



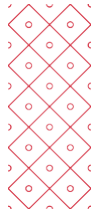
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Teaching Excellence at 4EU+ Universities

The Final Report



Partner Universities:

- Charles University
- University of Warsaw
- University of Copenhagen
- Sorbonne University



Introduction

It is said that teaching was the main function of universities until the late 19th century; however, the Humboldtian education ideal significantly increased the relevance of research, regarding teaching as a second-class activity. Nowadays with an increasing number of higher education institutions reassessing this model and emphasizing the relevance of quality teaching, a need for defining such concepts as “teaching excellence” and “quality teaching” seems to be of crucial importance.

Within the framework of the proposed project, we carried out comparative qualitative research to explore how the concepts of "teaching excellence" and "teaching quality" are perceived and applied at four 4EU+ universities: Charles University, University of Warsaw, University of Copenhagen, and Sorbonne University. This research involved an in-depth analysis of documents and interviews with key individuals from these consortium universities. Our primary objective was to test the hypothesis that these concepts could be understood and utilized in markedly different ways across these institutions.

The materials and documents we collected provided valuable insights into the translation of policy and strategic principles, such as the adoption of learner-centered teaching approaches, into concrete actions and their subsequent monitoring.

This research has enriched our comprehension of the discussed concepts, laying a solid foundation for the creation of new pedagogical skill enhancement programs to be designed at Charles University. Furthermore, our project aims to foster the development of shared standards among consortium universities, promoting better cooperation, facilitating course exchanges, and supporting student and teacher mobility, including virtual mobility.

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I Relevance

In recent years higher education institutions, and also governments, have shown increased interest in the quality and excellence of teaching and learning. Several initiatives have been implemented to raise awareness about the issue and to stimulate individuals (academic teachers) and institutions to care for the quality of teaching and to understand how to improve it.

To comprehend better what's happening, we must recognize that institutions, and teachers, are accustomed to collaborating effectively in research; however, the same competence is not so obvious when it comes to collaborating no longer (or not only) in research but in teaching even though this disparity has - unfortunately - been well known for a long time. Ernest Boyer in 1990 indeed identified four separate, yet overlapping, functions of the work of the professoriate: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, the scholarship of teaching; at the same time Boyer affirmed that "what we now have is a more restricted view of the scholarship, one that limits it to a hierarchy of functions. Basic research has come to be viewed as the first and most essential form of scholarly activity, with other functions flowing from it" (Boyer, 1990).

Starting from this premise, however, it is necessary to recognise how teaching is at the heart of many activities conducted within the 4EU+ Alliance, and it is precisely for this reason that sharing the different meanings attributed to the concept of quality (in teaching and learning) can facilitate effective and efficient collaboration between the universities in the Alliance.

The opacity in the use of the concept of quality is in fact not without risk: how can each institution (or teacher) act in concert if their idea of improving teaching is based on different implicit assumptions? This project, therefore, has set itself the goal of making the implicit, the unspoken, explicit so that real collaboration (among institutions and teachers) is possible - and effective.

This project is also of great relevance to the T&L Centres at Charles University, as they are currently in the process of development. The findings presented in the report can serve as a valuable resource to enhance the effectiveness of these centres. The information shared can support these centres not only in their initial establishment, but also in their ongoing efforts to improve and adapt to the evolving educational environment.



2 Quality in teaching and learning, an introduction

“Although quality has become the focus of attention, its meaning is not always clear nor its usage consistent. Indeed, the notion of quality in higher education has no agreed technical meaning and its use usually involves a heavy contextual overlay of some political or educational position” (Lindsay, 1992).

A decade later this statement still rings true, affirms Kim Watty in a seminal paper titled: *Quality in Higher Education: The Missing Academic Perspective* (2002). Now, in 2024 what has really changed? How many conceptualizations of the concept of quality are in place?

Vroeijenstijn (1992) suggested that all parties have an interest in quality, but not everyone has the same idea about it. This statement is perfectly aligned with our intention, with this project, to bring to the surface the unspoken, the implicit about quality in education, so that it can be discussed without running the risk of attributing different meanings to the same concept.

In the pursuit of fostering quality teaching within higher education, understanding the intricate layers of change becomes paramount. Parker and Jary's seminal work not only sheds light on the multifaceted nature of transformations within higher education but also underscores the critical role of their three-layer model in enhancing and sustaining quality teaching practices. Parker and Jary (1995) developed a three-layer model in their analysis of change in higher education in the UK, the work is therefore contextualised to a country specifically but can easily be generalised. The three levels (or layers) identified by Parker and Jary are:

- national-structural (policy and structural changes at the national level that affect all universities)
- organisational (internal changes to higher education – within universities)
- individual (actions, motivation and goals of an individual academic)

This model's enduring relevance extends beyond its original context, providing a foundational understanding applicable to broader academic settings globally.

In our research – in fact – we tried to operate with these different levels, as well as an international level, in mind and investigate their impact in different contexts and cultures.



3 The research

The project was divided into three phases and employed different research approaches:

- 1) Document analysis
- 2) Interviews with key persons
- 3) Opinions of the project participants

This structure is motivated by an attempt to investigate the concept of quality (and excellence) in education using different research methodologies (from document analysis to synchronous or asynchronous interviews) to collect as much data as possible, according to the resources available for the project.

3.1 Document analysis structure

In tackling the documentary analysis, the first issue was to choose the documents that could represent a relevant source of information with reference to the project objectives.

The first choice is the obvious one: the analysis of official documents where the universities define their strategic lines. Some common labels for university strategic plans include: "Strategic Plan" or "University Strategic Plan", "Vision 20XX" or "University Vision Plan", "Strategic Roadmap", etc. This is a type of political document, and should therefore be interpreted as such, but it represents a relevant source of information to understand the interpretation of the concept of teaching quality and the role of teaching in relation to research.

A first noteworthy element is how often these documents are only available in the language of the country of origin. Apart from the problems this presented for the project, it is an interesting finding to understand who this type of document is aimed at.

Another noteworthy fact is that none of the universities published a document such as 'Teaching and learning @ University of...'. In this type of document, the universities detail their vision in terms – exclusively – of teaching: teaching and learning priorities, quality and management processes, how the universities measure excellence (!).

A second type of document analysed refers to the universities' offer in terms of faculty development. This second source of information is – in fact – particularly relevant for investigating "how" the desire for a progressive improvement in the quality of teaching (or in the pursuit of excellence) is translated into concrete actions aimed at teachers (focusing our attention on objectives, content, formats and targets).

The third type of document analysed refers to the tool with which universities act directly on the 'recognition' of teaching quality: teaching awards. This specific instrument is very informative from our point of view since it implies an explication of the criteria underlying the evaluation of teaching quality at the level of the individual teacher.

Finally, within the framework of the project, we also analysed contextual documents i.e., those of a regulatory nature that define the criteria for teachers' career progression. Here follows an outline of the structure of the search to facilitate the reader comprehension (fig. 1).



Fig 1: Research structure

3.2 Interviews with key roles description

In the second round of data collection, we decided to proceed with interviews – one for each university – with key persons capable of deepening the interpretation of the concept of teaching quality.

Defining the structure of the questionnaire was itself a revealing process: in collaborating on the identification of the key questions, the partners made their views explicit and thus contributed to the creation of questions that could investigate the same concept in different contexts and universities.

The questions therefore aimed not only at collecting points of view on teaching quality and improvements but also at gathering evidence, opinions, concrete examples that allow an interpretation of the concept that goes beyond the policy statements.

Key roles interviews' questions

- 1) *How would you define teaching quality?*
- 2) *How do you measure teaching quality (please specify whether you are referring to a course, program, or institution level)?*



- 2a. *What kind of data does your institution collect to evaluate or measure teaching quality?*
- 2b. *What are the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) related to teaching quality used at your institution?*
- 3) *If we consider different levels (individual courses, programs, and the institution as a whole), how do you adjust the measurement and assessment of teaching quality?*
- 4) *Could you provide some examples of how you enhance teaching quality at the levels mentioned in the previous question?*
- 5) *Can you share some examples of how teaching quality has been improved on the initiative of management (considering the managerial structure in place)?*
- 6) *Can you share some examples of how teaching quality has been improved on the initiative of teachers or students?*
- 7) *What measures is your university currently undertaking to enhance teaching quality in the short, medium, and long term?*
- 8) *In your opinion, what are the essential conditions (the sine qua non) for improving teaching quality?*
- 9) *How does your institution communicate its vision of teaching quality, if at all, to both teachers and students?*
- 10) *Are there any teaching quality approaches or practices from other institutions, either within your country or abroad, that you find inspiring? If so, could you specify which ones and explain why?*

3.3 The voices of the participants, a survey

In the third phase of the analysis and data collection, the opinions of the project participants themselves were investigated.

The partners collaborated in the first phase (of the analysis) by analysing documents and information provided by the other institutions. It, therefore, seemed appropriate to us that surveying the outcomes of this experience could also be of informative value for the purposes of this project. In comparison to the previous phase, participants were asked to fill in an online questionnaire consisting only of open-ended questions.

Participants' survey questions

Is there anything that surprised you in analysing the documents of other universities? if so, what?

Based on the analysis you have conducted, is there anything you have found in the experiences or documents presented by other universities that you think is worth proposing within your own university or that you think could be inspirational?



Which is your own definition of teaching quality?

Teaching quality is a concept that can be applied at different levels: of the individual course, of the degree course, of the institution. What are, in your opinion, the criteria to be adopted to assess quality at the different levels mentioned?

If you had to name a single action to improve the quality of teaching, which one would you choose and why?

4. The results

The results are presented according to the three different phases of the research.

Specifically for the first phase, that of document research, separate paragraphs will be devoted to each of the four areas analysed.

4.1 Documents analysis outputs

The documentary analysis was conducted by dividing the work among the project partners. In the first step, the partners analysed the documents of the other universities. The output of this phase was the compilation of matrices for 4 survey areas: strategic plans (and comparable documents), faculty training, teaching awards and teachers' career. The matrices were composed of columns pertaining to the 4 universities involved and rows corresponding to the variables that allowed us to investigate that specific area. Once the matrices were completed, in the second step each partner checked that the information referring to its university was correct.

Here follow the variables used to describe the different areas.

STRATEGIC PLANS (AND COMPARABLE DOCUMENTS)

- Link to the strategic plan (if present).
- Does the document have a section explicitly dedicated to teaching? if yes, provide a very short description of the content.
- Referring to the structure of the document, where 'vision on education' is placed and described? try to provide an estimation of the 'weight' given to teaching in the overall balance of the document.
- To what other concepts is the quality of teaching related: what concepts are associated with educational improvement (e.g., internationalisation, life-long learning, etc.)?
- Which challenges/critical issues are related to education?
- How (if yes) is education cited among the strategic goals?



- Are there any indications which actions should be taken to implement the education visions in the strategy plan?
- Is 'teaching excellence' (or any other synonymous) cited? If yes, how?
- Any additional information or note.

FACULTY TRAINING

- Link to the faculty development offer (if present).
- List of formats (seminar, workshops, courses) with info on duration.
- Content of the faculty development offer.
- Are there compulsory courses/activities? if so, which ones and for whom?
- Are there categories of lecturers who can be 'warmly invited' to take part in faculty development activities (e.g., lecturers whose student evaluations are below a certain threshold level)?
- Metrics and data to evaluate faculty development (are faculty development activities monitored? if so, how? is their effectiveness evaluated? if so, how?)
- Any additional information or note.

TEACHING AWARDS

- Link to any page informing about teaching awards.
- At what level are teaching awards offered (university, faculty, department, etc.)?
- Who is eligible? More in detail: is the prize awarded to the individual lecturer or groups (degree program, department, etc.)?
- Who assigns the award?
- Who can submit nominations?
- What does the award consist of? money? hours reduction? tutors? etc.
- What are the award criteria?
- Is the prize awarded following an experience (to reward therefore ex-post) or for projects to be realised (to reward therefore ex-ante)?
- Any additional information or note.

TEACHERS' CAREER

- Link to any internal or national description.
- Qualification of teaching needed? If yes, summarize here the requirements.
- Which are the criteria that define the career of the teacher (national and/or institutional)?
- Any additional information or note.



4.1.1 Strategic and official documents

A strategic plan for a university is a comprehensive and forward-looking document that outlines the institution's long-term goals, priorities, and strategies to achieve its mission and vision. It serves as a roadmap for the university's future development and growth.

Here's a comparative analysis of the answers provided by the four universities (Charles University, University of Warsaw, University of Copenhagen, and Sorbonne University) regarding their strategic documents related to education:

Dedicated Section on Teaching

- Charles University: there is a section dedicated to education focusing on quality development of study programs, internationalization, evaluation, digitalization, and interaction with practice.
- University of Warsaw: there is a section called "Teaching Strategy" addressing various strategic goals related to education, including research-based learning, learner-centered education, and internationalization.
- University of Copenhagen: there is a section explicitly dedicated to education emphasizing interdisciplinarity, professionalization, and internationalization.
- Sorbonne University: Sorbonne University places teaching at the forefront of its strategic plan, emphasizing interdisciplinarity, professionalization, and internationalization.

Vision on Education

- Charles University: the vision on education emphasizes being a centre of learning for the future, but the weight is approximately 1/5 in the overall balance of the document.
- University of Warsaw: the vision on education is embedded within the document, and it places significant weight on teaching, with a dedicated section addressing various aspects of education.
- University of Copenhagen: the vision on education is integrated into the strategic plan and focuses on providing high-quality education. The weight is approximately 1/4 in the overall balance of the document.
- Sorbonne University: the vision on education recognizes the importance of providing high-quality education to students and is integrated into the strategic plan.

Related Concepts for Quality of Teaching

- Charles University: quality of teaching is related to such concepts as internationalization, lifelong learning, innovation, and faculty development.



- University of Warsaw: quality of teaching is related to research-based learning, learner-centered education, internationalization, and lifelong learning.
- University of Copenhagen: quality of teaching is related to interdisciplinarity, professionalization, internationalization, innovation, and lifelong learning.
- Sorbonne University: quality of teaching is related to interdisciplinarity, professionalization, internationalization, innovation, and lifelong learning.

Challenges/Critical Issues

- Charles University: challenges include completion rates, students' life conditions, and the quality of teaching.
- University of Warsaw: challenges are related to public funding cuts and government reforms.
- University of Copenhagen: challenges include adapting to a rapidly changing global environment, providing high-quality education, exploring new pedagogical approaches, leveraging technology, and increasing access to education.
- Sorbonne University: challenges include adapting to a continuously changing world, providing high-quality education, exploring new pedagogical approaches, leveraging technology, and increasing access to education.

Teaching Excellence

- Charles University: the term 'teaching excellence' is not explicitly cited, but 'high quality' is associated with teaching.
- University of Warsaw: the term 'teaching excellence' is not explicitly cited, but 'quality education' is emphasized.
- University of Copenhagen: the term 'teaching excellence' is not explicitly cited, but learner-centered education is emphasized.
- Sorbonne University: the term 'teaching excellence' is not explicitly cited, but excellence is associated with the university's reputation for academic excellence.

Starting with the awareness that these are political documents, and should therefore be handled as such, the analysis conducted allows us to focus on some issues.

As could be expected, all four universities demonstrate a commitment to providing high-quality education in their strategic plans. They share common themes related to the improvement of teaching quality, including a focus on research-based learning, learner-centered education, and internationalization. Interdisciplinarity is also a common element, with an emphasis on creating diverse and flexible learning paths.

It is worthwhile to focus our attention on a few elements, the first among them being the relationship between education and technology, a relationship that we could define quite



complex. Very often, in fact, the concepts of innovation and use of technology tend to overlap and, in some borderline cases, coincide. In these documents, too, emphasis is often placed on the implementation of technology in education, with an implicit 'modernisation' undertone that is worth paying some attention to.

Another recurring concept is that of internationalisation, again the concept itself seems to bring value and improvement to teaching. But for this to happen, the definition of a specific strategy, constant monitoring and evaluation of what is being carried out are more than necessary.

Let's now analyse what is perhaps the most cited concept in the higher education literature in the last decade: learner-centred education. Learning-focused education places the student at the centre of the educational process. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how students learn best, tailoring educational design to their needs, and ensuring that learning outcomes are achieved. Learning-focused education should be able to encourage universities to continually innovate and adapt their teaching methods and curriculum to align with the changing needs of students and the job market. This adaptability, when reached, helps universities stay relevant and competitive in the field of education. Student-centred education, to avoid being only a slogan, should be aligned with best practices in pedagogy, which are informed by educational research and evidence-based teaching strategies.

The analysis of the strategic plans has revealed a tapestry of shared commitments and nuanced approaches toward education, reflecting the cultural, political, economic and social diversity and specific educational paradigms within the Czech Republic, Poland, France, and Denmark. The balance between structured educational priorities, technological integration, internationalization strategies, and the implementation of learner-centered education is nuanced, reflecting the distinctive educational cultures. Appreciating these cultural subtleties is crucial in interpreting the approaches taken by these institutions and thus what prerequisites should be taken into account for effective collaboration in teaching.

When considering the educational landscapes of the Czech Republic, Poland, France, and Denmark, we cannot forget that there are noticeable cultural differences reflected in their university settings: some countries demonstrate a preference for structured and well-defined educational systems with clear guidelines and expectations, fostering a sense of stability and order. Others lean towards more flexible and adaptable environments, encouraging experimentation and openness to change. Moreover, the emphasis on individualism versus collectivism (as described in Hofstede, 2011) might influence educational methods, potentially shaping the focus on personalized learning or collaborative group activities within university frameworks. These cultural nuances play a role in shaping the educational experiences and approaches employed by universities across these diverse national contexts. Being aware of them is of fundamental importance to truly understand the 'implicit' that every institution (and every teacher) brings with them.



4.1.2 Faculty development plans

Faculty development is a critical component of improving teaching quality in higher education. It refers to a systematic and continuous process of enhancing skills, knowledge, and effectiveness of faculty members, primarily in their roles as teachers.

Analysing faculty development offerings can provide valuable insights into how universities aim to improve teaching quality for several reasons, including, above all:

- **Pedagogical Focus:** the content of faculty development courses and workshops reflects the pedagogical approaches and teaching methods that the university promotes. It can show whether the institution emphasizes student-centered learning, active learning, technology integration, or other specific teaching strategies.
- **Professional Development Opportunities:** faculty development offerings are an indication of the level of investment a university makes in the professional growth of its academics as teachers. The range and quality of these opportunities can demonstrate the institution's commitment to improving teaching quality.
- **Innovation and Adaptation:** the presence of innovative and adaptable faculty development programs can signal a university's willingness to stay current with evolving teaching practices and educational technologies. It shows an institution's openness to adapting to the changing higher education landscape.

To sum up, by analysing faculty development offerings, it's possible to gain a clearer understanding of the university's approach to improving teaching quality, its dedication to professional growth and development, and its responsiveness to the ever-evolving landscape of higher education and that's why we consider this analysis of great significance referring to our objectives.

What emerges from our comparative analysis of the faculty development plans of the partner universities? In general, these faculty development plans share several common principles and actions that are commendable:

- they encourage a deeper exploration of pedagogical themes and approaches,
- they foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among peers, they provide training opportunities within specific disciplines as well as cross-disciplinary options,
- they aim to address real-world teaching challenges and scenarios faced by teachers.

We observe the faculty development plans focus our attention on certain variables.

Formats and Duration

- Charles University offers a wide spectrum of workshops and courses with the durations ranging from 2 hours to several days. They also offer individual consultations for academic staff.



- The University of Warsaw offers training courses, individual projects, didactic workshops, and lectures, but specific durations are not mentioned.
- The University of Copenhagen offers a wide spectrum courses, supervision, and faculty peer mentoring, with varying durations.
- The Sorbonne primarily focuses on workshops and seminars, with no specific durations mentioned. They also offer resources and tutorials for teaching staff.

Mandatory Training

The University of Copenhagen, responding to the Danish regulations, is the only one to have mandatory training, especially for those applying for permanent positions, which sets it apart from the other universities.

However, it is essential to mention that Charles University has recently issued Rector's directive no. 37/2023 that states that, from the year 2026, all new academic staff in certain positions with 0.5 FTE and more will be required to complete the Basic Course of Pedagogical Competencies. Completion of the Basic Course is to be verified at the first evaluation of the employee on the basis of the Framework Principles of Career Growth of Academics, Researchers, and Lecturers at Charles University (Rector's Directive No. 28/2021).

Individual vs. Group Activities

The plans vary in the emphasis on individual and group activities. The University of Warsaw mentions individual projects, while the others emphasize group sessions and peer mentoring.

Cross-Disciplinary Training

The University of Copenhagen explicitly offers cross-disciplinary training, such as workshops on AI and podcasting, which is not explicitly mentioned by the other universities.

Online vs. Face-to-Face

Charles University, Sorbonne University, and the University of Copenhagen offer online components, while the University of Warsaw does not specify the online option.

Specific Focus and Requirements

The University of Copenhagen's faculty development plan is structured and includes specific requirements, such as mandatory courses for certain positions.

The differences described above reflect the unique approaches and priorities of each university's faculty development plan. Some institutions may place greater emphasis on flexibility and variety in offerings, while others might have more structured and mandatory components. The choice of formats, focus areas, and mandatory elements can be related to different degrees of maturity of the faculty development activities in place at the partner universities.



In conclusion, faculty development stands as a pivotal element in the enhancement of teaching quality within higher education. The systematic and continuous process of refining the skills, knowledge, and effectiveness of faculty members in their teaching roles is paramount to fostering a dynamic and responsive educational environment.

Analysing faculty development offerings serves as a valuable lens through which to understand a university's commitment to improving teaching quality. The pedagogical focus, professional development opportunities, and embrace of innovation collectively provide insights into an institution's dedication to staying abreast of evolving teaching practices and technologies. In this sense, a careful and stable design of the faculty development system of each university is crucial. The definition of what services to offer teachers for the improvement of teaching practices cannot be an incidental activity.

This type of services (the definition of content, formats and objectives) is, very often, the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Centres. Establishing Teaching and Learning Centres at universities is – in fact - fundamental for providing dedicated support to faculty development. These centres serve as hubs for fostering a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Teaching and Learning Centres facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange among faculty members. By creating a community of practice, educators can share insights, challenges, and successful approaches to teaching. This collaborative environment could foster a sense of shared responsibility for enhancing the overall quality of education.

Obviously, the construction of these centres, while a fundamental activity, cannot be considered a panacea, as there are other challenges to be taken into serious consideration, such as: how to serve disciplines without knowledge of the discipline, how to manage 'the taking home problem' (that could be reformulated as the "implementation gap" or the "application challenge": the issue where faculty members might face difficulties in effectively translating or applying the knowledge, skills, or insights gained from faculty development sessions into their teaching practices), etc.

Faculty development programs, hopefully under the responsibility of teaching and learning centres or specifically dedicated structures, could benefit from the following indications that emerged from the analysis conducted:

- Establish clear and structured development paths for faculty members, especially for those seeking long-term career advancement. Clearly defined requirements and milestones can guide teachers in their professional growth within the institution.
- Evaluate the feasibility of incorporating mandatory training, particularly in response to specific regulations or institutional needs. Such requirements, as observed in the case of the University of Copenhagen, can ensure a baseline of teaching excellence and adherence to educational standards.
- Foster a culture of collaboration and peer mentoring within faculty development initiatives. Establish mechanisms for experienced teacher to mentor their colleagues, share insights, and collectively contribute to the improvement of teaching quality.



- Diversify the formats and duration of faculty development offerings to accommodate the varied needs and preferences of faculty members. This includes providing options for workshops, courses, self-study, and other flexible formats.
- Periodically review and update faculty development plans to stay responsive to evolving educational landscapes and emerging pedagogical trends. This iterative process ensures that development initiatives remain relevant and effective over time.
- Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of faculty members who actively participate in development programs. Recognize their commitment to continuous improvement and the advancement of teaching quality within the university community (even with Teaching Awards).
- Promote the integration of research-informed teaching strategies within faculty development initiatives. This reflects a commitment to evidence-based practices and encourages faculty members to align their teaching approaches with the latest research on effective pedagogy.
- Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from faculty participants to continuously assess the effectiveness of development programs. Use this feedback to make informed adjustments, address emerging needs, and enhance the overall impact of the initiatives.
- Encourage a culture of lifelong learning among university faculty by instituting continuous professional development initiatives. Implement programs that offer ongoing training, seminars, and resources to support teachers in staying updated with evolving teaching methodologies and educational research trends.

These suggestions should allow universities to cultivate a robust and dynamic faculty development ecosystem that not only supports individual teachers in their professional growth but also contributes to the broader goals of enhancing teaching quality and the overall learning experience for students.

4.1.3 Teaching awards

Kottmann et al. (2016) extensively discuss the concept of specific national and institutional awards designed to encourage excellence in teaching. These awards constitute competitive funding opportunities tailored for institutions, programs, teams, or individuals, with a broad spectrum of focuses. These encompass the enhancement of teaching and learning practices, the promotion of innovation in both onsite and online settings and facilitating the dissemination of best practices (Land and Gordon, 2015, pp. 6). Awards are designed to achieve various objectives, including the reduction of dropout rates, the establishment of clear benchmarks for teaching excellence, and the improvement of educational infrastructures. It is worth noting that national awards seek to change the traditional emphasis on predominantly research-led excellence. Instead, they seek to bridge the gap between research and teaching and recognise excellence in teaching as an equally important component (Brockerhoff et al., 2014).



Teaching awards may be nationally or institutionally driven, sometimes even locally (at the level of faculty or departments).

Generally speaking, these awards aim to acknowledge the significance of exceptional teaching and its impact on the learning experiences of students. The primary objectives behind these awards are to motivate teachers to continually improve their teaching skills, share best practices, and create an educational environment that fosters academic excellence.

Analysing teaching awards can provide valuable insights into how universities aim to improve teaching quality for several reasons, here following.

Recognition of excellence: teaching awards are a means of recognizing and celebrating excellence in teaching. Analysing these awards can shed light on the specific qualities, practices, and behaviours that universities value in their teachers.

Identification of best practices: faculty members who receive teaching awards often exemplify best practices in teaching and pedagogy. Studying the profiles and accomplishments of award recipients can reveal the innovative and effective teaching methods that the university seeks to promote.

Alignment with institutional values: teaching awards are typically aligned with the institutional values and mission of the university. By examining the criteria used for these awards, one can gain insights into the university's core educational priorities and objectives.

Student feedback and impact: many teaching awards take into account student feedback. Teaching awards could provide a window into how universities value student perspectives and their role in assessing teaching quality.

Pedagogical innovation: teaching awards often recognize educators who have shown creativity and innovation in their teaching practices. These awards can highlight the value placed on pedagogical innovation and the integration of technology or new teaching methods.

Evidence-Based teaching: award criteria often consider the use of evidence-based teaching strategies. This reflects a commitment to data-driven decision-making and the integration of research on effective pedagogy into teaching practices.

By analysing teaching awards strategies in place at the partners' universities, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how they identify, reward and encourage outstanding teaching. Let's specify that the following comparison involves three project partners (three universities) that have various forms of teaching award in place; Sorbonne University is excluded from the comparison, as it reported having no award at all.

Level of Awards

- Charles University: University level for "Arnošt of Pardubice Prize." Also, a national level "Ministerial Award."
- University of Warsaw: University level.



- University of Copenhagen: University level for "Teacher of the Year", national level for "National Teaching Awards" plus at departmental level (not all the departments).

Eligibility

- Charles University: Academic staff and groups.
- University of Warsaw: Academic staff.
- University of Copenhagen: Academic staff.

Assignment of Awards

- Charles University: Prize Awarding Committee and Rector for "Arnošt of Pardubice Prize." Ministerial Award by the Commission for the Ministerial Award for Outstanding Educational Activities at Universities.
- University of Warsaw: University of Warsaw Academic Board on Education Strategy.
- University of Copenhagen: the award at the departmental level is assigned by the University of Copenhagen Academic Board on Education Strategy (KUUR).

Nomination Process

- Charles University: various bodies and individuals at the university level and beyond.
- University of Warsaw: Teaching Councils and various individuals/organizations.
- University of Copenhagen: all students and staff for "Teacher of the Year." Complex nomination process for "National Teaching Awards", at the departmental level: students can nominate as well as evaluations are taken into consideration.

Award Components

- Charles University: diploma, monetary reward, and public recognition for "Arnošt of Pardubice Prize." Monetary rewards for Ministerial Award.
- University of Warsaw: Financial Award, Official Award Ceremony, Information on UW web page.
- University of Copenhagen: decorated porcelain owl, monetary reward, and public recognition.

Award Criteria

- Charles University: criteria not explicitly specified.
- University of Warsaw: specific criteria related to teaching excellence and contributions to quality teaching.
- University of Copenhagen: specific criteria for both "Teacher of the Year" and "National Teaching Awards."

Award Timing

- Charles University: awards are granted based on past teaching experiences (ex-post).



- University of Warsaw: awards are granted based on past teaching experiences (ex-post).
- University of Copenhagen: awards are granted based on past teaching experiences (ex-post). The "National Teaching Awards" also provide grants for further projects (ex-ante).

An interesting element emerges from the information gathered: almost all existing awards are ex-post awards, not ex-ante awards. While ex-post awards recognize educators for their past achievements and excellence in teaching, ex-ante awards provide support and recognition for educators to develop and implement future teaching projects or initiatives that have the potential to enhance education.

Both types of awards serve valuable purposes in promoting and rewarding excellence in teaching and innovation in education, but the different emphasis on timing and criteria tells a lot about the willingness of universities to invest in the 'certification' of competences and results in terms of teaching or future investment in their improvement.

In conclusion, the establishment and analysis of teaching awards within higher education institutions serve as powerful tools for recognizing, promoting, and enhancing the quality of teaching. Based on the analysis of teaching awards and their implications across the partner universities, several suggestions can be made to further enhance the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives:

- Consider diversifying award categories to recognize various aspects of teaching excellence, such as innovation in pedagogy, technology integration, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement. This can provide a more comprehensive acknowledgment of the diverse skills and contributions of faculty members.
- Clearly define and communicate the criteria for each award category. This transparency ensures that faculty members understand the expectations and allows for fair and consistent evaluation. Clearly articulated criteria also provide guidance for teachers striving to improve and align their practices with institutional goals.
- Introduce or expand the scope of ex-ante awards to support and incentivize teachers in developing and implementing innovative teaching projects. These awards can encourage forward-thinking approaches and investments in educational improvements, aligning with the evolving landscape of higher education.
- Involve a broad range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, and external educational organizations, in the nomination process. This inclusive approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, and it fosters a sense of community involvement in recognizing and celebrating teaching excellence.
- Periodically review and update award criteria to reflect evolving educational priorities and advancements in pedagogy. This ensures that teaching awards remain relevant, aligning with the dynamic nature of higher education and the changing needs of students.



By considering these suggestions, universities can refine their teaching awards programs to better support faculty development, encourage innovation in teaching, and ultimately contribute to the continuous improvement of the overall teaching and learning experience.

4.1.4 Teaching careers

The balance between recognizing research and teaching in academic careers has a profound impact on the quality of education and the overall success of academics. It influences how teachers are prepared, motivated, and supported in their roles, which, in turn, affects their ability to deliver high-quality instruction to students. While some countries give universities autonomy in setting criteria for academic careers, in other countries central governments establish general rules. Various initiatives within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) seek to ensure uniformity and coherence of higher education systems in European countries; however, despite these efforts, substantial differences persist among these systems, impacting how institutions prioritize and balance research and teaching within academic career pathways.

Here's a summary comparing the responses from Charles University, the University of Warsaw, the University of Copenhagen, and Sorbonne University regarding the qualification of teaching and the criteria defining the career of teachers, the two areas we investigated to understand more about the impact of criteria for academic career and quality of teaching.

Qualification of Teaching

- Charles University: According to Rector's directive no. 37/2023, from the year 2026 all new academic staff in certain positions will be required to complete the Basic Course of Pedagogical Competencies. The completion of the Basic Course will be verified at the first evaluation of the employee on the basis of the Framework Principles of Career Growth of Academics, Researchers, and Lecturers at Charles University (Rector's Directive No. 28/2021).
- University of Warsaw: has formal requirements for teaching qualifications depending on the academic title and type of position. Participation in a Teacher Training course and a teaching portfolio are required.
- University of Copenhagen: requires participation in a Teacher Training course and the submission of a teaching portfolio. Pedagogical competence is assessed in conjunction with the portfolio.
- Sorbonne University: no mandatory teaching qualification requirements, except for training at the entrance of the academic career, which is provided by the institution.

Criteria Defining the Career of the Teacher

- Charles University: completion of the Basic Course of Pedagogical Competencies is a significant criterion. National and institutional regulations and criteria focus on research, administrative aspects, and teaching ratios.



- University of Warsaw: career progression depends on the academic title and type of position. Criteria vary for research, teaching, and other aspects. Progression may be determined by the university board in some cases.
- University of Copenhagen: teaching is one of the six overall criteria for career progression, along with research, societal impact, organizational contribution, external funding, and leadership. Legal framing mandates documenting participation in a teacher training course and a teaching portfolio.
- Sorbonne University: mainly emphasizes research for career progression but also considers involvement in the institution, teaching, and innovation. A jury could decide career progression, allowing a certain flexibility in the evaluation process.

Summarizing:

- The Czech higher education system appears to place relatively less emphasis on specific pedagogical qualifications and quality assurance mechanisms related to teaching when compared to other aspects of academic career development and university accreditation.
- Academic career progression in Poland, including at the University of Warsaw, is based on a combination of academic achievements, qualifications, and the type of position held within the university. Different positions have varying requirements for research and teaching.
- The University of Copenhagen, as well as other universities in Denmark, emphasizes the importance of pedagogical competence in combination with other academic criteria for career progression. The criteria for teaching qualifications are specified at different academic levels, and continuous professional development in pedagogy is mandatory.
- Sorbonne University primarily places importance on research achievements for career progression, but other aspects such as teaching and institutional involvement are also considered. The final decision is made by a jury, and there appears to be flexibility in the evaluation process.

When it comes to academic career paths, of course, the room for recommendations is limited. This is in fact an area where regulations are often national and, even when institutions have room for autonomy, decision-making processes are very articulate and long-term.

It is generally suggested to elevate the status of teaching, aiming for a balance with research efforts. While the goal of incorporating both teaching and research contributions in tenure, promotions, and career progression assessments might seem distant, establishing clear institutional criteria for evaluating teaching quality alongside research achievements can promote a more balanced focus. The current tendency to prioritize research outcomes over teaching achievements in career advancement can profoundly affect teachers' motivation. Recognizing this imbalance is crucial, as it influences their commitment to teaching excellence. Formalizing the evaluation of teaching in conjunction with research accomplishments is essential not only for achieving equilibrium but also for supporting and uplifting educators. By



adopting this approach, institutions can create an environment where teachers feel valued and motivated, ensuring that both research and teaching are equally respected and rewarded throughout their career development.

4.2 Analysis of the interviews

First of all, the authors of this report would like to thank all the interviewees for their kindness and cooperation during the data collection process:

- Mgr. et Mgr. David Hurný, Member of the Rector's Board for the Development of Teaching Competences of Academic Staff, Charles University
- Mgr. Michał Goszczyński, Expert at the Office for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, University of Warsaw
- Prof. Lars Tønder, Deputy Head of Department and Head of Studies, the University of Copenhagen
- Prof. Stéphanie Bonneau, Sorbonne University, Vice-President, Training and Student Life, Vice-President of the Training and University Life Committee

Here follows a short comparison of their responses. In order to facilitate the reading of this chapter, the questions that formed the structure of the interviews are again indicated.

Definition of Teaching Quality

Q1: How would you define teaching quality?

- Charles University defines teaching quality as a set of characteristics and features that meet or exceed stated requirements, emphasizing teacher qualifications, methods, and student satisfaction.
- The University of Warsaw defines quality as an ongoing process aimed at achieving the utmost efficiency and fostering a student-friendly, student-centered learning environment across the university.
- The University of Copenhagen recognizes that we can identify a “formalistic” definition of quality (teaching gets the students to achieve the learning objectives of their courses) and this can be considered a sort of “base level” of quality, and more “advanced” definition, where the focus shifts from transferring knowledge to students to making them co-creators of knowledge, enhance their critical thinking skills.
- Sorbonne University defines teaching quality as a means to help all students achieve their goals and succeed in their professional lives by offering varied teaching modalities and content to cater to diverse student needs.



Measurement of Teaching Quality

Q2: How do you measure teaching quality (please specify whether you are referring to a course, program, or institution level)?

- Charles University employs tools like student and alumni feedback, qualitative surveys, and accreditation evaluations, focusing on quantitative and qualitative data.
- University of Warsaw has two kinds of surveys: a survey that is delivered to students after every course and an evaluation of teachers that is conducted every six years. The first survey is quite important because it affects or can affect the way teachers advance through their career. In both cases the University Council for Teaching and Learning decides how the survey is designed.
- The University of Copenhagen acknowledges that defining teaching quality is dynamic and contextual rather than static. They measure teaching quality through various means including student course evaluations, employment rates, aiming for a quantitative assessment. Additionally, Copenhagen endeavours to incorporate qualitative measures by initiating discussions on teaching methodologies through peer mentoring activities and portfolio projects. These avenues serve as platforms where assumptions about teaching quality are articulated.
- Sorbonne uses entrance pressure (number of students and their level at the entrance at the university) comparing it with the students entering the labour market. They also utilise dedicated surveys at the institutional level to assess teaching quality. At the faculty level, they implement information/evaluation surveys at the department or course level.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Q 2b: What are the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) related to teaching quality used at your institution?

- Charles University highlights KPIs related to evaluation objectivity, the influence of external factors, and stakeholder involvement.
- The University of Warsaw does not commonly use KPIs. While surveys, including institutional ones, share some common elements, KPIs are not directly derived from them. The university prioritizes qualitative data over quantitative ones and is actively striving to enhance its approach towards measuring quality using this qualitative perspective.
- Expanding on the previously provided information, the University of Copenhagen categorizes its courses into three groups: Category A (excellent courses), Category B (adequate courses), and Category C, which require



specific attention. This categorization enables the university to monitor the evolution of course evaluations effectively.

- Sorbonne extends its KPIs beyond traditional metrics like employment rates and student satisfaction to include internationalization and multidisciplinary educational offerings.

Adjustment of Measurement by Levels:

- Charles University emphasizes faculty-level adjustments through surveys and support actions while retaining institutional oversight.
- At the University of Warsaw, an essential aspect to grasp is the varying degrees of autonomy across faculties: each dean receives aggregated results for their faculty along with information about individual teachers. However, only individual teachers have access to a comprehensive overview of their teaching performance. This faculty-level autonomy leads to a central focus on enhancing student support services.
- The University of Copenhagen explains how the adjustments and the actual way in which the related actions are going to be taken fall on the management team, and in the first instance on the Heads of Studies.
- Sorbonne University allows its individual faculties the freedom to measure teaching quality at their own level, indirectly monitoring through quantitative surveys and shared faculty information.

Enhancements of Teaching Quality:

Q4: Could you provide some examples of how you enhance teaching quality

- Both Sorbonne University and Charles University focus on trainings, with Charles University offering trainings for teachers and students on pedagogical competences and effective learning and Sorbonne University providing a training catalogue for teachers and hosting events, seminars, and conferences on quality teaching and innovative pedagogies.
- The University of Warsaw underscores the importance of addressing student needs comprehensively to enhance teaching quality, ranging from dormitory adjustments to adaptations in the regulations governing PhD studies.
- Copenhagen University employs a wide array of tools, such as teaching portfolios and peer mentoring, to enhance teaching quality. This effort entails a shared responsibility among all stakeholders, particularly the Heads of Studies and various collegiate bodies.



Improvements Initiated by Management, Teachers, and Students

Q5: Can you share some examples of how teaching quality has been improved on the initiative of management (considering the managerial structure in place)?

Q6: Can you share some examples of how teaching quality has been improved on the initiative of teachers or students?

- Charles University mentions institutional programs like NLSU and SFRI as well as the involvement of international experts.
- At the University of Copenhagen, most teachers are actively engaged in daily efforts to enhance teaching quality by introducing valuable educational projects and innovative ideas. The management actively supports these initiatives by involving those who will be working on them, encouraging them to take ownership and fostering an environment conducive to generating feedback-related ideas.
- To comprehend the landscape at the University of Warsaw, it's essential to note a significant change in the higher education law in 2018. This overhaul granted greater autonomy to Polish universities, altering the orientation of teaching and learning. This shift necessitates a complete re-evaluation of how study programs are managed from a managerial standpoint. Approaching it from a bottom-up perspective, current students wield a substantial voice in shaping new study programs. Their input is highly valued, evidenced by the significant representation (33%) of students in the university council for teaching and learning. This involvement allows them to express their opinions on new or revised programs effectively.
- Sorbonne University highlights individual initiatives by teachers and students in adopting innovative pedagogies, hybrid learning, and peer review activities.

Short, Medium, and Long Term

Q7: What measures is your university currently undertaking to enhance teaching quality in the short, medium, and long term?

- Charles University offers short, medium, and long-term measures. Short term: introduction of new technologies and tools for teaching, regular evaluation and feedback from students and teachers, modification of teaching content and methods based on feedback. Medium-term horizon: Development of new courses and programs that better match the labour market needs, introduction of new teaching and assessment methods, greater involvement of industry and external experts in teaching. Introducing reskilling and upskilling, including micro-certificates. Long-term horizon: Restructuring of study programs, their unification introduction of strict adherence to the European framework for time-based credit allocation.



- The University of Warsaw does not act defining short, medium or long-term goals. They work in a continuous process of “adjustment”.
- The University of Copenhagen, in identifying the different time horizons, highlights how long-term perspectives (as such) are seldom perceived as a real everyday urgency (e.g., need to develop competences in climate change and green transition). In the short and medium term, actions are almost 'reactions' aimed at improving the everyday-ness of teaching and the conditions under which academics are working.
- Sorbonne University focuses on providing financial support of pedagogical centres and recognising the time spent by the teachers on the design or redesign of their courses or modules or teaching activities in a blended format. The extra time is recognized and integrated as teaching hours for the teaching teams that participate to these projects. In the long-term Sorbonne is also implementing large programs like NLSU and SFRI.

Essential Conditions for quality improvement

Q8: In your opinion, what are the essential conditions (the *sine qua non*) for improving teaching quality?

- Charles University emphasizes the importance of resources, technology, evaluation systems, stakeholder involvement, and management support.
- The essential condition, from the University of Warsaw's point of view, is the involvement of all actors in the improvement process, with teachers also taking charge of those aspects of their work that they perceive as more bureaucratic.
- The University of Copenhagen succinctly encapsulates its ethos of educational enhancement with this statement: 'Ownership of their actions is the fundamental prerequisite for effectively improving teaching quality.': “*if you want to improve teaching quality you must work very hard to make those who are going to improve the quality see the purpose of what they are doing*” (quote from the interview).
- Sorbonne University underscores the need to grant teachers freedom, provide support, and offer incentives for teaching quality.

Communication of quality vision

Q9: How does your institution communicate its vision of teaching quality, if at all, to both teachers and students?

- Both Sorbonne University and Charles University communicate their vision through strategic documents, internal reports, and faculty involvement, with Charles University involving stakeholders through training and quality plans.



- The University of Warsaw is working exactly in this period on this issue, trying to integrate top-down and bottom-up communication flows, involving academic bodies and trying to communicate and reinforce good practices.
- In providing the answer to this question, the University of Copenhagen identified two risks: the first is that the vision could be so general and so abstract that it rarely really makes sense – or at least speaks – to people in a meaningful way. The second challenge refers to the “dimension” of the University: the University of Copenhagen is such a big institution that communicating effectively is a very difficult task.
- Sorbonne University utilizes pedagogical centres and events for communication and support.

Inspiration for quality improvement from Other Institutions

Q10: Are there any teaching quality approaches or practices from other institutions, either within your country or abroad, that you find inspiring? If so, could you specify which ones and explain why?

- Charles University draws inspiration from international practices, collaborating with international organizations and inviting international experts.
- The University of Warsaw observes with particular interest the experiences carried out in the 4EU+ partner universities, with particular reference to Heidelberg (e.g., language learning).
- The University of Copenhagen considers those conducted in the field of peer mentoring in Scandinavian countries as best practice. In particular, reference is made to the University of Lund (Sweden) and Oslo (Norway).
- Sorbonne University conducts benchmarking and references institutions like U Laval, UC Louvain, and U Utrecht.

The interviews outlined diverse perspectives on teaching quality across universities, showcasing varying definitions, measurement methods, and enhancement initiatives. The insights gathered from the conversations highlighted a multitude of approaches and emphasized the dynamic nature of teaching quality.

Each institution defines teaching quality uniquely: meeting requirements, fostering a student-centered environment, or shifting focus from knowledge transfer to co-creation. According to this, also measurement methods differ, from surveys to categorizations, with emphasis on qualitative or quantitative data varying by institution. In the same vein, enhancements involve training, innovative tools, and pedagogical support, driven by collective and individual actions from management, teachers, and students.

In summary, the interviews emphasized, once again, the multifaceted nature of quality in teaching and highlighted the importance of contextual adaptation.



4.3 The participants' point of view

Methodological note: In this paragraph, citations are indicated by means of an identification code (P1, P2, P3, P4) and not by name (and the university to which they belong), as the data were collected anonymously.

The first interesting result of this phase of the research is that, even among the participants (who are to all intents and purposes considered experts in the field), emerged an awareness of the presence of under-recognised but relevant issues, such as context.

To question *'Is there anything that surprised you in analysing the documents of other universities? if so, what?'*, two (out of four) participants answered:

"Analysing other universities documents underline the importance of context, i.e. understand the conditions as such (law, resources etc.)." – P1, or

"The importance of understanding the context of each institution was underlined." P2.

Still trying to understand what, in analysing the documents provided by the other universities, had impressed the project partners, the direct question was asked: *"Based on the analysis you have conducted, is there anything you have found in the experiences or documents presented by other universities that you think is worth proposing within your own university or that you think could be inspirational?"*. Very interestingly, the teaching portfolio tool, in use at the University of Copenhagen appeared in two replies:

"I like Copenhagen's idea of Teachers Portfolio." – P3

"The teaching portfolio is a very nice initiative that can be used as pedagogical tool and a competence profile for the teacher." - P4

From questions related to the experience within this project, the focus then shifted to questions directly related to the topic of the project itself: *"Which is your own definition of teaching quality?"*.

Commonalities and differences among the answers could be identified. Let's start from the commonalities:

- **Emphasis on continuous improvement:** all the responses emphasize the importance of continuous improvement in teaching quality. They all stress the idea that teaching quality is an ongoing process that requires reflection and adaptation.
- **Focus on student learning:** each response recognizes the connection between teaching quality and student learning outcomes. They all highlight the goal of supporting and enhancing student learning.
- **Importance of institutional culture:** three of the responses (P1, P2 and P4) mention the significance of institutional culture in promoting teaching quality. They emphasize the need for a culture that encourages discussions about teaching and provides resources and support.



- **Reference to Collaboration:** two of the responses (P1 and P2) mention the role of teachers working as a community or group to enhance teaching quality.

Let's move to the differences among the answers:

- **Perspectives on measurement:** P3 takes a more quantitative perspective, focusing on measurable outcomes and the achievement of higher levels of understanding. In contrast, the other responses are more qualitative and process oriented.
- **Individual vs. Collective responsibility:** P2 places a stronger emphasis on individual teachers taking responsibility for their self-development, while P1 focuses more on collective reflection and improvement of teaching within a community of teachers.
- **Learner-Centered vs. Outcome-Centered:** P4 takes a more learner-centered approach, emphasizing the development of specific competences and skills in students, while the other responses are more outcome-focused, with an emphasis on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- **Specific cultural and resource references:** P1 specifically mentions the role of cultural and institutional factors, as well as the availability of resources. P2 also highlights the importance of a culture that fosters discussions about teaching. P3 refers to constraints, such as class size and IT resources, as factors in teaching quality. P4, on the other hand, does not mention cultural or resource-related aspects explicitly.

It's quite easy to see how the commonalities among the responses include a focus on continuous improvement, student learning, and the importance of institutional culture, while the differences lie in the specific perspectives on measurement, individual vs. collective responsibility, learner-centered vs. outcome-centered approaches, and references to cultural and resource factors. These differences are also able to reflect the diverse ways in which teaching quality can be conceptualized and prioritized.

With the final aim of identifying the *sine qua non* for improving the quality of teaching, the following question was addressed to the experts: *"If you had to name a single action to improve the quality of teaching, which one would you choose and why?"*

With respect to this question, it is more informative to report the answers than to comment on them:

P1 - Start a conversation about teaching and supervision at a departmental level striving for choosing one (little) step to be improved within one semester.

P2 - Create a culture where you talk about and practice how you can improve teaching and supervision.



P3 Mandatory training regardless of the position. Many of the staff learned how to teach conducting classes having no pedagogical background. I would like also to change how teaching at the university is perceived. For researchers it is the last thing they want do and usually they do it poorly. On the other hand, some of poor researchers are pushed into full didactic position as demotion which is against any ideas of improving quality of teaching.

P4 - Enhance academic development in teaching and learning“.

Each of these responses addresses different aspects of improving teaching quality. They emphasize the need for conversation, culture change, mandatory training, and academic development. The choice among these actions is also most probably connected to the specific context and the existing challenges within each institution (and country).

The different suggestions are offered by “our” experts (emphasizing the importance of initiating conversations, fostering a culture of improvement, providing mandatory training, and enhancing academic development in teaching and learning) could be considered also as recommendations in themselves. What became evident is also that institutions should prioritize grasping particular contextual factors that impact teaching and learning within their environment. This could involve developing frameworks or guidelines to help educators recognize and adapt to diverse institutional contexts. We understood how important could be to acknowledge the impact of cultural and resource-related factors on teaching quality, that is why institutions should consider these elements when designing strategies to improve teaching and provide necessary support and resources.

5. Conclusion and lesson learnt

The project embarked on a thorough exploration of excellence and teaching quality across participating universities, employing diverse investigative approaches. This comprehensive endeavour sought to unravel the intricate nature of these concepts within the higher education landscape.

Methodologically, the project adopted a multi-faceted approach, blending documentary analysis and interviews to delve into the complexities of teaching quality. This strategic fusion allowed for both direct and indirect analysis of the conceptual territories under investigation, navigating through the nuanced interpretations held by different stakeholders.

At its core, the research affirmed the multifaceted essence of teaching quality, showcasing its dual role as both a theoretical cornerstone and a practical dimension. It underscored the varied perspectives surrounding this concept, shedding light on the divergent interpretations among universities. From the robust discussion emerged the realization that teaching quality operates as a critical driver for institutional improvement, yet its definition and assessment remain subject to diverse viewpoints.



Central to the discourse was the examination of teaching quality through lenses such as the student-centered approach and the achievement of learning outcomes. While the former emphasized student satisfaction and engagement, the latter called for a meticulous alignment of teaching activities with intended learning outcomes. However, the research cautioned against the potential pitfalls of overemphasizing student satisfaction, highlighting the risks of grade inflation and the neglect of essential but challenging courses.

Another pivotal aspect of the project was the spotlight on faculty development as a cornerstone for enhancing teaching quality. It underscored the indispensable role of investing in faculty development initiatives to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills. However, this investment necessitates a delicate balance between teaching and research priorities, calling for a recalibration of faculty career trajectories.

Leadership emerged as a key determinant in fostering a culture of teaching quality within institutions. Effective leadership not only shapes the quality culture but also facilitates the dissemination of initiatives aimed at nurturing excellence in teaching. However, assessing the quality culture proves challenging due to its reliance on shared assumptions, necessitating effective communication channels for dissemination.

A significant finding of the research was the recognition that improving teaching quality transcends individual responsibility. Instead, it calls for distributed accountability and collaborative efforts across the academic community. This collaborative ethos, coupled with a long-term perspective, forms the basis for sustained improvement in teaching quality.

The distinction between “excellence in teaching” and “teaching quality” emerged as a salient theme, with the former denoting the pinnacle of achievement and the latter encompassing a broader spectrum of effectiveness. Both are indispensable for evaluating and enhancing teaching within universities, each catering to distinct evaluation and improvement strategies.

Institutional recommendations derived from the project underscore the importance of aligning faculty development plans with institutional values and fostering a culture of transparency in teaching awards. Regular review and adaptation of these plans, combined with recognition for faculty engagement, further reinforce the quality-driven teaching culture within institutions.

As the project draws to a close, it sets the stage for continued reflection and action within the academic community. Its findings and recommendations serve as guiding principles for institutions seeking to cultivate excellence and quality in teaching, fostering an environment conducive to continuous improvement within higher education.



5.1 Take-home messages

In conclusion, this report emphasizes key considerations that, depending on the reader's role or perspective, should be kept in mind when seeking to enhance the quality of academic teaching.

<i>Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize the complexity of the concept of teaching quality.• Check – and try to ensure – coherence among statements of a strategic nature and the actions supporting their achievement.• Establish a clear vision for teaching excellence.• Promote recognition and rewards for teaching excellence.
<i>Academic leader</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in faculty development programs.• Facilitate and encourage taking responsibility for teaching quality improvement projects.• Allocate resources for professional development.
<i>Academic developer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with needs analyses• Do not “copy and paste” from other contexts, countries or universities, localization matters.• Encourage reflective teaching practices.• Encourage collaborative teaching and learning.• Offer tailored professional development.• Provide ongoing support.
<i>Teacher</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek professional development opportunities.• Stay informed about educational research.• Share best practices, as well as pitfalls, in teaching with colleagues.
<i>Quality assurance officer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use students' feedback as the sole measure of teaching quality.• Implement effective evaluation processes (go beyond students' surveys).• Recognize the plurality and value of different points of view on the quality of teaching.



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