

## Background: EUA's initiatives to establish a European dimension on learning and teaching

*Over the past three years, EUA has been working on a number of initiatives related to higher education learning and teaching. Activities include knowledge building and studies, institutional development and peer learning, as well as a related policy statement and recommendations.*

The basis for starting discussions and reflection on key challenges related to the education mission of institutions lies in an [EUA Council discussion paper on digitalisation](#) (April 2016). The main messages from the Council discussion were:

- While digitalisation has a transformative power, it should not stand as a goal in and of itself. It should be considered together with the institutional mission and goals for research, education, services to society, and the implications for governance and management.
- Higher education institutions all over Europe are exploring digitalisation, some more actively than others. Considering the institution's responsibility in assuring the quality of the student experience, implementing digitalisation has been, so far, about gradual transformation rather than fast, disruptive change.
- National and European governments can play an important role in supporting institutions, in terms of staff and financial resources, and in eliminating technical and legal obstacles.
- The challenges related to digitalisation need to be considered in the broader context of the institution's education mission, its approaches to learning and teaching, and how teachers address it.

Discussions on how digitalisation may challenge the institution's educational mission and offer have prompted EUA to further work on the enhancement of learning and teaching, in close collaboration with its members and partner organisations:

1. The EU-funded [EFFECT \(European Forum for Enhanced Cooperation in Teaching\) project](#) (2015-2018), coordinated by EUA in partnership with members and organisations, aims at working on both enhancing teaching, and how the institutional context could enable that. The project has conducted a series of staff development workshops on social inclusion and citizenship, and produced the [European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching](#), endorsed by the EUA Council in October 2017. In full respect of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, the Principles support institutional approaches towards the enhancement of learning and teaching. They emphasise the role of the entire institution, students, staff and leadership, in developing comprehensive, value-based learning and teaching strategies, in line with the institutional mission, vision and goals.

2. In order to enable more exchange and cooperation among European higher education institutions, EUA launched its [Learning & Teaching Initiative](#) in 2017. This Initiative consists of two activities: the organisation of four thematic peer groups gathering vice-rectors and senior staff responsible for learning and teaching for a series of meetings on a given topic; and a [European Learning & Teaching Forum](#), organised as a platform to concentrate discussions on and advance higher education learning and teaching. The [reports from the 2017 thematic peer groups](#) were published, and the [2018 groups](#) were launched this spring. The first Forum, held in Paris in September 2017, attracted close to 300 participants. The [2nd Forum](#) will take place on 14-15 February, at the University of Warsaw.

3. The EUA Council adopted a [position paper on learning and teaching](#) in January 2018. The paper emphasises the importance of institutional strategies. It also identifies institutional autonomy and sustainable funding as conditions, and European and international collaboration as means to advance learning and teaching. The position paper builds on lessons learnt from the EFFECT project, the European Learning & Teaching Forum, the thematic peer groups organised in 2017, and from the preliminary results of the TRENDS 2018 study.

4. The [TRENDS 2018 report](#)<sup>1</sup> will be based on survey results from 303 higher education in 43 European countries. It confirms that higher education institutions all over Europe feel increased pressure to enhance the education mission, due to national reforms, the increasing diversity of the student body and the higher expectations of students, as well as of employers. This seems to inspire the development of strategies for learning and teaching, but also the establishment and enhancement of institutional structures for learning and teaching support. For example, according to the study 65% of respondents have learning centres. Interestingly, the majority of institutions see cooperation in learning and teaching, through dedicated national and international initiatives, university associations, networks and partnerships, as critical for pedagogic staff development (teacher training) and, more generally, for the development of learning and teaching. Practically all institutions confirm the added value of international staff and student exchanges, underlining the critical importance of Erasmus+ mobility and cooperation actions, by which these are often financed. The TRENDS results also suggest evolving learning and teaching methods (for example, 54% of institutions award credits for student engagement in civic and social initiatives), and an increased offer of flexible provision (short-term certificate courses), including through digital means and blended learning. Most institutions offer teaching staff enhancement, either on a voluntary and compulsory basis, with no real changes compared to the previous survey in 2015. When asked about the biggest obstacles with regard to learning and teaching, most institutions refer to funding and the lack of recognition for teaching in career development.

The TRENDS report will contribute to mapping current challenges in European higher education learning and teaching. In the coming years, EUA will continue monitoring developments at European universities, and instilling a bottom-up, practice-driven approach, but also to contribute in collaboration with institutions, and other stakeholders, to policy development in this important area.

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<sup>1</sup> The TRENDS 2018 Report will be published in autumn 2018, but [some of the results are already available](#). Data from TRENDS 2018 is also referenced in the chapter on learning and teaching in the forthcoming Bologna Implementation Report 2018 [24 May 2018].

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. EUA promotes cooperation between universities and 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 independent voice of European universities is heard, wherever decisions are being taken that will impact on their activities.

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