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Social Scientists call for more effective teaching in Higher Education

A new ESF position paper identifies needs and steps to improve teaching skills in Higher Education.

A new position paper, *The Professionalisation of Academics as Teachers in Higher Education*, has been published today by the European Science Foundation.

In Europe, where over 19 million students are in tertiary education, it is becoming crucial to look at, study and improve the teaching skills of scientists in order to teach more effectively the next generation of innovators. This is not only of interest to the Social Sciences but an issue of basic importance to all domains of science and to society as a whole.

The publication exposes current developments and challenges in the European Higher Education landscape. The authors establish a set of nine principles of good teaching and recommend that universities that strive for quality education offer educational development opportunities for their teachers. They claim that well-designed educational development programmes lead to increased satisfaction of teachers and changes in attitudes, behaviours and teaching practice.

The position paper underlines that “excellent teachers are made, not born; they become excellent through investment in their teaching abilities. Leaving teachers to learn from trial and error is a waste of time, effort and university resources.”

The publication therefore highlights six recommendations for important advances to be made toward the professionalisation of teaching and student learning:


- define professional standards for higher education teachers; Ø measure teaching effectiveness and provide constructive feedback for academics; Ø establish the institutional support base for educational development locally;
- promote the idea of the ‘teacher researcher’ and recognise research on teaching as research activity and teaching excellence in hiring and promotion decision; Ø allocate

meaningful funding for educational development;
establish a European forum within a currently existing institution that pools and shares resources and existing expertise.

Sir Roderick Floud, Chair of the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences says, “Higher education is an important aspect of the ‘absorptive capacity’ of societies, the degree to which new knowledge is accessed, understood and used, and a crucial means of realising the ambition of making Europe more innovative”. He continued; “As one of the main ‘outlets’ for research, not just for social science but for science in general, higher education is one of the most important routes along which research directly impacts daily life”.

The document aims at presenting the state-of-the-art in the field and increasing the visibility of the growing research on improving teaching abilities of scientists through teacher development programmes, in order to increase application of this research.

This position paper is an outcome of the European Science Foundation’s Exploratory Workshop ‘The Impact of Training for Teachers in Higher Education’ held 18–20 March 2010 in Bratislava with the participation of 20 international academics engaged in both teacher training and researching teaching and learning in higher education.

The ESF Position Paper The Professionalisation of Academics as Teachers in Higher Education is available online at <http://www.esf.org/publications.html> 


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