

## Forum Insights for Students in Higher Education

### REPORT

#### High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education

#### Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions (June 2013)

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/modernisation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/modernisation_en.pdf)

### Key Insights for Students

#### Introduction:

This Forum insight paper provides a very brief summary of the High Level Group Report on the Modernisation of Higher Education. For more comprehensive details, please refer to the link to the full report, provided above. We have highlighted the parts of the report that we think are particularly useful for students to consider, but it is not exhaustive. The summary provided below is simply a brief flavour of the themes and priorities emphasised in the report.

#### Background:

The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, multilingualism and sport, Androulla Vassiliou set up the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe. This group (chaired by Prof Mary McAleese) was asked to put the quality of teaching and learning at the top of their agenda for change and it makes a range of important recommendations that provide a strong guide for the ways in which teaching and learning in higher education can be enhanced throughout European Higher Education Institutions. The work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education work will be guided and informed by these recommendations.

*'The experience of learning from, and alongside, a good university or college teacher is one that should be shared by every one of the millions of students in Europe today. Not only because good teachers make one's student days challenging, motivating and rewarding; but because quality higher education teaching is absolutely crucial in enabling our higher education institutions to produce the critically-thinking, creative, adaptable graduates who will shape our future.'*

#### Some important aspects of the report:

The report highlights the importance of active learning, assessment, cross-disciplinarity, using students feedback, and the teaching and learning-related roles and responsibilities of students and their higher education institutions:

#### Active learning

- Higher education provides an opportunity to be part of a community of scholars.

- 'Teaching and learning in higher education is a shared process, with responsibilities on both student and teacher to contribute to their success' (p.18).
- Teachers and students are engaged in the co-creation of knowledge: 'a good teacher, like a good graduate, is also an active learner, questioner and critical thinker' (p.13).
- Innovative pedagogical approaches, such as problem-based learning and technology-enhanced learning, can help to support and inspire active learning.

#### Engaging with subjects, skills and 'new questions..bigger than the course itself'

- Students' role is not merely to acquire knowledge in their chosen discipline, but 'to engage with new questions which are bigger than the course itself, which have relevance to their own lives and which provoke a lively participation far beyond simply getting through assessment or exams' (p.18).
- Higher education should equip students with 'both subject-specific and generic skills which they can apply immediately in the real world, especially in the labour market' (p.19). Generic skills may also be developed through extra-curricular activities, which are integral to the overall student-learning experience.
- Assessment methods should 'measure the competences the student obtained as a result of a process of learning' (p.42).
- 'Higher education institutions should introduce and promote cross-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, helping students develop their breadth of understanding and entrepreneurial and innovative mind-sets' (p.47).
- Graduates represent an important conduit through which knowledge is transferred from higher education institutions to wider society.

#### Higher education institutions' obligations to students

- For higher education institutions, teaching is 'a high-priority contractual obligation to the students' (p.15).
- The report recommends that 'higher education institutions should develop and implement holistic internationalisation strategies' to include, inter alia, 'student and staff mobility (incoming and outgoing), the international dimension of curricula, the internationalisation of the campus, [and] a positive and efficient approach to foreign language learning' (pp.50-51).
- 'Higher education institutions and national policy makers in partnership with students should establish counselling, guidance, mentoring and tracking systems to support students' (p.45).

**Students' contribution to higher education**

- 'Active student involvement is essential in governance, curricular design, development and review, quality assurance and review procedures' (p.15).
- 'Higher education institutions should encourage, welcome and take account of student feedback' (p.29).
- Data on students' performance and experience provides institutions with an evidence-base for monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching quality.

**Questions for students implied by the high level report**

- How can I ensure that my voice as a student is heard when it comes to providing an effective learning experience?
- To what extent do I take responsibility for my learning and for engaging actively with all aspects of my programme?
- Do I know where to go/who to ask if I am experiencing difficulties or challenges when it comes to effective learning in my programme of study?
- To what extent do I feel my voice is sought and responded to when it comes to feedback on my learning experience?
- To what extent do I provide feedback to my teachers and my institution relating to my learning experiences?
- What skills do I need to develop in order to achieve my own learning and development goals and in order to engage as effectively as possible with my programme of study?
- Do I see ways in which I can become actively engaged in enhancing teaching and learning?
- Do I feel I can play a part in planning for and availing of opportunities for internationalising my higher education experience? To what extent do I consider this a priority in terms of my own learning?
- What are the key things I need to do in order to maximise my learning opportunities and outcomes in my higher education context?