Student Centred Learning from the teachers' perspective

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Chair of Higher Education and Research Standing Committee

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Ministerial commitment

- The Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Declaration on the EHEA in March 2010, recognized the need for 'a more **supportive environment** for the staff to fulfil their tasks'

- The 2012 Bucharest Ministerial Conference committed to **student-centred learning**, based on methods of teaching that involve students as active participants. Together with institutions, students and staff, ministers committed to **facilitate a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment**.

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ESG 2015 include reference to the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation

- More focus on internal QA and quality culture
- Guideline 1.3: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - respects and attends to the **diversity of students** and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths
  - considers and uses **different modes of delivery**, where appropriate
  - flexibly uses a variety of **pedagogical methods**

Standard 1.5 on Teaching Staff

Need to set up a **supportive environment** that allows teaching staff to carry out their work effectively.

Such an environment

- sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for **staff recruitment and conditions of employment** that recognise the importance of teaching

- offers opportunities for and promotes the **professional development** of teaching staff

- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the **link between education and research**

- encourages innovation in **teaching methods** and the use of new technologies

The T4SCL-project (ESU-EI 2010)

- The project started in December 2009 and ran for one year - http://www.esu-online.org/projects/archive/scl/

- The first part is an analysis of existing theory and practice

- The second part is a tool kit, where practical advices are provided and the principles for the paradigm are elaborated

Nine basic principles

I: SCL requires an ongoing reflexive process

II: SCL does not have a ›One-Size-Fits-All‹ solution

III: Students have different learning styles

IV: Students have different needs and interests

V: Choice is central to effective learning in SCL

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Nine principles (ctd.)

VI: Students have different experiences and background knowledge

VII: Students should have control over their learning

VIII: SCL is about ›Enabling‹ not ›Telling‹

IX: Learning needs cooperation between students and staff.

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SCL, quality and efficiency of learning

- Standardised or teacher centred:
  - Memorising or rote learning only for the next exam
  - Not necessary a deeper understanding
- Student centred:
  - Students striving for understanding

  (Gibbs and Coffey 2004; Active Learning in Higher Education, 5: 87–100.)

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Implications of SCL

- No standardised tests or curriculum
- No "one size fits all" approach to planning and study-structure
- Respect for and protection of academic freedom – including the freedom to learn for the students
- Continuous professional development
- Time to prepare and evaluate classes

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Supporting teachers in making SCL a reality

EI study by Marie Clarke (2015): *Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education* recommend the following on teaching:

- There is a need for **more investment in activities that support the teaching function** and provide academics with high quality pedagogical support that focuses directly on their practice.
- Make available **specialised training** to academics so that they can deal with students who are presenting with diverse needs.
- All higher education institutions should make specific and public **commitments to the teaching role** of academics.
- All higher education institutions should **support research led teaching**.
- Higher education institutions should recognise **teaching as a legitimate career progression route.**
- Higher education institutions should prioritise the **evaluation of teaching**. Such evaluations should facilitate academics in the **improvement of their pedagogical activities**

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Academic professional values

- Academic freedom and individual autonomy
- Community of scholars and collegial governance,
- Scrutiny of accepted wisdom and truth seeking
- Service to society through the production of knowledge, the transmission of culture, and education of the young

(Kuh & Whitt, 1986)

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Casualisation of employment

- 48% did not have permanent contracts.

- 17% had worked in three institutions before their current job, and 10% had worked in six or more institutions since they qualified

- A higher proportion of males were in permanent positions compared to their female colleagues

- While not having permanent positions a majority of respondents were employed full time.

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Perceptions of working conditions

- The **contractual status** and prior work experience of academics played an important role in shaping perceptions of their working conditions.

- For many there is **perceived deterioration** in their working conditions since starting work and is attributed to increased administrative responsibilities; staffing embargos; wage cuts and few opportunities for professional development.

- Difficult to achieve a **work life balance** in their current institutional contexts.

- Half of respondents (51%) were satisfied with their jobs, this was attributed to the **levels of autonomy** that enjoyed within their **research areas**.

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Perceptions of teaching environment

- A majority of academics across the countries surveyed were of the view that **teaching was underfunded**, there was a lack of teaching support staff and that more administrative support for teaching related activities was required.

- Only 39% perceived management in their institutions as being **supportive of teaching**.

- **Training** provided for teaching is **not** assessed as being **adequate**

- The **evaluation of teaching** was regarded as a bureaucratic process that did **not focus on developing teacher quality**

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Emerging conclusions

1. The success of higher education institutions in a period of austerity is inextricably linked to the creation of supportive academic work environments.

2. Permanent employment is a pre-condition for creating supportive work environment.

3. Academic staff needs to be involved in meaningful decision making through collegial governance structures and their representative unions.

4. Urgent need for improving professional development for academic staff.

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Emerging conclusions (ctd.)

5. Autonomy in research remains the key factor explaining job satisfaction in otherwise difficult conditions

6. Academics are not against accountability but the evaluation of teaching should be focused on improving teaching quality

7. Unnecessary administrative burdens must be reduced and more administrative support is needed

8. Goals and processes of Bologna process need to be better communicated to academic community

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Many of the recent reforms lead to an instrumentalisation of education, knowledge and understanding. When you are required to make all teaching fit into 10 ECTS and modules of 7 weeks, where there are targets to meet and levels of competence to be measured and assessed at the next exam, it will most often interfere with your way of thinking. I know as an educator that we are experts in teaching students how to get high grades in exams. But what have they studied and learned?" [Lecturer, Denmark].

(Clarke 2015, p 61)

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