EQUiiP Thematic Introduction

EQUiiP in Context – Societal Trends and the Need for Continuing Professional Development of Academic Staff

Abstract

This text is a thematic introduction relating the work of EQUiiP to the state-of-affairs in the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA; the Bologna Process). Given the current focus in the EHEA on the quality of teaching and learning across Europe, continuing professional development (CPD) of academic staff is essential. EQUiiP identifies the role of the internationally oriented educational developer (ED) as crucial to higher education institutions (HEIs) and provides these institutions with the means to support academic staff and hereby enhance the quality of internationalised programmes taught in international classrooms.

Keywords

European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Bologna Process; Continuing Professional Development (CPD); internationalisation of higher education; educational development; internationalised programmes; international classroom

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Introduction

Globalisation, migration, and mobility for work and study are societal trends that have impacted higher education with the result that students and academic staff are much more diverse groups of actors than ever before. Higher education institutions (HEIs) pay increasing attention to attracting global talent for the knowledge economy and to preparing students for life and work in a globalised world (Sandström & Hudson 2018). However, this does not happen exclusively through the mobility of students and academic staff. Rather, it requires internationalised curricula – both as regards the content of the programmes of study and the way they are taught.

This state-of-affairs is reflected in the literature and the conceptual underpinnings of higher education internationalisation (Hudzik 2011; Hudzik 2015; de Wit et al. 2015), including internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask 2015) and internationalisation at home (Beelen & Jones 2015). For more on this, please see the thematic text The International Classroom.

The state-of-affairs is also reflected in the way many HEIs have already responded to these trends by developing their internationalisation policies and strategies and developing internationalised learning outcomes and graduate attributes for all students in the descriptions of their programmes of study. Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to how this changing higher education landscape has impacted – and will continue to impact – teaching and learning, and to how lecturers might need to change their pedagogical approaches and academic practices as a consequence of it. With an increasing focus on sustainable, international, and intercultural dimensions of content across the disciplines, often in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations n.d.), it is important that lecturers acknowledge the resources and perspectives that diverse student cohorts are able to share in the international classroom. In an inclusive learning environment, students should be able to learn from and with each other, thereby enriching the learning experience and learning outcomes for them all.

This thematic introduction to the EQUiiP continuing professional development (CPD) programme – Designing and teaching inclusive international programmes – will briefly outline how recent years have seen an increase in the focus on the quality of higher education teaching and learning. It will also point out, however, that there

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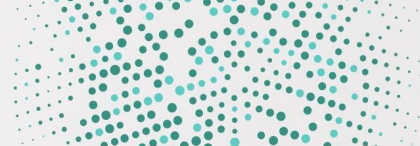
are still gaps that need to be bridged if HEIs are to successfully implement their internationalisation policies and strategies.

Trends in the European Higher Education Area

The Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) provides an important framework within which HEIs may respond to the political, economic, socio-cultural, and academic developments taking place across Europe today. In the communiqué from the ministerial conference in Paris (2018), it is stated that ministers commit themselves to
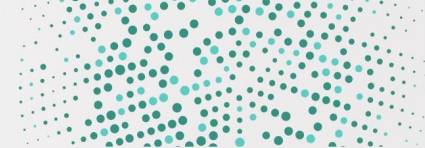
> (…) developing policies that encourage and support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society through enhancing intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness, as well as ensuring equitable access to higher education. (EHEA 2018)

If HEIs are to fulfil this mission, careful consideration of the purpose, content, and delivery of their study programmes is imperative. In this context, the internationalisation of higher education is not limited to the minority of mobile students (incoming or outgoing), but is an integral part of an HEI's research, education, and service missions and must be beneficial to learning as a process as well as the learning outcomes that all students should be able to achieve. The international, intercultural, and global dimensions concern all students, irrespective of whether they are mobile or local. This is also reflected in this definition of the internationalisation of higher education:

> [Internationalisation of Higher Education is] the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (de Wit et al. 2015:29)

Respecting that curriculum content is decided within the disciplines, the EQUiiP programme focuses on the design and delivery of internationalised programmes of study and should be considered against the backdrop of the increased attention currently being paid to higher education teaching and learning across the EHEA and in the HEIs.

On a European level, this focus on teaching and learning really took off with the report of the High Level Group on Modernisation of Higher Education (2013). The communiqué from the ministerial conference in Yerevan promoted pedagogical innovation in student-centred learning environments as well as opportunities for the

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development of lecturers' teaching competences (EHEA 2015). European projects in higher education have echoed the need for teaching enhancement and continuing professional development of academic staff (e.g. European University Association 2019; Gregersen-Hermans 2017; Lauridsen 2017; Lauridsen & Lillemose 2015). The section below briefly outlines the current picture in this area.

The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is important for a number of reasons that are all interlinked, including the ability of HEIs to attract talented students, the overall quality of their programme provision and delivery, and the employability of their graduates. It rests on a number of factors, e.g. that HEIs establish and maintain an environment that is conducive to the best possible learning for all students and, not least, that - in addition to their research credentials – the lecturers possess the pedagogical skills and competences needed to teach a 21st century higher education programme. However, with a few notable exceptions, pedagogical training for all academic staff is rare and certainly not mandatory. Research credentials have traditionally been – and continue to be – the main component in the recruitment and promotion of academic staff.

That being said, recent years have seen an increase in pedagogical training, e.g. as teaching enhancement courses for academic staff. According to the most recent European surveys, national strategies for learning and teaching in higher education are becoming more widespread and, where such strategies are in place, 47 % of HEIs report that they address the revision of teaching methods and approaches, and 46 % that they promote teaching enhancement initiatives (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice 2018:83). However, where it exists, such training is most commonly voluntary. In the Trends 2018 report, 77 % of respondents report that there has been a systematic effort to establish optional courses to enhance teaching skills, and 37 % that there has been a systematic effort to establish compulsory courses (Gaebel & Zhang 2018:72). This is also reflected in the fact that, even at senior level, pedagogical qualifications in the form of teaching enhancement courses are only required for appointment in academic positions in about one third of the HEIs (Gaebel & Zhang 2018:68f).

The Trends 2018 report has also surveyed the topics of compulsory teaching enhancement courses. Out of 15 topics, only one might be specifically targeted at teaching in the international classroom: Teaching diverse student groups. This topic is included in 44 % of the courses surveyed (Gaebel & Zhang 2018:73), and there is no indication as to whether this diversity is indicative of students' socio-economic background, race, gender, and other general demographic factors, or of an

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international and multicultural group of students with different educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in an international classroom.

The devil's advocate might claim that graduates are successful, and those who have studied abroad, fare better on the job market than do their peers without such international experience (CHE Consult et al. 2014; Hunter & de Wit 2018). Even so, there seems to be a general consensus at European, national and institutional levels that there is still room for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning across Europe. Many projects and reports, including those referred to above, are a clear indication that stakeholders consider an improvement of teaching enhancement training and other CPD initiatives as imperative. As most of these reports are linked to the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area, it is all the more surprising that most of the academic development seems to be addressing general issues of higher education teaching and learning only rather than also explicitly including – and integrating – the issues related to the international classroom. The next section looks into teaching and learning in the international classroom.

Teaching and learning in the international classroom

While the general training courses or other CPD initiatives targeted at higher education lecturers, and mentioned in the section above, are an important development across Europe, there are some additional factors that characterise an international classroom and internationalised programmes. These should also be addressed in the CPD provision for academic staff.

The terms international classroom and internationalised programmes ideally cover the curriculum content, the intended learning outcomes and graduate attributes, the language of instruction, and the diversity of the student cohort. These essential factors will be briefly outlined in the following.

Depending on the discipline, the curriculum content includes examples from different cultures or geographical areas, or comparisons across such cultures and areas. The content may also, where appropriate, reflect the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations n.d.). While academic staff may be aware of the UNSDGs, they may need a facilitated discussion with peers about how these goals may be reflected in the curriculum of a specific course or programme.

In internationalised programmes, the intended learning outcomes comprise international and intercultural components, including the development of students' intercultural competences and leading to a set of graduate attributes for the programme as a whole. As with the curriculum, the development and definition of learning outcomes and graduate attributes is often considered a tall order and may

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benefit from facilitated peer interaction (see the thematic texts Internationalising Course Design and Facilitating intercultural group dynamics to enhance learning in and from the international classroom).

An internationalised programme is taught in a language that may or may not be the local or national language of the HEI. English Medium Instruction (EMI), the obvious example here, does not in itself make a programme international, but may be one characteristic or contributing factor to an internationalised programme. The programme may, however, also be taught in the local (national) language. Whatever the language, lecturers in non-language disciplines often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with language issues among their students, including the development of students' academic literacy and academic writing skills. And, even if they possess such skills, they may find it difficult to allocate enough time to language issues, thereby reducing the time allocated to curriculum content – unless the content and language issues are properly combined (see the thematic text The Role of Language in the International Classroom).

The international classroom comprises a diverse group of students. In addition to general demographic differences, race, gender, beliefs, etc., the students may come from different educational backgrounds (disciplines or national systems) and have different first languages and cultures. They may be mobile (international) students, or they may be local. Whether mobile or local, all students come together in a physical or virtual classroom and learn from and with each other, and their lecturers need the necessary skills to facilitate the intercultural group dynamics in the international classroom (see the Introductory thematic text Enhancing Intercultural Learning in the Curriculum and the thematic text Facilitating intercultural group dynamics to enhance learning in and from the international classroom).

As appears from the section above, these characteristics of international programmes and international classrooms do not seem to be addressed in most of the CPD provision currently available to higher education lecturers and other academic staff.

Continuing professional development (CPD) needs

The above sections have demonstrated that higher education teacher training and other CPD provision for lecturers and other academic staff is still an emerging field in Europe. While there seems to be a welcome development in the provision of general higher education teacher training, the special characteristics of internationalised programmes and international classrooms seem to be only very sporadically addressed. Moreover, the question remains who provides the existing

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or emerging CPD, and who can actually provide the CPD needed for lecturers teaching internationalised programmes in international classrooms.

The concept of the educational developer role is widely recognised and can be identified across European HEIs, even though the role may be organised in different ways in different contexts. For example, the role of educational developer may be played by academic staff in tenured positions, who combine this role with many other academic tasks. In other cases, the role of educational developer may be a dedicated professional position, a job filled by an educationalist or pedagogical expert. Whatever role an educational developer might have within a given HEI, s/he will need to have – or develop – the necessary knowledge, competences and skills to support lecturers in the design and teaching of internationalised programmes in the international classroom.

This is exactly the background for the EQUiiP project (2016-2019), which has developed an International Competence Profile for Educational Developers as well as an online resource platform for educational developers who are to support lecturers as described above. The platform contains a five-module training programme for educational developers – Designing and teaching inclusive international programmes – that, when completed, leads to EQUiiP certification. See the User Guide in the EQUiiP platform at www.equiip.eu for further details on the International Competence Profile for Educational Developers, the modules of the programme, and the portfolio-based certification procedure.

Conclusion

This thematic introduction has briefly outlined the state-of-affairs in the development of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process) and its current focus on the quality of teaching and learning across Europe. In this context, a need for continuing professional development (CPD) of academic staff has been identified, including special attention to the conditions characterising internationalised programmes and international classrooms.

In order to provide such CPD, it is imperative that HEIs ensure that educational developers have the necessary knowledge, competences and skills. The EQUiiP programme – Designing and teaching inclusive international programmes – has been developed with the purpose of providing the necessary background for educational developers to take on this essential role within their HEIs and to assist lecturers in leveraging the benefits of higher education internationalisation.

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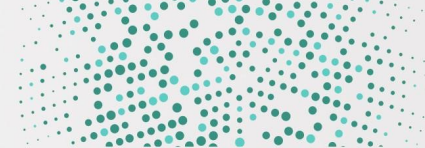
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version June 2019

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