, teaching is recognised as a professional and skilled activity, which is actively promoted through recruitment, staff development (including Continuing Professional Development), and promotion schemes. Staff members with any teaching responsibilities are supported in fulfilling their role and developing their practice to meet changing circumstances. Teachers are actively encouraged to undertake research about teaching and to engage with the scholarship of learning and teaching to inform their own practice.
- 8 The university community actively explores and cherishes a variety of approaches to learning and teaching that respect a diversity of learners, stakeholders, and disciplines.**

Higher education provision needs to address the diversity of learners, disciplines, learning purpose and outcomes. Learning design needs to be informed by disciplinary content, any available knowledge about how students learn, and information available about learner progress.
- 9 Sustainable resources and structures are required to support and enable learning and teaching enhancement.**

There has to be appropriate and sustainable funding for developing and carrying out teaching. Resources are allocated and used to support a long-term strategic approach for enhancing learning and teaching. Learning and teaching is structured in a sustainable way, with distributed leadership and clearly articulated responsibilities, including at discipline and programme levels.
- 10 Institutional QA for learning and teaching is enhancement-driven, and a shared responsibility of staff and students.**

In line with the ESG, institutional QA develops flexible, fit-for-purpose processes suited to evaluate and demonstrate the quality of the learning experience. It is geared toward continuous improvement and fostering a culture that engages everyone in the university community in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.

