Forum Insights for Teachers in Higher Education

REPORT

High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, Report to the European Commission on New Modes of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (October 2014), http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/modernisation-universities_en.pdf.

Key Insights for Teachers

'For too long, this core mission of higher education [learning and teaching] has been overshadowed by research priorities. The very fact that people are talking about teaching is progress in itself. Many higher education institutions and academics are starting to rethink the process of teaching. They are challenging the status quo and bringing new energy and fresh approaches to the teaching mission' (p.19).

The transformative potential of new technologies

- 'Traditional degree programmes are modernising. Teachers and students alike have access to a wider range of materials, and new technologies and pedagogical approaches are being "blended" with the traditional classroom setting. There has been a shift in the concept of and attitude towards distance education. Increasingly, people are opting to study online. In tandem, these forms of learning are becoming more recognised and more widely accepted in society. As a result both traditional higher education institutions and new types of providers are developing a range of online offerings' (p.15).

- 'New and emerging approaches to learning and teaching, made possible by new technologies' can enhance the provision of 'high quality, relevant and widely accessible higher education' (p.18).

- Online programme provision and open access to educational resources supports the internationalisation of higher education. 'Internationalising the student and staff body, and developing global partnerships with leading institutions worldwide, enhances the quality of learning, teaching and research, and contributes significantly to the student experience' (p.20).

Supporting engagement with new technologies and associated pedagogies

- The integration of new modes of teaching into higher education is changing the role of academic staff 'from knowledge transmitters and experts in a particular subject to mentors and facilitators of critical thinking' (p.31).

- In order to mainstream new modes of learning and teaching and to expand online learning opportunities, staff need training, guidance and support to equip them to engage successfully with new technologies and associated pedagogies (p.31).

- 'All staff teaching in higher education institutions should receive training in relevant digital technologies and pedagogies as part of initial training and continuous professional development' (p.33).

Learning analytics and personalised learning

- While 'almost all European universities use central electronic learning environments, giving access to course documents, multimedia material, simulations, assessment tools, discussion fora and learning communities', the 'absence of clear information on authorised uses of specific online learning deters users' (p.47).

- Institutions should obtain 'the full and informed consent of students' for the collection and analysis of data pertaining to their learning, which 'should only be used for educational purposes' (p.50).

- 'Advances in big data and data analytics are [...] creating opportunities for institutions to better understand the needs of students and develop more personalised learning pathways' with 'the potential to transform the learning experience and enhance completion rates' (p.49).

- Digital technologies can enable student-centred learning, providing 'a personalised learning experience for each student, based on each student's strengths' (p.18).

- 'Data can capture how students engage in the course, interact with other students and retain concepts over time. It can provide information on the learning process as opposed to just learning outcomes. Teachers can experiment with different approaches and examine the immediate impact. Data can also be used to identify at-risk students at an early stage, assisting in efforts to increase retention rates' (p.21).

Fostering active learning

- 'New technologies and communication platforms [...] allow for greater interactivity between the teacher and the student, and between students both inside and outside the classroom. While much of the content of programmes can be delivered through "self-administered" e-learning, teachers can concentrate on their role as mentor, developing with students the skills of information management, understanding and questioning, critical thinking and knowledge application. Thus, digital media can facilitate more active, problem-based learning' (p.19).

- 'Digital assessment tools can enable quick feedback on student progress and curriculum adjustment to student needs. Technology's potential [...] to complete the move [...] from the mere transmission of information to a co-partnership in learning' can enhance the student-learning experience (p.19).

Fostering open access to education and research

- Institutions should 'promote a culture of openness' in relation to education and research, thereby 'ensuring that high quality materials are accessible to all, and can be adapted and customised to learners' needs and specific circumstances' (p.47).

- 'Creative Commons licenses provide a simple, standardised way to arrange copyright by giving public permission to share and use educational material on conditions that can be tailored to specific needs' (p.47).

Skills acquisition, assessment and accreditation

- 'Institutions must [...] provide digital skills training for students, especially for first year students' in order to support their learning and enhance their skills-base (p.31).

- 'Institutions must [...] replicate the softer skills [e.g. peer-interaction] acquired during an on-campus learning experience in online offerings', e.g. via Google hangouts (p.31).

- Assessing learning outcomes online is challenging because 'it requires trustworthy mechanisms for the verification of online participants' identities'. However 'new forms of authentication such as webcam identification, typing pattern recognition and online proctored exams with online simultaneous supervision are helping to develop credibility' (p.44).

- The recognition and accreditation of the skills and knowledge acquired through online learning is essential to 'instil confidence in the quality of the learning outcomes'. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) provides a framework to facilitate this (p.44).