eua EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATION

REPORT

Student-centred learning: approaches to quality assurance

Anna Gover, Tia Loukkola and Helene Peterbauer

September 2019

European University Association asbl

Avenue de l'Yser 24	Rue du Rhône 114
1040 Brussels	Case postale 3174
Belgium	1211 Geneva 3, Switzerland
+32 (0) 2 230 55 44	+41 22 552 02 96

www.eua.eu · info@eua.eu

Content

1. Introduction

Among the many recent changes to higher education in Europe, there is a renewed focus on the educational mission of universities. In parallel, there is a widely accepted paradigm shift from teaching to learning underpinned by the discourse around the need for education provision to focus on student learning and success (EUA, 2018). This approach, which is commonly referred to as student-centred learning, stipulates that education provision and all its aspects are defined by the intended learning outcomes and most suitable learning process, instead of the student's learning being determined by the education provided.

Recent evidence (see e.g. Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 72 and European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, pp. 53-57) attests that there is widespread will across European higher education to focus more on the student learning experience and to back this up with the necessary changes in policy and practice. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has most recently reiterated its ambition to address learning and teaching through the establishment of an Advisory Group tasked with developing guidelines for governments on this topic.[1] Student-centred learning can safely be expected to appear as a cross-cutting priority in this document.

The central function of student-centred learning for the development of high-quality education is also highlighted by Standard 1.3 in the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG),[2] according to which universities "should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach" (ESG, 2015, p. 12). The introduction of this standard was one of the major novelties of the ESG 2015,[3] which has contributed to it being widely discussed within the quality assurance community (cf. Crozier et al., 2016, p. 10).

The student-centred learning concept spans a variety of aspects affecting the organisation of learning and teaching, so the difficulties associated with implementing it, let alone ensuring and demonstrating its effectiveness only enhanced the focus on this new standard. Its "broad nature" was highlighted already in a paper published by the European University Association (EUA) in 2015, which took stock of the status of internal quality assurance in European higher education, and – despite acknowledgements of previous progress made in this regard – concluded that it was "unclear what evidence will or should be used to show that [...] the requirements of this standard are being met" (Gover et al., 2015, p. 16).

The more recent EUA-led study *Enhancing quality: From policy to practice* demonstrated that such uncertainties persist. Its results indicated that the quality assurance community still found it difficult to address student-centred learning, partially due to a lack of a common understanding of the concept (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, pp. 34-35). This appears to be the case despite the guidelines linked to the standard, which outline some of the key characteristics of student-centred learning (see Appendix).

---

1   More information on this Advisory Group is available under http://www.ehea.info/page-Advisory-Group-2.
2   The European University Association (EUA) was a co-author of the ESG, together with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), Education International (EI), BUSI-NESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
3   The original ESG were published in 2005. In 2015 the EHEA Ministerial conference adopted a revised version, which aimed to make them clearer and to reflect the changing higher education landscape.

This report reflects on the material available in order to shed light on what student-centred learning is, or can be, and how it can be addressed in internal quality assurance processes, thus complementing the guidance provided by the ESG. The data feeding into this report is drawn from various studies published by EUA, among others, on the status of student-centred learning and quality assurance across Europe's universities, and on developments in learning and teaching in general. In addition, a focus group was organised on 6 June 2019,[4] which gathered representatives from 25 EUA members[5] in 19 countries to share examples from institutional practice and discuss the draft messages forming this report. The focus group was instrumental in clarifying and adjusting them.[6]

The points in this report are raised in full awareness that the application of the ESG is influenced by a variety of factors including legislation, external quality assurance frameworks, national and institutional context and culture, and programme specificities (cf. Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 35). The same concerns student-centred learning, the implementation of which is dependent, for example, on the programme level or the discipline (European Students' Union (ESU), 2015, pp. 17 and 23). As such, the starting point for the discussions in this report is that student-centred learning, like quality assurance, is a context-sensitive concept that may be applied differently in the various institutional and programme settings (cf. ESU and Education International (EI), 2010, p. 3; Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 35).

The next chapters provide an overview and state-of-play mapping of some areas for institutions to consider when fostering a student-centred education provision. The report then continues with a discussion on approaches to quality assurance that may be useful for an institution reflecting on how it ensures student-centred learning through its activities.

---

4 https://eua.eu/events/95-eua-focus-group-on-%E2%80%98quality-assurance-of-student-centred-learning%E2%80%99.html.
5 EUA membership is open to universities, national rectors' conferences or other bodies active in higher education or research from one of the signatory countries of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe. For more information, see https://eua.eu/about/become-a-member.html.
6 The authors of this report would like to thank the focus group participants for their active contribution and valuable input.

2. Student-centred learning

In the context of the Bologna Process, student-centred learning has been defined as an approach that replaces purely transmissive models of education with an outcome-based perspective implemented through "new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner [...] leading to high quality, flexible and more individually tailored learning paths" (EHEA, 2009, p. 3). It is largely understood as a "paradigm shift" (Sursock and Smidt, 2010, p. 4) and "both a mindset and a culture" (ESU and EI, 2010, p. 2), encompassing all aspects contributing to the organisation of learning and teaching in higher education. It is not limited to a pedagogy like active learning, nor reduced to student participation in design and decision-making processes.

Many benefits have been linked to student-centred learning. It is generally considered to improve teaching (Warming and Frydensberg, 2017) and student learning. It fosters transversal skills, critical thinking and active citizenship, and is thus considered to better prepare students for the current and future labour market and society. For example, links have recently been suggested between student-centred learning and the achievement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Junyent et al., 2018, p. 30).

Because of the many benefits associated with an academic environment geared towards student learning and success, universities are increasingly implementing elements of a student-centred approach, which allow and encourage students to be actively involved in the creation of their learning experience. This focus, which also needs to be understood in the context of the recently broadened and globalised access to higher education, acknowledges that there are different types of students requiring individualised education. In this sense, student-centred learning is a concept that takes into account the student as a person with a unique background while also ensuring the student's active involvement in shaping his or her own learning path.

A teaching environment geared towards student learning is one in which the teacher facilitates the student's learning. Learning is a responsibility shared between the two (Sursock and Smidt, 2010, p. 31) and is achieved, for example, through methods such as problem- or research-based learning. Yet ensuring the most effective and meaningful path of learning also encompasses institutional responsibilities such as curriculum design, support services and appropriate learning facilities (cf. EFFECT/EUA, 2017).

Student-centred learning is often characterised by small group work, but a mix of various methods involving both student- and teacher-centred approaches to learning and teaching is common and successful in providing high-quality education (Sursock and Smidt, 2010, p. 32). It is the responsibility of institutions to ensure a contextually appropriate selection of pedagogical methods as well as a continuous review thereof to provide students with the most adequate modes of delivery.

This concerns assessment methodologies as well, with assessment needing to be formative and tailored to the individual learning methodology (ibid., p. 32), i.e. including regular feedback to allow both teacher and student to closely monitor the learning progress and reflect on it. In student-centred learning, both the learning process and its assessment are defined through intended learning outcomes, which are based on the skills and knowledge needed by the future graduate (EUA, 2018).

Finally, student-centred learning is often linked to student participation in governance and other decision-making processes (Sursock, 2015, p. 88). While student participation is not a dominant aspect of student-centred learning – and is thus not further addressed in the following chapter – it certainly is a logical consequence of it. It reflects the core notion of students as partners in the learning process and having an active role in developing their learning paths, as well as the recognised benefits of involving all stakeholders in institutional processes in order to ensure, e.g., meaningful curriculum design (Loukkola and Peterbauer, 2019, p. 8). Therefore, to ensure that the learning environment is truly student-centred and fit-for-purpose, institutions are not only encouraged to design their education provision with a learner-centred perspective in mind, but also to make sure that students are involved in these decision-making processes (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 38).

All of these ways to foster a student-centred education provision are reflected in various reports and policy statements and suggest a common basis at the policy level of what student-centred learning is and how it supports student success. At the institutional level, however, there remain challenges in translating this into practice (cf. ESU, 2018, p. 50).

3. Mapping institutional policies and practices

As noted earlier, student-centred learning is envisioned as a complete rethinking of education provision. The activation of learners' responsibility requires a shift in culture and mindset from both students and teachers with arguments for a "partnership on equal footing" (Loukkola and Peterbauer, 2019, p. 5). An important driver for changing this relationship is the pedagogical approaches used, with active learning methods emphasising the teacher's position as a facilitator, whose role is to guide students in taking ownership of their own learning (Christersson et al., 2019, p. 3).

In addition to paying attention to the teaching methods, there are a number of other practical steps that an institution can take to promote students' responsibility for their learning. These include allowing flexibility in learning paths and study choices, ensuring guidance and support so that students can make informed choices about their studies, and providing sufficient opportunity for students to give and receive feedback.
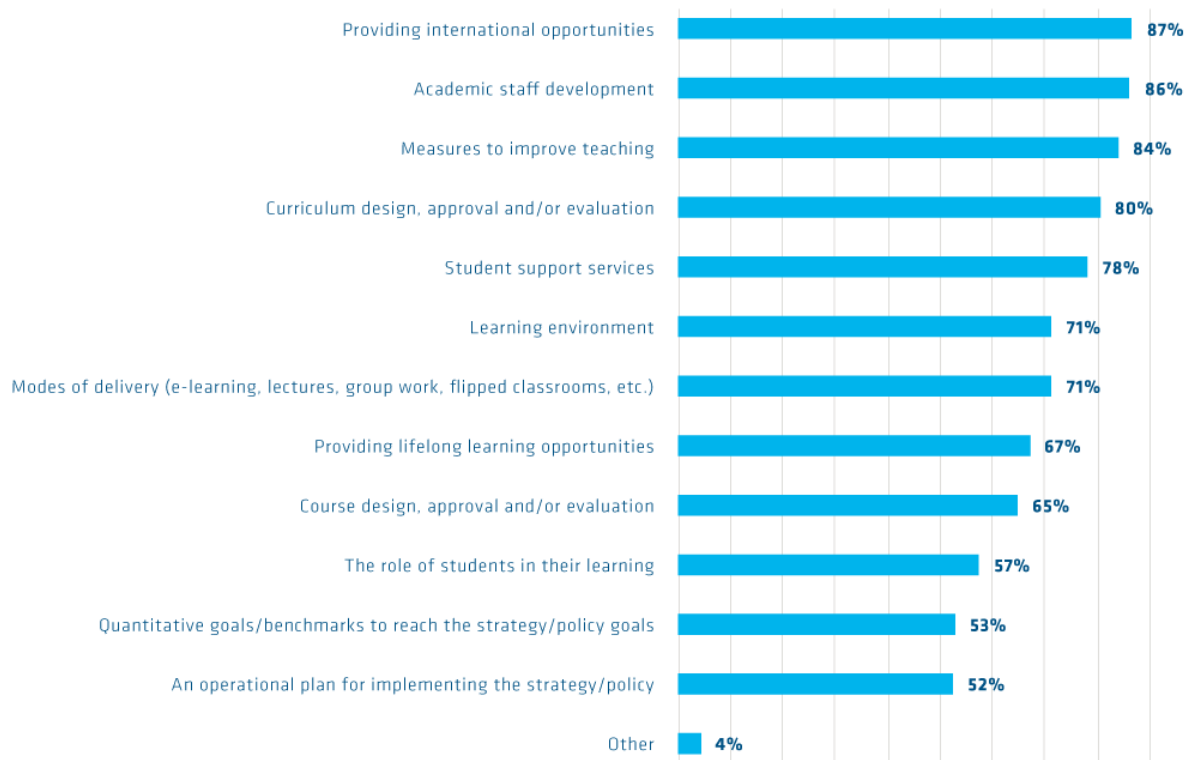
There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for student-centred learning, but certain trends can be observed and many institutional activities, depending on how they are implemented, have the potential to foster it. In this chapter, some of these have been chosen for further exploration, namely institutional strategies and policies, flexible learning paths and curriculum design, teaching methods and pedagogical training, student assessment, and student services and learning resources.

Strategies and policies

The starting point for ensuring student-centred provision is for institutions to have a common and regularly revisited understanding of what this means in their specific context, as well as a commitment to delivering it in practice. A concrete definition established at the institutional level is one way of achieving this. However, participants of the focus group, as well as EUA's previous work (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 36), indicated that this is not common. Moreover, participants of the focus group suggested that it is not necessary and could, if perceived as rigid, have an adverse effect such as stifling creativity. A common understanding reached by means other than an explicitly defined statement can be just as effective. This is particularly true if fostered through a broad, ongoing discussion with internal stakeholders about what student-centred learning means for the institution and how measures to support it can be integrated into learning and teaching strategies in general.

Data from EUA's Trends 2018 report shows that 86% of responding institutions have a teaching strategy at institutional and/or faculty level (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 15). Figure 1 shows that many of these strategies or policies include concrete elements that are often associated with student-centred learning.

Figure 1: Elements included in the institution's learning and teaching strategy

Element	Percentage
Providing international opportunities	87%
Academic staff development	86%
Measures to improve teaching	84%
Curriculum design, approval and/or evaluation	80%
Student support services	78%
Learning environment	71%
Modes of delivery (e-learning, lectures, group work, flipped classrooms, etc.)	71%
Providing lifelong learning opportunities	67%
Course design, approval and/or evaluation	65%
The role of students in their learning	57%
Quantitative goals/benchmarks to reach the strategy/policy goals	53%
An operational plan for implementing the strategy/policy	52%
Other	4%

Source: Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 15, Fig. 3

The inclusion of these elements indicates a strong interest among institutions in providing quality education and implementing student-centred learning, even though it might not be specifically named as such. However, only just over half of the Trends respondents reported that their learning and teaching strategy also includes quantitative goals/benchmarks to reach the strategy/policy goals (53%) or an operational plan for implementing the strategy/policy (52%) (ibid., p. 15).

The need for students to take responsibility for their own learning is at the heart of the concept of student-centred learning. This requires, on the one hand, students to have a proactive and independent mindset in approaching their learning and, on the other hand, institutions to provide a framework that facilitates this, as well as active support for students who are not accustomed to this style of learning. Yet, only 57% of the Trends respondents that have a learning and teaching strategy reported that this includes a reference to the role of students in their learning (ibid., p. 16).

Finally, when collecting data for Trends 2018, EUA also analysed 64 institutional learning and teaching mission statements and noted that nearly all of them referred to "quality assurance (QA) and quality management, with a general statement on quality teaching, the development of an internal QA system as a strategic goal for learning and teaching, concrete indicators and the accreditation awarded to study programmes" (ibid., p. 17). This attests to the importance attributed to quality assurance processes in ensuring that education provision meets the goals set out by the institution.

Flexible learning paths and curriculum design

The core element of a student's educational experience is the programme they follow. Institutions have been adapting their curricula to respond, on the one hand, to the increased diversity of the student body (cf. Loukkola and Dakovic, 2017, pp. 14-17) and, on the other, to the need for higher education to better prepare students for their future professional and societal roles (cf. ibid., pp. 9-13).

One of the driving factors behind curriculum reform has been the steady increase in the use of learning outcomes, which are largely considered to form the basis for student-centred learning. Data from Trends shows progress in recent years: in 2018 learning outcomes had been developed for all courses in 76% of responding institutions, compared to 64% in 2015 and 53% in 2010 (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 35). A majority of Trends 2018 respondents stated that the introduction of learning outcomes has resulted in the revision of course contents (91%), a reduction in course duplication (73%) and more flexible learning paths (63%) (ibid., p. 36). However, the positive impact of learning outcomes extends beyond curriculum design, with over half of institutions also reporting easier recognition, changes in teaching methods, improved overall teaching quality and improved cooperation among teaching staff (ibid.). This demonstrates that the implementation of learning outcomes has had a comprehensive quality-enhancing effect on diverse areas affecting learning and teaching.

Trends data also showed that the majority of institutions have procedures to check whether the education provided is in line with the intended learning outcomes. In most cases this is done through a combination of measures and responsibilities assigned at the level of the individual teacher, the programme coordinator/director and at faculty/department level (ibid., p. 38). In two-thirds of institutions, these actors have frameworks at institutional and/or national level guiding their work (67% and 68% respectively) (ibid., p. 41; see also figure 2).

Figure 2: Programme curricula development
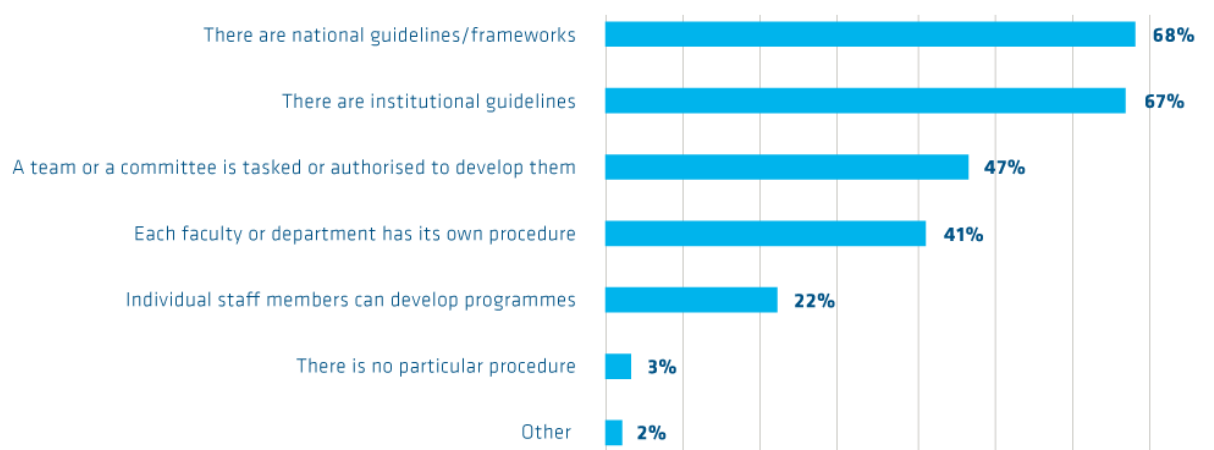
Source: Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 41, Fig. 14

The guidelines of Standard 1.3 call for flexible learning paths, and the experience of the focus group participants does indeed suggest that universities are – to varying degrees and following diverse approaches – in line with this call. In the group, there was a variety of interpretations of what constitutes a flexible learning path, with examples ranging from the type of requirements for being admitted to a programme to the recognition of prior learning and the timeframe in which students can take advantage of mobility schemes.

This picture is confirmed by Trends 2018, which showed that the majority of institutions provide students with some choice, but greater flexibility is granted at the level of selecting courses, than at the level of the overall study path: 80% of institutions commonly offer students a choice of optional courses in the study programme, 49% commonly allow students to change their study programme and 41% commonly allow some flexibility in the time it takes to finish a study programme (ibid., pp. 47-48).

Once a student has chosen a course, however, there appears to be very little possibility to influence how that course proceeds, with students rarely able to propose topics to be studied or choose the assessment method (ibid., p. 48). Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the issues related to flexibility of study paths are not in the control of the institution and depend rather on the legal framework of the national education system.
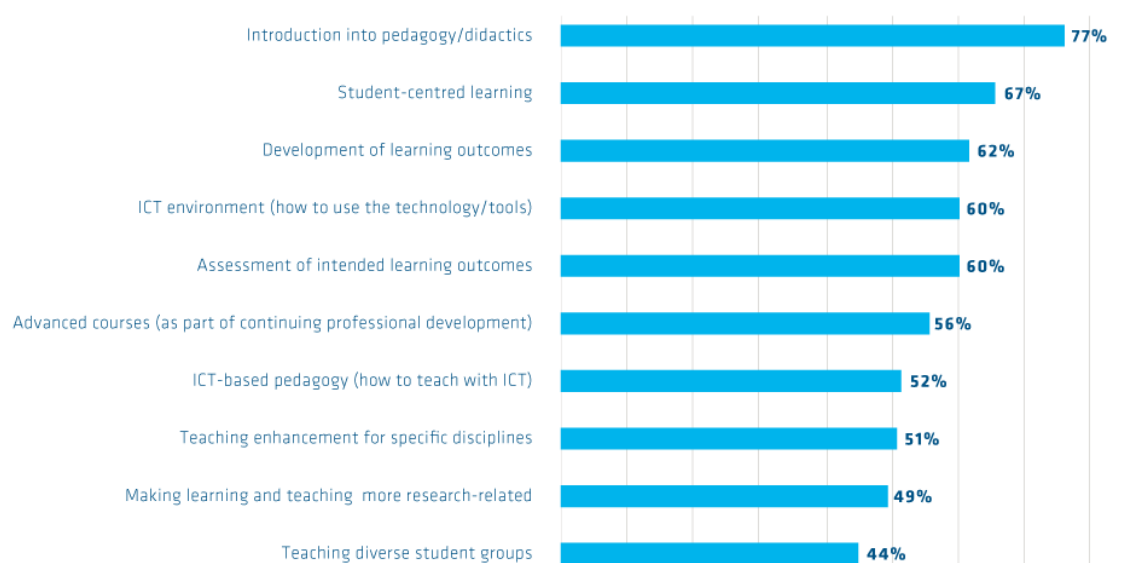
Teaching methods and pedagogical training

Teaching methods form an important part of student-centred learning. This is illustrated by the changes to Standard 1.5 addressing teaching staff in the ESG 2015, whose scope was widened compared to the ESG 2005 to also emphasise the key role of teachers in implementing student-centred learning.

EUA's work with its members shows that different types of pedagogical approaches aimed to enhance student learning, including problem-based learning, teaching in small groups, active and peer learning, are gaining ground (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018; Loukkola and Dakovic, 2017; Christersson et. al., 2019). In terms of the teaching approach to be used, 77% of Trends 2018 respondents reported that each teacher can decide for their own courses; however, only in 42% of institutions did they have sole responsibility. In the rest, there was also the involvement of other institutional actors, or in some cases even guidelines from national authorities (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 56). This demonstrates a shift away from teaching being an individual activity towards models in which there is not only an emphasis on collaboration, but also formal frameworks and guidelines.

To support teachers in broadening their methodological repertoire, many institutions offer pedagogical training, though Trends 2018 showed that this is usually voluntary (77%) rather than compulsory (37%) (ibid., p. 72). In institutions that have compulsory teaching enhancement courses, these are usually introductory pedagogy courses, or they address issues that are crucial to having a student-centred approach to learning and teaching, such as the development and assessment of learning outcomes or student diversity (ibid., p. 73; see also figure 3).

Figure 3: Topics addressed by compulsory enhancement courses

Topic	%
Introduction into pedagogy/didactics	77%
Student-centred learning	67%
Development of learning outcomes	62%
ICT environment (how to use the technology/tools)	60%
Assessment of intended learning outcomes	60%
Advanced courses (as part of continuing professional development)	56%
ICT-based pedagogy (how to teach with ICT)	52%
Teaching enhancement for specific disciplines	51%
Making learning and teaching more research-related	49%
Teaching diverse student groups	44%

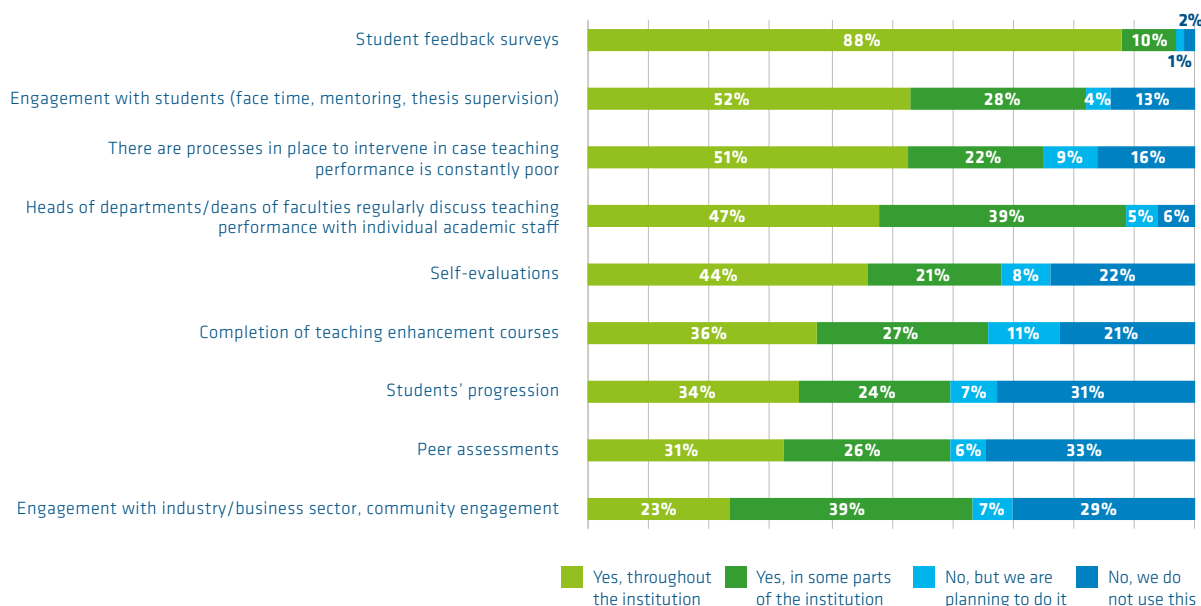*Source: Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 73, Fig. 33*

This picture was only partially confirmed by the focus group participants, the majority of whom reported having compulsory pedagogical training at their institution. However, this was often compulsory for specific groups, for example, new teachers, and its scope varied significantly from a one-off course covering basic didactics to ongoing professional training leading to a formal qualification or certificate.

Courses that are voluntary, however, bring with them the paradox that voluntary training is not necessarily accessed by those who might most benefit from it; and for those who might want to attend, there is often a lack of time to do so (Dewhirst and Gover, 2019, p. 4). Tackling this calls for a cultural shift towards more importance being placed on teaching skills, underpinned by giving teaching greater visibility in the university mission, and by measures to reward and recognise excellent teaching both as stand-alone initiatives (e.g. teaching prizes) and as part of academic career paths (Loukkola and Dakovic, 2017, p. 6).

Finally, the focus group participants highlighted that, whether compulsory or voluntary, the effectiveness of pedagogical training depended not just on its content, but also on the form of delivery (for example, one-off or ongoing, formal or informal) and whether it is framed as something for teachers who need additional support or as continuous professional development for everyone.

While according to Trends 2018 there is a range of methods used at institutions to evaluate teaching, student feedback surveys still remain the most common approach. Almost all respondents reported using them, despite concerns about their reliability (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, pp. 70-71). Other approaches included self-evaluations, peer assessment and performance discussions (ibid., p. 70; see also figure 4). It is, however, noteworthy that Trends respondents commented "that they are not yet fully satisfied with the present approaches in evaluating teaching performance and would like to enhance them" (ibid., p. 71). For this reason, a variety of coordinated and complementary tools and processes is needed to ensure appropriate evaluation of teaching.

Figure 4: Means and criteria used for the assessment of teaching

Source: Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p.70, Fig. 31 (adapted)

Student assessment

The guidelines of Standard 1.3 highlight the relevance of adequate assessment methods to a meaningful and comprehensive implementation of student-centred learning. They present programme delivery and assessment of students as complementary, pointing to the "importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers" (ESG, 2015, p. 12). This link was echoed by participants of the focus group, some of whom questioned

the value of student-centred teaching methods, unless they are backed by a similar approach to assessment. Furthermore, it was suggested that the guidelines related to assessment in the ESG do not sufficiently reflect or promote the shift from teaching to learning.

Indeed, concerns have been raised that assessment methods are not keeping up with the speed of change seen in other areas of education provision (Coates, 2015, p. 401). However, more recent reports point to a variety of formative assessment methods (cf. Eggers Bjælde et al., 2018, p. 4) and indicate that the learning outcome approach has led to the revision of assessment methods at institutional (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, pp. 32 and 36) and at national levels (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 57).[7] Furthermore, of the Trends respondents from institutions that have compulsory training for teachers, 60% included assessment of intended learning outcomes as one of the topics (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 73). The focus on learning outcomes also calls for assessment approaches to be transparent and criteria-based, often resulting in the use of rubrics, which set out this information in a clear and accessible way for students and assessors (Wagenaar, 2019, p. 302).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the issue of feedback. Previous studies have noted that much attention is given to collecting feedback from students to evaluate teaching. However, for students to develop as independent learners, it is also important that they receive feedback from teachers about their work and learning and how to improve it (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, pp. 37-38). Ensuring that feedback is a two-way process also fosters the concept of the student-teacher partnership and supports each in taking ownership of their respective roles in the process.

Student services and learning resources

Among the often-neglected foci of making the educational environment fit-for-purpose and student-centred are the physical spaces in which students are expected to learn and the services and resources that allow students to focus on their learning. The importance of this is highlighted by Standard 1.6 of the ESG, which addresses learning resources and student support. Evidence shows that universities and the higher education community at large are increasingly acknowledging the need to redesign learning environments to make them more student-centred (Christersson et al., 2019, p. 6; ESU and EI, 2010, p. 16), and points to the need to cover facilities and student services in learning and teaching evaluations (Dewhirst and Gover, 2019, p. 6).

In reaction to these calls for a more flexible, learner-centred environment on campus, which has been hindered in the past by the tradition of having theatre-style, teacher-focused lecture halls, institutions are adapting their physical spaces. The Trends 2018 report showed that nearly all responding institutions were enhancing existing spaces, such as libraries and labs, to accommodate new forms of learning and teaching, while the vast majority had also created spaces for student-to-student interaction (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018, p. 61).

The importance of support services to student success is reflected in universities' learning and teaching strategies. Just over three quarters of Trends respondents reported that such services are part of their institutional strategies (ibid., p. 15), which makes this aspect one of the most frequently cited elements of such strategies.

With regard to support staff, Trends distinguishes between those who have teaching duties and those who provide student and institutional services. Roughly 60% of respondents stated that their teaching support staff provide a substantial contribution to delivering the institution's programmes (ibid., p. 62), demonstrating the significant impact they have on the education provision.

---

7 To further support the drive to innovate student assessment across European universities, in 2019 EUA is coordinating a Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Group dedicated to the topic. The group's report will be published in early 2020. Further information on EUA's Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Groups is available via https://eua.eu/101-projects/540-learning-teaching-thematic-peer-groups.html.

Along the same lines, focus group participants commented that support staff may focus on supporting teaching, students or the institution. Discussions demonstrated that awareness by support staff of student-centred learning may be particularly influenced by the extent to which the role of the individual staff member is linked to the teaching mission of the institution. Furthermore, it was noted that some universities have dedicated professional staff for a variety of services, while others rely on teaching staff to also deliver support services and the role of administrative staff is much more limited. Nevertheless, generally, support staff were found indispensable and the importance of them working as a team with teaching staff was highlighted (cf. Loukkola and Peterbauer, 2019, pp. 8-9).

4. Approaches to quality assurance

The previous chapter provides a picture of universities increasingly having policies, processes and infrastructures in place that guide and support their educational mission. Taking this as a starting point, three proposals are made below for how internal quality assurance can support institutions in ensuring that their education is geared towards student learning and students taking an active role in the process. While reflecting on these approaches, it is also worth keeping in mind that they can be applied to the quality assurance of all institutional activities, not just student-centred learning.

Back to basics

Following in the footsteps of previous EUA publications, this report uses quality assurance "in its broadest sense, including all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality" of an institution's activities (Loukkola and Zhang, 2010, p. 9; see also EUA, 2009, p. 6). This understanding is in line with the ESG. While the ESG do not favour any particular quality assurance model, the standards for internal quality assurance, nevertheless, can be interpreted as following a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of a study programme.

This consequentially concerns quality-assuring student-centred learning as well. In other words, quality assurance is, in this context, understood as a set of policies and processes through which an institution ensures that measures to support student-centred learning are embedded in its education provision.

This can be done right from the start, by including a commitment to it in institutional learning and teaching strategies and policies, as well as more specifically in guidelines and approaches for programme design. At the stage of delivering a programme, student-centred education provision is supported, amongst other things, by addressing it in pedagogical training for teaching staff, ensuring appropriate learning spaces, resources and services for students and decisions on teaching methods. All the relevant elements can then be covered through the evaluation and monitoring of learning and teaching, with the results used to inform changes and feed into new planning processes.

In this way, the elements discussed in the previous chapter (and covered in the other standards of the ESG) emerge as tools of quality assurance that can be employed to ensure an education provision geared towards student learning.

Beyond the obvious

A recent study on quality in higher education administration (Kivistö and Pekkola, 2017) distinguishes three dimensions: primary, secondary and latent quality assurance. This distinction may also be useful when considering the role of quality assurance in fostering student-centred learning.

Primary quality assurance practices and processes focus explicitly on ensuring student-centred approaches to provision. Internally, this might, among other things, take the form of offering pedagogical training on how to translate an institution's understanding of student-centred learning into the classroom or evaluating the student-centredness of the provision separately. An external quality assurance approach to the latter was explored through the ESU-coordinated project *Peer Assessment of Student-Centred Learning* (PASCL), which piloted a methodology for identifying good practice and areas for improvement in relation to student-centred education. It used external peer review to provide assessment and recommendations for participating institutions on their implementation of student-centred learning.

Secondary quality assurance processes, in turn, involve embedding a student-centred mindset into existing quality assurance processes, for example teaching guidelines, teaching evaluations and measures for collecting student feedback. Many of the elements addressed in the preceding chapter are secondary quality assurance processes, as

they explicitly assure other aspects of education provision but can, at the same time, serve to assure that these aspects are student-centred. In this way, student-centred learning is approached as a cross-cutting issue that is integrated into the planning and evaluation of other elements of learning and teaching.

Finally, latent quality assurance can be summarised as actions, practices and policies that can be categorised as quality assurance procedures, but are not explicitly named as such (Kivistö and Pekkola, 2017, p. 30). Staff recruitment and promotion policies may, for example, take teaching competences into account in a way that implicitly fosters student-centred approaches to education provision, as might other incentive systems, such as teaching awards. Other examples brought up by the focus group include strategic plans and mission statements, which may cover many activities that support student-centred learning, even if they are not always labelled as quality assurance.

When reflecting on institutional quality assurance activities, it may prove useful to combine and cross-reference the two approaches presented above, i.e. the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle and the three dimensions of quality assurance. For example, programme design can be regarded as a secondary quality assurance process in the "planning" stage, and recruitment processes as latent and belonging to the "doing" phase. When the focus group participants were asked to test this approach, they found it to be a challenging yet fruitful framework for mapping the diverse aspects of institutional quality assurance systems and reflecting on their goals and functions.

One clear outcome was that focus group participants generally identified more secondary and latent than primary processes in relation to ensuring a student-centred provision, or considered many processes to cut across several categories. This emphasises the importance of secondary and latent quality assurance as a way to embed a student-centred mindset in institutional culture and to demonstrate a student-centred education provision in the planning, implementation and monitoring of learning and teaching. Furthermore, limiting the number of primary quality assurance processes might help to counter the common perception of quality assurance as a bureaucratic burden.

A role for everyone

A report published at the launch of the ESG 2015 noted that Standard 1.3 is implicitly about the willingness to strengthen the link between quality assurance and the quality of learning and teaching. The report therefore already pointed out that to do this successfully would "require expertise that is typically located outside the [quality assurance] unit; therefore, it will be important to strengthen co-operation among different institutional actors" (Gover et al., 2015, p. 27). In particular, this is likely to require close cooperation between the work of quality assurance units and units or centres for learning and teaching, so that relevant information is shared and feeds into improvement measures, while also avoiding duplication of work.

The need for cooperation between different actors across a university community is further emphasised when considering that the remit of quality assurance professionals does not typically cover secondary quality assurance processes and rarely covers latent approaches. For this kind of approach to quality assurance to work, there needs to be clearly defined roles and an understanding of shared responsibilities. This means thinking carefully about, e.g., central or decentralised approaches and the role of different units (Gover and Loukkola, 2015, pp. 14-18).

If well implemented, this can work towards promoting ownership across the institution and therefore fostering a comprehensive quality culture. In fact, student-centred learning in itself already has the potential to promote institutional quality culture (Sursock and Smidt, 2010, p. 31) by activating students' responsibility for their own learning and increasing the awareness and ownership of academic staff of their role in providing high quality, student-centred education (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 40). Such an understanding of quality assurance fosters the establishment of an institutional community and a quality culture in which stakeholders feel a shared responsibility for the quality of education provision.

Yet it was pointed out in the focus group that for all institutional actors to be motivated to share responsibility for quality education, they need to feel that their contribution is valued and that they have the competence to carry out their role. Only if institutional actors feel empowered to make valuable contributions to a common goal will they have an interest in doing so.

5. Conclusions

As shown in this report, many universities across Europe already have policies, processes and infrastructures that are or could be used to ensure that their education provision is student-centred. Whether they embrace and promote student-centredness on an extensive scale is another question. The evidence indicates that this is not always the case.

For education to be truly geared towards student learning, it needs to be underpinned by an understanding of what this means and commitment to ensuring it, which is aligned to the specific institutional and disciplinary context. This discussion needs to be inclusive and ongoing so that the mindset becomes an integral part of the institutional culture and is also transmitted to new staff and students. Recent work by EUA has highlighted the importance of collaborative approaches (cf. Loukkola and Peterbauer, 2019, p. 8 and EFFECT/EUA, 2017) and evidence shows that this is indeed happening in many institutions. It is therefore worth repeating the recommendation that institutions should "engage internal stakeholders to develop a common institutional understanding of [student-centred learning], which can then be used to inform [quality assurance] processes" (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 36).

With regards to quality assurance, it is beneficial to remember the links and synergies between the different standards of the ESG and quality assurance processes (Gover et al., 2015, p. 27). This implies a need to embed the quality assurance of student-centred learning into existing processes rather than addressing it in isolation. Exactly how this is done will depend on the design of each institution's internal quality assurance system.

Finally, this report focuses on internal quality assurance and the role of universities in ensuring that their provision is geared towards student learning. The ESG place this responsibility firmly with universities, the underpinning principle being that the role of external quality assurance is to verify whether the institution has policies and practices to operationalise its understanding of student-centred learning (Gover and Loukkola, 2018, p. 35). In doing so, the need for context-sensitivity also concerns external quality assurance. Agencies should acknowledge the diversity of approaches to quality assurance laid out in the previous chapter and recognise that some of the most effective processes may not be specifically labelled as quality assurance of student-centred learning, or even as quality assurance at all.

In whichever way an institution chooses to define and implement an education provision geared towards student success, EUA hopes that the suggestions in this report will provide some inspiration to reflect on how they can ensure this.

Appendix[8]

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard:

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Guidelines:

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching

- 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;

- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;

- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;

- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;

- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;

- The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;

- The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;

- Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;

- The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;

- Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;

- A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

8 The appendix is a copy of Standard 1.3 in the ESG 2015 (ESG, 2015, p. 12).

References

Christersson, C., Staaf, P., Zhang, T. and Peterbauer, H., 2019, Promoting active learning in universities: Thematic Peer Group Report. Learning & Teaching Paper #5 (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUATPGr5 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Coates, H., 2015, 'Assessment of Learning Outcomes', in Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J. and Scott, P. (Eds.) The European Higher Education Area: Between Critical Reflection and Future Policies (Springer), pp. 399-413.

Crozier, F., Loukkola, T. and Michalk, B., 2016, 'Revision of the ESG: finding a common view on the future of quality assurance in higher education', in Journal of the European Higher Education Area, 1, pp. 1-16.

Dewhirst, C. and Gover, A. (eds.), 2019, Evaluation of learning and teaching: Thematic Peer Group Report. Learning & Teaching Paper #4 (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUATPGr4 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Eggers Bjælde, O., Lauridsen, K. M. and Büchert Lindberg, A., 2018, White paper: Current trends in assessment in Europe: The way forward (Coimbra Group/Education Innovation Working Group). http://bit.ly/2L9PYfQ (accessed 05/07/2019).

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union). http://bit.ly/2u785Z9 (accessed 05/07/2019).

EHEA, 2009, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué. http://bit.ly/2Jl2znt (accessed 05/07/2019).

European Students' Union (ESU), 2015, Overview on Student-Centred Learning in Higher Education in Europe: Research Study. http://bit.ly/2HumqGW (accessed 05/07/2019).

ESU, 2018, Bologna with Student Eyes 2018, the Final Countdown. http://bit.ly/2Hm9QKB (accessed 05/07/2019).

ESU and Education International (EI), 2010, Student-Centred Learning: Toolkit for Students, Staff and Higher Education Institutions. http://bit.ly/32hQP38 (accessed 05/07/2019).

European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching (EFFECT)/European University Association (EUA), Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. http://bit.ly/EFFECTprinciples (accessed 05/07/2019).

European University Association (EUA), 2009, Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity: Change Processes in European Higher Education Institutions. Final Report of the Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA) Project. (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2SO2Ndj (accessed 05/07/2019).

EUA, 2018, Learning and Teaching in Europe's Universities: An EUA position paper (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUALTposition (accessed 05/07/2019).

Gaebel, M. and Zhang, T., 2018, Trends 2018. Learning and teaching in the European Higher Education Area (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUATRENDS2018 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Gover, A. and Loukkola, T., 2015, EUREQA Moments! Top Tips for Internal Quality Assurance (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2XwJedF (accessed 05/07/2019).

Gover, A. and Loukkola, T., 2018, Enhancing quality: From policy to practice (Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice/EQUIP). http://bit.ly/30mvwM2 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Gover, A., Loukkola, T. and Sursock, A., 2015, ESG Part 1: Are universities ready? (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2FmqAQc (accessed 05/07/2019).

Junyent, M., Mulà, Í. and Fonolleda, M. (eds.), 2018, The Quality of Higher Education in Andorra and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Proposal for Quality Assessment Standards and Guidelines (Andorra la Vella, The Andorran Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (AQUA)). http://bit.ly/2SpoKm5 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Kivistö, J. and Pekkola, E., 2017, Quality of Administration in Higher Education (Sveriges universitets- och högskoleförbund (SUHF)). http://bit.ly/2LGNN2Q (accessed 05/07/2019).

Loukkola, T. and Dakovic, G. (eds.), 2017, EUA's Learning and Teaching Initiative. Report from the thematic peer groups (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2Jdiltc (accessed 05/07/2019).

Loukkola, T and Peterbauer, H., 2019, Towards a cultural shift in learning and teaching. Learning & Teaching Paper #6 (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUATPGr6 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Loukkola, T. and Zhang, T., 2010, Examining Quality Culture: Part 1 – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institution (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2YBHykm (accessed 05/07/2019).

PASCL Consortium, Guidelines for Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning, http://bit.ly/30gtA83 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015, Brussels, Belgium. http://bit.ly/2G3D134 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Sursock, A., 2015, Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/EUATRENDS2015 (accessed 05/07/2019).

Sursock, A. and Smidt, H., 2010, Trends 2010: A decade of change in European Higher Education (Brussels, EUA). http://bit.ly/2NHoVKS (accessed 05/07/2019).

Wagenaar, R., 2019, REFORM! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning (Deusto and Groningen, International Tuning Academy).

Warming, R. and Frydensberg, P., 2017, Principal in Own Learning – Student Centred Learning Viewed Through the Eyes of an External Quality Assurance Agency. EQAF Paper. http://bit.ly/2LJ6XFl (accessed 05/07/2019).

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides a unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.