

## Course Team Meetings

### Overall Report May 2013

The course team meetings were carried out in the 9 partner institutions between May 25 and October 1, 2012. The course teams were made up of the following teachers / study programmes:

- University of Jyväskylä - Masters in Corporate Environmental Management; 28 August 2012.
- University of Innsbruck – Lecturers on teacher education programme for future teachers of languages.
- University of Southampton - 4 members of staff from the Faculty of Engineering; 28 June 2012.
- University of Szeged, Faculty of Education - 6 literature teachers from the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures; 25 May 2012.
- Deusto University - 8 lecturers at undergraduate and postgraduate level from the fields of law, economics, computer sciences, humanities, languages, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences; 18 September 2012.
- University of Aveiro – 6 members of teaching staff from the Mathematics Department; 12 September 2012.
- Babeş-Bolyai University - 5 members of academic staff from the Department of Applied Modern Languages, Faculty of Letters; 15 June 2012.
- University of Trento – 10 members of teaching body of the School of International Studies; 1 October 2012.
- Copenhagen Business School – 5 members of (full-time) academic staff, Bachelor Degree in International Business and Politics, and Bachelor Degree in Intercultural Communication and Management.

### The meetings

The meetings lasted from 45 minutes to 4 hours, with most lasting around 2 hours. Participants were recruited using different techniques: in some cases, open invitations were made to a department or faculty; in most cases, recruitment was by personal contact and invitation.

As agreed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Partner Meeting in Innsbruck, Austria, in May 2012, the meetings began with an introduction to LanQua and to SPEAQ, or were preceded by a briefing which included the introduction to these two projects, and the Data Collection Questions were used as a guide to the group discussion. In the University of Trento, a short group discussion was followed up by an on-line survey.

This report aims to summarise the reports presented by the partner institutions and organised with reference to the three groups of data collection questions: **What quality means to you; Quality in your institution;** and **Improving Quality.** The results of all institutions are integrated into this framework.

## **What quality means to you**

*a. What makes your programme a good one? What in your opinion are the elements of a good programme?*

It was the general opinion that the quality of a programme depends on both its ability to meet external expectations and benchmarks and internal standards and criteria. For example, recognition in international rankings and by external agencies were mentioned as important aspects of good degree programmes, as well as benchmarking against other programmes in the country and internationally. The national and international reputation of a degree programme contributes to its capacity to attract (high quality) students, which in turn contributes to its internal quality.

The external recognition of the institution itself was also mentioned as an important dimension to a quality profile for study programmes. Some qualities of a good institution were given, principally: good working conditions and facilities for teaching and nonteaching staff and students, credibility in the market place, high level quality of the teaching staff, adequate institutional support for teachers and students.

Internal elements of a good programme referred to by teachers had to do with the organisation of the learning: is the structure of the programme clear and transparent? How interdisciplinary is it? Is the approach student-centred? Is the content varied and updated? Are the methodologies varied and updated? Are learning objectives and outcomes concrete and relevant? Are theory and practice well integrated? Are the methods of assessment in tune with the learning goals? Does the programme respond to the demands of society? Does it have an international dimension?

Teachers felt that employability is a sign of excellence, so programmes should be both market driven, developing general competences and specific skills needed for working life, and also oriented towards the development of personal and interpersonal skills and enhancing student satisfaction and enthusiasm.

The ability to get feedback from students and social actors as to what constitutes a good programme and what skills are relevant to the workplace is seen to be crucial in this context. Curricular design needs to be coherent in terms of structure and organisation, taking into account students' prior learning and personal goals as well as the competences desired by potential employers.

This is not to underestimate the centrality of the teacher in the delivery of a quality programme. Teachers recognised that the teaching staff must be of a high quality, revealing personal as well as academic and technical competence. Teachers' preparation for each lecture / teaching session was considered vital to good learning and teaching. The value of teamwork and cooperation was mentioned as important, with staff working together to take advantage of complementary strengths and weaknesses, finding time to meet regularly, listen to each other and be willing and able to discuss issues in an open and democratic manner, with a view to finding answers to students' (and their own)

#### **Quality of a good programme**

- Recognition in international rankings and by external agencies
- Benchmarking against other programmes in the country and internationally
- National and international reputation of degree: ranking/accreditation, good results, employable/successful students, quality of teaching staff, institutional support
- National and international reputation of institution: ranking/accreditation, good working conditions and facilities for teaching and nonteaching staff and students, credibility in the market place, quality of the teaching staff, institutional support
- Coherence, clarity and transparency of curricular design
- Interdisciplinarity
- Student-centred teaching approach
- Varied and updated content
- Concrete and relevant learning objectives and outcomes
- Good integration of theory and practice
- Methods of assessment in tune with the learning goals
- Curricular design, objectives, learning outcomes, course content should take into account students' prior learning and personal goals
- Curricular design, objectives, learning outcomes, course content should take into account needs of the market and requirements of employers
- Good employability and low dropout rates
- Effective feedback mechanisms from students, teachers and social actors
- Quality of teaching staff: personal, academic and technical competence; preparation for lectures / teaching sessions
- Teamwork and cooperation among teachers to take advantage of complementary strengths and weaknesses, discuss problems and find answers to students' needs
- Teaching must be institutionally valued and good teaching rewarded
- Good students fundamental to good programmes: high entry grades, autonomy and study skills, preparedness for academic work and a good grounding in their subject area; interest and motivation

needs. For this, teachers need to feel that they and their contribution are valued in their institutions. In most institutions, teachers feel undervalued as teachers and that research and/or efficiency criteria are given precedence over what they see as central to the quality of the service offered by higher education – that is learning and teaching. This may be due to the idea that good research is seen as a substitute for good pedagogy, or that class sizes are too big, physical spaces inadequate, and contact hours too few for quality teaching to take place on a sustainable level.

Finally, good students were considered fundamental to good programmes, and good programmes attract good students. Although what is understood as a good student is not clear, high entry grades, autonomy and study skills, preparedness for academic work and a good grounding in their subject area were all mentioned as relevant factors; student interest and motivation were taken to

be pivotal in bridging the gap between entry and exit levels. In some institutions, especially at undergraduate level, teachers felt the lack of these competences and resources affected the quality of the study programme, reflected in retention and drop out levels and student success rates.

*b. What makes your experience as a teacher a valuable one?*

Teachers recognised that the value of their experience had much to do with their professional identity and its personal rewards; in other words, working with others, engaging in dialogue with colleagues, building relationships with students, getting feedback on their work constituted the central valuable experiences of teaching.

Teachers expressed their sense of satisfaction and value when students show an interest in their subject and are motivated and enthusiastic, and, although suspicious of QA mechanisms, when they receive high student success rates and satisfaction scores. On the other hand, low student success rates and satisfaction scores tend to lead to a sense of disillusionment with the system and the quality assessment instruments themselves.

*c. What is the most rewarding learning experience you have had on your programme. Why?*

Significantly all the rewarding experiences recounted had to do with students, and the teachers' ability to motivate them and to have 'proof' of this, either through students' reactions and/or their successes. For example, teachers mentioned students working harder than necessary, revealing new thought processes and understanding, and recognising that their learning had been useful to them in their future lives and professions. A smile, a comment, not rushing off immediately after the class, sending an email saying how interesting the class was, and asking whether the teacher would continue teaching them

**Value of teaching experience**

- related to teachers' professional identity and personal rewards:
  - working with others
  - engaging in dialogue with colleague
  - building relationships with students
  - getting feedback from students
  - motivating students to their subjects
  - students getting high grades
  - getting good scores from QA questionnaires

**Rewarding experiences**

- related to students:
  - students working harder than necessary
  - students revealing new thought processes and understanding
  - students recognising that their learning has been useful to them
  - a smile, a comment, not rushing off immediately after the class, sending an email saying how interesting the class was, asking whether the teacher would continue teaching them in the following year
  - being remembered in a positive way by students in later life
  - teaching small groups of motivated students
  - using interactive methodologies, e.g. simulations and discussions

in the following year were examples of rewarding moments which teachers recalled. Teachers also appreciated being remembered in a positive way by students in later life since good teaching should stand the test of time.

Certain contexts were mentioned as being particularly conducive to rewarding experiences, such as small groups of motivated students, combined with particular activities, like simulations and discussions.

*d. What do you understand by the term quality within your university context?*

Quality is considered something of a buzzword which should be made more explicit and concrete, enabling it to be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively, in research and in teaching. It has an impact on the success of the institution, and its programmes, enabling it to attract good and motivated students and staff. It has an influence on the economic sustainability of an institution and its financial well-being. It is therefore a priority and efforts should be made to adopt quality practices in all sectors of university life.

Recognising quality as multi-faceted, teachers reflected a view that in a university context quality

means preparing students as well as possible for their future lives, including but not exclusive to their employability. As such, it was for many a regular practice and not merely the filling out of institutional questionnaires, taken to be necessary but insufficient for quality enhancement. In fact, in several institutions, teachers establish their own ways of getting feedback on teaching quality from students, through feedback forms or face to face discussions, thus revealing two ways of promoting quality: one top down and the other bottom up, one more formal, the other less so.

Assessment via student questionnaires and institutional statistics is in general not highly valued by teachers, who often feel they are being pressured to pander to students' likes and dislikes rather than provide a quality education. Teachers feel students may not be either mature or knowledgeable enough to know what is best for them, especially in the short term; what's more, students are often not consistent in their evaluation of teaching quality, so it may not be easy to

**Quality in the university context – teachers' views**

- Quality - an important but ill-defined concept, difficult to measure, yet with a strong impact on institutions, programmes, staff and students
- Quality - a priority, and quality practices should be adopted in all sectors of university life
- Quality – the preparation of students for their future
- Quality - a regular practice not confined to the filling out of institutional questionnaires, often part of the teaching routine of teachers
- Quality – top down *and* bottom up
- Teachers prefer bottom up practices
- Institutional, top down quality practices may mean teachers neglect good quality education in favour of students' whims, likes and dislikes
- Teachers feel students are inconsistent in their judgement of quality
- Teachers do not share a uniform understanding of quality
- Results and impacts of institutional quality processes should be made more visible and be more openly discussed among all those involved
- Teachers should have a stronger voice in these processes

adjust pedagogical action to student opinion. In addition, teachers from different disciplines often see quality in different ways, as may teachers of different age-groups, backgrounds, personal beliefs, etc.

So while external quality control requires statistical data on quality indicators, teachers are concerned with how they can meet their own and students' expectations in their subject, which is complex and unresolved. It was suggested that making the results and impacts of institutional quality processes more visible and more openly discussed among stakeholders could enhance the quality of these processes; in some cases, teachers feel that they should have a stronger voice in these processes, as compared with students and quality managers / management structures.

*e. How do you make sure your courses are coherent within the degree programme? Is there overall coherency in the programme? How can you influence this coherence and development personally?*

Institutions have ways of planning and implementing degree structures in a coherent way and processes for altering study plans when appropriate, also in a coherent way. Coherence is established on the basis of what students should know and be able to do when they complete their programme, and how each discipline can contribute to this graduate profile. QA systems and external and internal feedback mechanisms have an important role in identifying situations where there may be a lack of coherence in study programmes, missing contents, unrealistic goals, etc. and bringing these to the attention of administrators and course directors. Though this is largely an administrative process with the involvement of quality managers, course directors and departmental heads, teachers have a role in adjusting what they do in their disciplines to the overall structure of the programme and pointing out where they feel inconsistencies lie. In some institutions, teachers have a voice on the deciding committees; in others, teachers seem to feel more cooperation is necessary to ensure that coherence is based on pedagogical and scientific criteria and not just to ease administrative or financial constraints.

*f. Can you provide any examples of good practice of improving your teaching in your institution?*

#### **Coherence in study plans**

- Coherence in study plans is established on the basis of what students should know and be able to do when they complete their study programme, and how each discipline can contribute to this graduate profile
- Institutions have ways of planning and implementing degree structures in a coherent way and processes for altering study plans when appropriate, also in a coherent way.
- Coherence is QA systems and external and internal feedback mechanisms have an important role in identifying situations where there may be a lack of coherence in study programmes, missing contents, unrealistic goals, etc. and bringing these to the attention of administrators and course directors.
- Teachers have a role in adjusting what they do in their disciplines to the overall structure of the programme and pointing out where they feel inconsistencies lie
- Some teachers have a voice on deciding committees; others feel more cooperation is necessary to ensure that coherence is based on pedagogical and scientific criteria and not just to ease administrative or financial constraints

Working together with other teachers to establish synergies and take advantage of each other's experiences is recognised as a good practice in itself and as a way of developing good practice, although it is also considered time-consuming and not always possible to achieve.

Good practice seminars are promoted to support this process; taking part in professional development programmes to improve teaching skills and participation in conferences, training programs and national and international project are other ways in which teachers look to find, share and implement good practice.

Listening to student feedback, both formally through QA processes and informally through discussion in or after class were also mentioned as good ways of helping teachers reflect on their practices; student feedback is used to add, change and update curricular units and teachers' strategies. Maintaining close contact with students is considered a good practice in itself, through keeping class sizes small and providing time for supporting student learning.

Exploiting new ways of communicating within institutions and with students, including the use of social networking to engage, inform and motivate student participation.

In several institutions, teachers mentioned a lack of attention to pedagogical preparation and staff development / training, seeing this as a sign that institutions in general give little importance and value to teaching itself.

#### **Good practice**

- Working together with other teachers to establish synergies and take advantage of each other's experiences
- Participating in good practice seminars
- Taking part in professional development programmes
- Participation in conferences, training programmes and national and international projects
- Listening to student feedback, both formally through QA processes and informally through discussion in or after class
- Maintaining close contact with students, keeping class sizes small and providing time for supporting student learning
- Exploiting new ways of communicating within institutions and with students, including the use of social networking to engage, inform and motivate student participation

### **Quality in your institution**

*a. Do you have a voice within your university? Are you listened to? If so, how is your opinion heard/acted upon? Where is your voice heard? By whom?*

Many participants felt their voice was not heard as much as it could/should be in their faculties / institutions despite the fact that they felt they did good work and made a valuable contribution. In fact, sometimes they seemed to feel taken advantage of in some ways. They mentioned their opinion was rarely asked for or needed at the institutional level, but when their excellence was recognised externally, their institutions did not hesitate to use this in their self-promotion.

However, they did feel listened to within a more limited sphere – department or course group, for example, with some capacity to influence decisions at that level and able to express their opinion both formally and informally.

Some participants made the distinction between being heard, through formal QA or institutional processes, and action being taken on the opinions which they gave. It was felt that better communication and more interaction would enable their opinions not only to be heard, but also to be the engine for change and improvement.

#### **Voice of teachers in the institution**

- Many teachers feel their voice is not heard as much as it could/should be in their faculties / institutions
- Teachers feel taken advantage of in some ways
- Teachers' opinion rarely asked for or needed at the institutional level, but when their excellence was recognised externally, institutions take advantage of this for self-promotion
- Teachers feel listened to within a more limited sphere – department or course group, for example, with some capacity to influence decisions at that level
- Some teachers distinguish between being heard and action being taken on the opinions which they give
- Better communication and more interaction would enable their opinions not only to be heard, but also to be the engine for change and improvement

*b./c. In what contexts, both formal and informal, is quality/teaching practice/learning experience discussed in your programme? Is quality a daily matter for you or something which occurs only sporadically?*

Quality teaching and learning is discussed in institutional bodies at university and departmental levels, in staff meetings and workshops, in corridors and offices, and at different moments during the planning and delivery of degree programmes. It is discussed in degree boards and student committees, often in connection with the results of the QA questionnaires. Although recognising the pertinence of these different fora, teachers appear to value most the relationship established with students and quality in the classroom (their sphere of influence) and the contribution of this to the overall quality of the teaching programme.

#### **Where and when is quality teaching and learning discussed?**

- Quality teaching and learning is discussed:
  - in institutional bodies at university and departmental levels
  - in staff meetings and workshops
  - in corridors and offices
  - at different moments during the planning and delivery of degree programmes
  - in degree boards and student committees, often in connection with the results of the QA questionnaires
  - in the classroom, in dialogue, with students
- Formal quality processes occur regularly and periodically at university / institutional level
- Informal quality processes are a regular, everyday practice

In general, for the teachers, quality is sought and found in the demands made of students, the provision of clear rules and guidelines for their studies, and the facilities provided by the institution. External bodies provide the pressure for the development of an internal quality culture and the permanent search for better teaching and better results.

Distinguishing between formal and informal quality processes, teachers make a distinction between quality as practice which is a daily business for them, and QA processes which occur regularly at the university / institutional level, and which may or may not have a conscious impact on their activity.

*d. How do you feel you are supported in your teaching development? How do you think the institution supports teaching and learning?*

Most teachers who addressed this question seemed to feel they were supported within their faculties either formally (training sessions) or informally (meetings with other staff members). However, they felt less supported by their institutions, which can be distant, unresponsive to their opinions, or even responsible for closing units which provided support for teaching quality enhancement. For example, teachers believe that quality is directly proportional to student numbers in class but cannot persuade the institution to provide more resources. They also suspect that the institution is more interested in evaluating than contributing to QE.

Thus rising student numbers is aggravated by a reduction in contact hours and an increase in dependence on ICTs and tutoring, for which neither time nor credit is allocated to teachers. Such factors contribute to an overall perception that teaching is not as valued as it should be.

Inadequate staff development programmes were noted, as well as a lack of provision of basic induction for new or external tutors, who are often unsure about how the institution works, and where to turn if they need support, and a general lack of information seemed to be felt across the course teams.

#### **Institutional support for teacher development**

- Some support provided for staff development, training sessions, staff meetings, etc.
- Support for research and project work, with funding for research projects and conferences
- Institutions felt to be:
  - Distant
  - Unresponsive to teachers' opinions and the need for more resources for teaching
  - Responsible for closing support units and shutting down teacher development programmes
  - Responsible for increasing class size and reduction in contact hours
  - More interested in evaluating than contributing to QE
- Also noted:
  - An increase in the use of ICTs and tutoring, for which neither time nor credit is allocated to teachers
  - Inadequate staff development programmes
  - Lack of provision of basic induction for new or external tutors
  - Lack of information and support for teaching

Teachers did feel, however, that support was provided for research and project work, with funding for research projects and conferences, for example, which bring people together to share practice and create support networks.

*e. Is quality something which is imposed externally? How do you know what works well in your practice? What do you think you do well in your department that other departments can learn from?*

Not many opinions were given on this subject, perhaps because it is one of the last ones on the interview schedule. Teachers seemed to know quite a lot about quality in general terms, but not very many were fully familiar with the quality management system in the university. Many not knowing who was responsible in their institution, or, indeed, if anyone was. However, they did express the opinion that although quality is imposed externally e.g. through accreditation, recognition by local industries, it is also achieved through the motivation and ambition of the teachers and their determination to improve their courses and their performance. Thus, the regular filling in of forms will not necessarily lead to the implementation of a culture of quality. This needs to be based on the identification, discussion and

#### **Quality imposed externally?**

- Quality is imposed externally, through accreditation processes, recognition by local industries, for example
- Quality is achieved through the motivation and ambition of teachers and their determination to improve their courses and their performance
- The regular filling in of forms will not lead to a culture of quality
- Quality culture will be based on the identification, discussion and dissemination of what works well in practice
- Teachers must continue to strive for high quality learning and sharing their experiences with colleagues
- Teachers are uncomfortable with quality standards imposed from external sources, questioning whether the agencies and managers responsible for evaluating and maintaining quality actually know what is best in practice for teachers, and therefore for students
- More dialogue with teachers, and action on the basis of the dialogue, is necessary to overcome resistance and improve practice.
- University teachers / professors are the authority in their subjects and courses and this is a strong barrier to change

and dissemination of what worked well in practice, rather than on the results of a combination of statistical scores. In this context, it is important for teachers to continue to strive for high quality learning and sharing their experiences with colleagues.

Teachers also revealed a discomfort with quality standards imposed from external sources, questioning whether the agencies and managers responsible for evaluating and maintaining quality actually know what is best in practice for teachers, and therefore for students. This seems to suggest that a lot more dialogue with teachers, and action on the basis of the dialogue, is necessary to overcome resistance and to improve practice. It is noted that university teachers / professors are the authority in their subjects and courses and this is a strong barrier to change.

*f. Who are the quality managers in your institution?*

Only a few of the participating teachers could say who the quality managers were in their institutions although they were aware, for the most part, of the existence of units and people whose task it is to deal with the management of quality.

*g. What are the particular features of your institution, which would or should be taken into consideration when dealing with quality issues?*

Teachers mentioned specific qualities they associated with their institutions, for example: transparency, fairness, criteria, good level of subject competence, lifelong learning & development; frequent feedback, including questionnaires from students; student-centredness; a close relationship between teaching staff and students and a favourable learning environment; interdisciplinarity and a practical focus; a concern with employability and skills development; high standards; high prestige and attractive.

Interestingly, teachers selected features which they feel distinguish their institutions from others in a positive way, e.g. well-organised (compared to the others), interdisciplinary (as opposed to subject-oriented), etc. rather than mentioning more concrete and measurable features, such as location, size, catchment area.

Some less favourable characteristics were recorded, including being overly bureaucratic, disorganised, behind regarding quality management processes, ineffective in communicating internally and externally, unresponsive to teachers' needs.

**Particular features of institutions**

- Specific qualities mentioned:
  - transparency
  - fairness
  - good level of subject competence
  - lifelong learning & development
  - frequent feedback, including questionnaires from students
  - student-centredness
  - close relationship between teaching staff and students and a favourable learning environment
  - interdisciplinarity and a practical focus
  - concern with employability and skills development
  - high standards
  - high prestige and attractive
  
- Some less favourable characteristics:
  - excessively bureaucratic
  - disorganised
  - behind regarding quality management processes
  - ineffective in communicating internally and externally
  - unresponsive to teachers' needs

## Improving Quality

- a. *How can the learning experience be enhanced?*
- b. *What can you contribute to enhancing the learning experience?*
- c. *What is in place for future developments in quality?*
- d. *What would you like to improve in the study experience and how would you do it?*
- e. *What do you think a quality manager does/should do to improve quality?*
- f. *How do quality processes in your institution reflect changes/trends in higher education?*

The reports reveal that teachers answered these questions in a more general way, less directed at the specific questions, being mostly concerned with the overarching question of how to improve quality from the teachers' perspective.

It was generally felt that there should be a clear focus on teachers and teaching quality if the learning experience is to be improved, bringing the quality of teaching and learning to the centre of institutional concerns and reinforcing the reward mechanisms for good teachers/teaching. For the participants in the group discussions, this means a focus on learners and ensuring the engagement of all students in the learning process, from the most talented to the most vulnerable; it means a focus on teachers and their professional development, to enable them to keep up with the latest trends in a rapidly changing world; it means monitoring study programmes so that they stay in tune with the needs of society and the workplace; it means ensuring a balance between theory and practice, promoting the development of skills but also personal growth.

There should be less focus on financial issues and administrative tasks, and more provision of rewards for dedication and excellence in teaching and participating in pedagogical projects, alongside the existing rewards for publications and research projects. Institutions should (re)orient themselves towards the needs of learning and teaching, providing the best facilities, flexible and easily available spaces and equipment, user-friendly interfaces and reorganising their resources to better meet the expectations of students who choose to study there. Attention should be given to involving alumni associations and members of the wider community, including representatives of local authorities and businesses, in the continuous process of adjusting programmes to the needs of students and society as a whole.

Teachers referred to the need for more dialogue within institutions about what constitutes quality conditions for learning and how best to achieve them and more opportunities for recognising and sharing best practices within and between departments. More concretely, the results of QA processes should be implemented in action plans which visibly contribute to the improvement of programmes and subjects; the Quality Managers have an important role to play here.

The teachers' role in improving quality is related to making sure their practices are adjusted to the needs and expectations of students and the marketplace, by listening to students and working

together with colleagues. Professional development, improving technical expertise, sharing experience through cooperation and teamwork are recurring themes, with some teachers mentioning the value of peer observation and feedback. Bringing together the different actors in the quality process was also mentioned as a good way of bringing together bottom up and top down perspectives on learning quality.

It is a widely felt experience that students are under-motivated for learning and/or for their study programme; some tend towards absenteeism; others may drop out. The teachers' role in finding innovative and alternative ways of involving students in their learning or helping them find alternative paths is crucial. A practical orientation, a focus on real world problems, and hands on learning, combined with support and tutoring programmes, are mentioned by teachers as ways of engaging students and developing problem-solving skills and independence.

It was also noted by teachers that universities have a vital role to play in facilitating this process by being flexible and open to non-traditional forms of organising learning. It is the case that timetabling, the distribution of physical spaces, the way classrooms are laid out, for example, can be obstacles to implementing pedagogical innovation. In addition, the rationalisation of resources and the priority attributed to research are demotivating for teachers giving their time to improving students' learning experience. In some institutions, teachers find themselves with many different subjects to teach and many students to attend to, making it difficult to maintain the close contact with students which is considered necessary for good results.

Providing students with opportunities to participate in Department / Faculty activities and projects, and recognising this participation as an added value, is a good strategy for engaging students, and extracurricular activities should be encouraged from the start and, where possible, integrated into the study programme. Participation in national and international projects is a way of promoting the motivation of both teachers and students and making sure the Department and its study programmes are in touch with current trends.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the institutions involved are all engaging with international quality assurance requirements, meaning that there is convergence on many of the issues recognised as important for the objective quality of a study programme, department or institution – student teacher ratio, number of qualified staff, structured and coherent programmes, adequate QA mechanisms, student involvement, employability rates, success and drop out rates, and so on. Teachers' input indicates that there is also a degree of convergence regarding teachers' perceptions of what would ensure a better quality of learning experience, including attracting better prepared, more motivated students, providing structured learning environments, tailored to the needs of groups of students, giving value to teaching and teachers, using feedback from QA constructively, and organising resources in such a way as to enable teamwork, dialogue and discussion involving teachers and students.

## Improving Quality

- A clear focus on teachers and teaching quality, bringing the quality of teaching and learning to the centre of institutional concerns
- Reinforcing the reward mechanisms for good teachers/teaching
- A focus on learners and ensuring the engagement of all students in the learning process, from the most talented to the most vulnerable
- A focus on teachers and their professional development, to enable them to keep up with the latest trends in a rapidly changing world
- Monitoring study programmes so that they stay in tune with the needs of society and the workplace
- Ensuring a balance between theory and practice
- Promoting the development of skills but also personal growth
- Less focus on financial issues and administrative tasks
- More provision of rewards for dedication and excellence in teaching and participating in pedagogical projects, alongside the existing rewards for publications and research projects
- (Re)orientation towards the needs of learning and teaching, providing the best facilities, flexible and easily available spaces and equipment, user-friendly interfaces
- Reorganisation of institutional resources to better meet the expectations of students, involving alumni associations and members of the wider community in adjusting programmes to the needs of students and society as a whole
- More dialogue within institutions about what constitutes quality conditions for learning and how best to achieve them
- More opportunities for recognising and sharing best practices within and between departments
- Results of QA processes should be implemented in action plans which visibly contribute to the improvement of programmes and subjects
- Teachers should make sure their practices are adjusted to the needs and expectations of students and the marketplace, by listening to students and working together with colleagues
- More professional development, improving technical expertise, sharing experience through cooperation and teamwork; including peer observation and feedback
- Bringing together the different actors in the quality process in order to bring together bottom up and top down perspectives on learning quality
- Finding innovative and alternative ways of involving students in their learning and helping them find alternative paths in order to combat the lack of motivation for learning and/or for study programmes, and to promote retention and good results
- A practical orientation, a focus on real world problems, and hands on learning, combined with support and tutoring programmes, are important ways of engaging students and developing problem-solving skills and independence.
- Universities should be flexible and open to non-traditional forms of organising learning, for example: timetabling, distribution of physical spaces, the way classrooms are laid out
- The rationalisation of resources and the priority attributed to research should not be at the expense of teachers giving their time to improving students' learning experience
- Students should have opportunities to participate in Department / Faculty activities and projects, and this participation recognised as an added value; extracurricular activities should be encouraged from the start and, where possible, integrated into study programmes
- Participation in national and international projects to motivate both teachers and students and keep Departments and study programmes in touch with current trends