

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching: a European policy dialogue

25-26 October 2021





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The event

On 25–26 October 2021, the European University Association (EUA) organised a policy dialogue on learning and teaching, under the EU-co-funded [LOTUS project](#). The dialogue explored how national- and European-level action can best promote and support the enhancement of learning and teaching, in collaboration with autonomous higher education institutions.

The programme of the policy dialogue built on common interest topics identified through the LOTUS Leadership Development Programme, as well as through a series of interviews conducted in 30 European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries. It also offered a reflection on the development of learning and teaching across Europe.

The policy dialogue gathered different types of stakeholders, such as ministry officials, university leaders, teachers, university associations and representatives from other organisations with an interest in learning and teaching. They interacted and compared viewpoints on much-debated topics, such as the recognition of teaching in academic careers and inter-institutional cooperation on learning and teaching.

The event was part of a series of webinars organised in September 2021 by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It will continue throughout 2022, with a lunchtime session planned at the 2022 European Learning and Teaching Forum (17 February 2022), and three workshops taking place in Ireland, Finland and Austria in the spring of 2022.

The LOTUS European policy dialogue

25–26 OCTOBER 2021

64

registered participants

30

countries

19

national
ministries

16

higher education
institutions

10

university
associations

The policy dialogue programme

Day 1 How is the enhancement of learning and teaching supported across the EHEA?

- presentation of a study on national initiatives for the enhancement of learning and teaching
- breakout group discussions on teaching enhancement and rewarding teaching, and inter-institutional cooperation

Day 2 Leadership in teaching

- presentation on the concept of leadership in teaching, as a role with responsibilities and as a collective endeavour
- case studies on leadership in teaching in the Netherlands, in Sweden, and in the UK
- breakout discussions
- final panel with representatives from the national level, students and the European Commission: How to best empower and support transformation in learning and teaching?

Key findings and actions needed

Discussions during the plenary and breakout sessions identified the following key findings and actions needed. These should be considered only as temporary conclusions after this first LOTUS policy dialogue. The work will continue to further refine recommendations and identify which stakeholders are best placed to address them.

1. The connection between teaching and research in academic careers

- Imparity of esteem for teaching is deeply rooted, including when it comes to cooperation in the field of teaching (exchanging on teaching practices, conducting research on teaching, cooperating on the design of joint education offer, etc.). Unlike for research, education cooperation is not yet a well-recognised and standard practice.
- Academics currently face multiple demands and pressures, due to a fragmentation and silo effect between university missions. Time and effort spent to improve and innovate teaching is not valued and does not account much for career progression.
- Although teaching is often perceived as an individual and personal activity, it also has more collective and collaborative aspects: the study programme, the curriculum, the contribution of teaching support staff, etc. One example of practice that needs consideration is the “team approach”, meaning training to work as a team, which includes teaching support staff and students.

Action needed: Consider more holistic approaches to higher education missions, academic careers and career development at the national, institutional and European policy levels.

2. Enhancing participation of and dialogue among stakeholders

- As frequently stated, various stakeholder groups contribute to learning and teaching, within and outside the institution: teachers, students and generally staff and leadership, as well as national organisations supporting teaching, policy makers and other external stakeholders, for instance, employers or their representative organisations.
- There is strong agreement that more dialogue among these groups is needed to reach better mutual understanding of the different perspectives. This was confirmed even for countries with a strong tradition for institutional autonomy and a well-established culture of stakeholder participation in policy-making. The capacity of each stakeholder group to understand the others' viewpoints (which comes from their practice) needs to be reinforced.

Action needed: Provide structures and means to involve stakeholders, foster meaningful dialogue and achieve better mutual understanding through more joint activities at the institutional and national levels.

3. More emphasis and visibility for the role of students

- Student-centred learning as a pedagogical concept has been a central paradigm across the EHEA for years. However, it is still difficult to assess the state of play within higher education institutions and across study programmes.
- Student participation in university governance and in decision-making is considered a key principle in the Bologna Process.

Action needed: Prepare plans to implement the “[Recommendations for National Authorities for the Enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA](#)”, endorsed by the ministers under the Bologna Process in Rome in 2020. National-level discussions need to be organised to design such plans and identify roles and responsibilities.

4. An evidence-based approach for institutional and national policy-making

- Higher education is based on research. But when it comes to universities’ own learning and teaching practices, research on teaching, education sciences as a scientific discipline, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) are not fully valued and used. While “measuring teaching” is clearly a complex issue, this should not give reason to abstain from an evidence-based approach in identifying the gaps and challenges in learning and teaching, in order to improve actions and practices.
- Innovation in teaching also means taking risks and possibly facing failures. An overly strong emphasis and pressure on accountability and student success can hamper and impede teaching innovation.

Action needed: Provide more value and recognition for research on teaching and SOTL, including a non-quantitative evidence base, as part of teachers’ continued professional development, institutions’ decision-making, and national and European policy-making.

5. Flexible and complementary opportunities for teaching collaboration

- There is a wider range of opportunities for inter-institutional cooperation in learning and teaching, from peer-to-peer exchange among individual staff to larger initiatives such as the EU’s European University Initiative. This diversity needs to be fully acknowledged, valued and nurtured.

Action needed: Map, test and mainstream enabling frameworks for learning and teaching cooperation, within and across institutions and systems, in order to better address needs for and gaps in learning and teaching support.

Upcoming LOTUS policy dialogues and [other LOTUS activities](#) will address these findings. The final project report, planned for the autumn of 2022, will include key messages and recommendations for different stakeholder groups.

The LOTUS project aims to contribute to capacity building and strategic change management for learning and teaching at higher education institutions across Europe. The project also aims to discuss and demonstrate the potential of various actors (ministries, university associations, student and staff unions, etc.) to support transformation and innovation in learning and teaching.

LOTUS is led by EUA in partnership with a diverse consortium of higher education institutions, national rectors' conferences, education ministries and organisations actively involved in learning and teaching across Europe.