

The Student in the Global World

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I - Introduction – the student in the global world:

The higher education landscape is changing rapidly and universities have never before had to address so many burning issues at the same time, faced as they are with greater global competition for students and researchers, in an ever more interconnected and interdependent world, not least as reflected in the growth of global rankings over the last decade. More specifically the status quo of European higher education is being challenged, by the destabilising and disruptive forces of globalisation, demographic change and migration, and not least by rapid technological change.

A major challenge indeed, is how to educate students for this new era, as global citizens, in fact be it at the local national or global of the world. In recent years, - perhaps also given the global growth in student numbers and the importance of internationalisation in/ for Europe – it has become clear that there is a greater focus on the importance and relevance of the teaching mission of universities, and on addressing the needs of an ever more diverse student body.

However, there is a certain paradox in the present situation, as, at the same time, in many countries the state is withdrawing, and tightening its belt with respect to the funding of higher education - or at any rate focusing more on targeted, performance related funding – and/or on maintaining funding for research - while at the same time demands are growing for widening access, increasing diversity so as to increase the number of highly qualified graduates with the broad employability skills needed to meet the demands of the global knowledge society and economy.

So, as a precondition, the student in the global world needs more money being injected into HE systems in Europe.

What are the indicators showing that the situation is changing? For us, much of the evidence for a renewed focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is

based upon findings from the more than 400 responses that EUA received from its members through our latest Trends survey - which was a very broad one, but one that does provide insight into a rapidly changing situation, as far as the student body is concerned and the role of teachers and educators.

II - RENEWED FOCUS ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Some of the main elements are as follows:

First of all, the composition of the student body is changing, thanks to successful institutional outreach strategies. This is part of a **significant trend towards increasing and broadening access** that overall means greater diversity in the profile of students entering higher education, not only significantly more international students but also mature students, students with disabilities or from disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, and students without standard entry requirements/formal qualifications; thus promoting reflection on inclusiveness, - one of the UN sustainability goals - and its importance for growth and societal cohesion. However this does also have an impact on the types of study programmes on offer and the support services needed.

These nascent developments need further attention, in particular in adapting lifelong learning opportunities to the specific demographic and economic situation in each country. Our survey showed a **variety of activities developed by institutions that confirm the existence of targeted institutional strategies to support a more diverse student body**, for example through academic orientation and advice or bridging courses to bring secondary school leavers up to the level of introductory course work in higher education. A range of different support services and pastoral care opportunities are in the meantime also on offer to support students during their time at university. (While most institutions report dropout rates to have remained roughly stable since 2010, those offering the broadest range of student support services report a decrease.)

However, student success depends to a large degree on providing the necessary development support to university teaching staff: Nearly 60% of institutions report a growing recognition of the importance of teaching, while a similar percentage emphasised the need to introducing new ways of teaching. There is evidence that these aspirations are translated, on the one hand into staff policies focusing on international recruitment, academic experience gained in another institution and, more generally, internationalising staff through staff mobility; while on the other, slightly more than half of the institutions surveyed reported taking into account advances in research as well as the views of employers and professional associations,

as appropriate, when revising their curricula. The implementation of learning outcomes has also continued to progress since 2010. Institutions are generally positive, but not in all countries. However, it appears that in many institutions their implementation appears to have taken place without changing radically how curricula, including examinations, are developed; so, this is still work in progress.

There is also evidence of changes in the learning environment, overall, such as improving equipment, libraries and learning centres and creating common rooms for students and staff, as well as centres for learning and teaching, seem fairly common; although it is difficult to evaluate the scope of these changes based on the Trends questionnaire.

In addition to these other recent positive developments relate to **improved institutional support for students**, for example, better opportunities for library use, access to digital tools etc. Institutions also report significant improvements in student support services offered, be it career guidance and other forms of counselling services, the acquisition of additional competences and skills, including language courses, introduction to entrepreneurial and interdisciplinary skills, digital literacy etc...

After graduation these same universities report maintaining alumni relations in the university. **In addition, there is a growth in the tracking of both institutions and graduates, e.g. through Increased use of student and graduate surveys** that are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Increased numbers of institutions are developing instruments to track their students during and after their studies. The results of these surveys are used to improve the educational offer and institutions' responses to students' needs.

Linked to this more and more universities are creating central planning and data collection services, as a means of increasing strategic capacity at institutional level. There is also more and more research on teaching and learning taking place, and the number of dedicated courses on offer designed to improving teaching competence is on the rise. Evaluation systems based on peer evaluation are also emerging in some systems. All these elements represent important progress in supporting student learning and student success, and demonstrate that the way to improve student learning is highly dependent on the enhancement and upgrading of the skill of teachers...

Finally, student involvement in governance is prevalent almost everywhere (albeit more at faculty than at central level) and many institutions provide support for

student-led activities and volunteer engagement in the local community; thus meeting their expectations.

Considerable progress has also been made in the introduction of institutional quality assurance processes and procedures – thanks to the adoption and implementation of Europe wide accepted European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA, which includes 48 European countries and the EC, with the universities as consultative members. These standards and guidelines have been developed exclusively by the universities, the students and the QA agencies working together in the context of the Bologna Process – and are now becoming more generalised. At institutional level these include elements such as the use of student questionnaires, the regular evaluation of study programmes and all sorts of formal procedures that have to be followed in case of problems.

In response to your question to consider how universities/accreditation bodies can adapt to recognise credits from foreign universities, this is a complex process, but for accreditation systems, I would start with the revised ESG standard 1.4 and make it clear that the expectation towards the accreditation processes is that they check whether institutions “consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.”

But preparing the regulations for recognition and ensuring they are followed, is then up to the institutions. However, some guidance for institutions is provided in the ESG guidelines: Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;

In addition, cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre is important, with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

In addition, we would need to admit that the challenges we at the moment in some universities is the level of knowledge of the expectations of Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Trends 2015 was interesting in this sense: The results of the 2015 Trends questionnaire concerning credit recognition show that the institutions are doing their best to ensure a fair process but that this issue remains an enduring obstacle to mobility. See more on page 46-47. My personal view would be that a lot of this stems from the attitudes and cultures: “The largest number of answers

revealed a misplaced focus on the notion of equivalency.” (Trends 2015, p 46). When recognising credits from other universities are we expecting the contents to be exactly the same as in our own university or do we look for “the same level” and learning outcomes. My comment would be that it would be important to encourage universities to embrace diversity and work on the “recognition culture”...across the institution.

III - KEY ELEMENTS IN IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Trends 2015 results confirm the pre-eminence of both internationalisation and ICT in the development and improvement of learning and teaching, with their importance expected to grow further. The answers suggest that the quality of learning and teaching has improved thanks to student and staff mobility while ICT developments are expected to contribute to increasing the flexibility of access to the learning provision and the effectiveness of classroom time. Teaching innovations (whether ICT-supported or not) tend to be piloted at the level of departments and faculties. It is unclear if the decentralised way in which innovations are being introduced is due to lack of central steering or is a deliberately intended to pilot them first on a small scale.

So, some further reflections on these two essential elements:

Digital Innovation and the impact of new technologies:

The use of new technologies is another important way of introducing pedagogical innovation, of acquiring new competences and of preparing students for new digital employment opportunities. At the same time there is an impact on universities themselves, through transformations such as the introduction of mixed and blended teaching modes: a recent survey of EUA members showed that 70% of institutions already have a strategy in place or are in the course of developing their policy.

Digitalisation takes many forms and one of the most important developments going on at present concerns open access and open science more broadly. These fast moving developments will very likely to change the way we think about and conduct research, as well as the way scientists publish the results of their research, and will also have a major impact on the nature et quality of scientific careers in future.

The importance of internationalisation, global engagement and citizenship

In this new era the strategic importance of internationalisation is growing and already impacting our universities, for example, as universities focus more on the

development of strategic local, regional and international partnerships, as a means of enhancing impact and consolidating institutional profile, as well as improving the way we teach and learn, our capacity to innovate and to conduct research; and, underpinning it all, the way in which institutions are governed and managed.

Internationalisation plays an ever more important role not only for European universities but also for universities around the world, and together with the digital revolution has become a central pillar, both for developing cross border research cooperation and increasingly for the enhancing the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, the most recent OECD figures (2015 – data from 2012/2013) show that the number of foreign tertiary students increased by 50% between 2005 and 2012/13, thus meaning that over 4.5 Mio students were enrolled outside their home countries. The total number is estimated to have surpassed 5 Mio by this year, with a dominance from students especially from China and India (followed by Europe). Also interesting is that enrolments tend to be at the most advanced levels of attainment, thus at master level and especially doctoral level (accounting for almost 24% of the total).

Thus, in the interconnected world in which we live people, ideas and information circulate between national and move freely beyond borders, and this is the world in which to-day's students live their lives, pursue their studies and embark upon their future careers. The university has an important role to play in preparing students to become responsible citizens, of their own country as well as at European and global level, which in turn means actively promoting intercultural understanding and providing students, through their study programmes, with the skills and competences they need to become the global citizens of the future.

IV - INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES: LOOKING FORWARD

Maintaining the momentum: the importance of learning and teaching – in summary 4 issues key to ensuring that the expectations of the student in the global world will be met

- In line with the UN Sustainability Goals, **making our systems more inclusive, widening participation and promoting lifelong learning - lifelong access to learning for a diverse student body is pivotal**; achieving this goal requires working across all educational levels to ensure a good transition into higher education, first of all, as well as offering students a full array of student support services, stressing their engagement via their involvement in governance, volunteer activities in the community, etc.

- **Continuing the focus on student-centred learning and on preparing graduates for the labour market and society through a continued focus on learning outcomes that take account of** the diversity of learning styles and the extensive mix of skills required to function in complex environments; and making sure that the development of transversal skills is incorporated into intended and achieved learning outcomes and translated into learning activities.
- **Developing and implementing effective internationalisation strategies –** considering the benefits, consequences and risks of different approaches, including the costs involved and sustainability prospects, and reflecting on the proper balance between cooperation and competition with other universities. 85% of the 400 EUA members who responded to a recent survey said that they already had an international strategy in place, based on student and teacher exchanges, short courses, work placements, generally in the context of well reflected strategic networks, including also increasing numbers of programmes offered in English and related, targeted marketing strategies.
- **Last but not least, the importance of governance, autonomy and funding:** institutional autonomy and sustainable funding, not to mention inter-institutional cooperation, are essential for future success. However, in the longer term, perhaps even more important for the success of higher education systems, universities and students across Europe will be the capacity of universities to innovate both in relation to all their activities, be it teaching, research or service to society, as well as in relation to their ability to build the strategic leadership and management capacity, and strategic partnerships needed to provide the best teaching for their ever more diverse students, to drive excellent research and innovation that benefits society.

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