Evaluation of learning and teaching

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Challenge 1

Having a systematic approach to evaluation processes

- Having a systematic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of programmes, student outcomes and teaching competences was identified as a key difficulty, even in institutions with a relatively centralised structure. Yet, results of evaluations can only feed into strategic planning and decision-making at the central level and be used for comparison or benchmarking if everyone involved is working towards common goals within an agreed institutional framework (even if there is flexibility across the institution regarding the exact details of the implementation).

Challenge 2

Balancing trust and autonomy of faculties with centralisation

- Following directly from challenge 1, there are further difficulties around how to implement a systematic approach in a way that also respects faculty autonomy and disciplinary differences, particularly in institutions with a tradition of independent faculties. In this regard, there are also challenges around supporting the intangible elements that affect engagement in evaluation processes such as trust, ownership and communication.

Challenge 3

Motivating teaching staff to take part in training for teaching development

- Teaching competence was frequently cited as one of the most difficult aspects of programme delivery to evaluate and enhance, in particular in terms of ensuring that action is taken where a need for development is identified. Many institutions offer initial teacher training, but nothing further. If voluntary training is offered, it often does not reach those that most need it, is always accessed by the same individuals, or there is a lack of time for teachers to attend. At the other end of the spectrum, many institutions have some form of teaching awards, but the actual award or incentive varies significantly, and there is often little public recognition attached, thereby reducing its value.

Challenge 4

Ensuring student involvement in programme evaluation and development

- Ensuring meaningful engagement of students in evaluation processes came up repeatedly, regardless of the specific evaluation methodology used. Examples of difficulties included achieving sufficient response rates to student surveys, involving students in curriculum development, and offering sufficient opportunities for input to governance and decision-making processes in order to involve them in discussions about follow-up of evaluation results. Furthermore, it was found that students often lack the skills to give constructive feedback and motivation to do so may be low when the results will not benefit them directly, but only the next cohort of students.

Challenge 5

Encouraging responsibility at all levels of institutional hierarchy

- This challenge leads on from that of student engagement but expands to encompass the difficulties in ensuring engagement and ownership across the full range of institutional stakeholders, including leadership, academics, and support staff. As responsibility for QA is increasingly focused in one office (either centrally or in each faculty), it risks becoming an isolated task and those directly responsible may find it difficult to get relevant stakeholders involved. It can also be particularly difficult to reach certain groups of stakeholders, such as international or part-time staff.

Challenge 6

Lack of resources

- Lack of resources, be it funding, staff or time, is a complaint that could be voiced by most institutions in relation to almost any aspect of their work. While some small-scale actions such as disseminating student questionnaires or sharing basic information about actions resulting from feedback can be implemented with relatively few resources, developing a systematic approach to evaluating L&T (for example, having a comprehensive and efficient data collection system), making real changes on the basis of the results requires ongoing investment, as does closing the feedback loop to demonstrate how the resources have been used and the resulting impact.

Recommendation 1

To put the focus on the programme as the main reference point around which the evaluation of L&T is organised

- A good programme is more than the sum of its constituent elements.

- While individual courses should have learning outcomes, these also need to be mapped against learning outcomes at the programme level to ensure that they are coherent and that the overall programme aims are reached.

- While researchers are commonly coordinated around research groups, teaching staff often have little contact with other academics teaching courses as part of the same programme.

Recommendation 2

To have one institutional policy and framework outlining a systematic approach to the evaluation of L&T at programme level, defining the overall shared aims and expectations

- It is important to have a common policy and framework from the central level to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals and in accordance with the same principles.

- A coherent, institution-wide system with ongoing analysis, action and follow-up requires investment.

- A common framework, endorsed by institutional leadership, contributes to building a shared understanding of the importance of and responsibility for continually enhancing the quality of the educational offer.

Recommendation 3

To ensure different stakeholder perspectives are involved in defining programme aims and intended learning outcomes and then in evaluating whether these goals are being reached

- It should be viewed as a continuous cycle, with involvement in;
  - a) defining the aims and intended learning outcomes of a programme and in designing the curriculum
  - b) formative evaluation during programme delivery in order to make small-scale adjustments where possible
  - c) evaluation of outcomes, in order to adapt how the programme is designed and delivered in the future.

- Students are key stakeholders here and should be provided with sufficient opportunities to provide feedback, through both formal and informal channels.

- There should be opportunities for providing feedback mid-course and mid-programme to allow that, if possible, action can already be taken while it still affects them.

Recommendation 4

To evaluate and enhance the full range of services that support students in achieving their learning outcomes, and teachers in delivering high quality programmes

- It is important to evaluate not just student outcomes but to consider the full range of aspects that contribute to the student learning experience.

- Support services for teachers should also be included in evaluation and monitoring processes.

- In order to make evaluation effective, there should be extensive coordination and communication between different institutional units, specifically including those responsible for quality assurance, teaching support and student support.

Recommendation 1	**Recommendation 2**	**Recommendation 3**	**Recommendation 4**
To put the focus on the programme as the main reference point around which the evaluation of L&T is organised	To have one institutional policy and framework outlining a systematic approach to the evaluation of L&T at programme level, defining the overall shared aims and expectations	To ensure different stakeholder perspectives are involved in defining programme aims and intended learning outcomes and then in evaluating whether these goals are being reached	To evaluate and enhance the full range of services that support students in achieving their learning outcomes, and teachers in delivering high quality programmes

Conclusions

- The need to enhance the visibility of L&T as a central mission of higher education institutions to address the current disparity of esteem in comparison with research;

- The importance of investing in support for teaching development (including training, practice-sharing and awards) and ensuring that teaching can play a central role in career paths for academics.

Thank you!

- You can find the full report at;

- https://www.eua.eu/resources/publications/813:evaluation-of-learning-and-teaching-thematic-peer-group-report.html