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IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ANECA AGENCIA NACIONAL DE EVALUACIÓN
DE LA CALIDAD Y ACREDITACIÓN

Universidad de Alcalá

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PLA Outcome

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN SPAIN

HERE-ES Project
Student Centred Learning

University of Alcalá, 7 – 8 April 2016

Around 50 experts and representatives from 15 European countries: Albania, Austria, Denmark, Belgium-Flanders, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom, representing national/regional ministries of higher education, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and national student unions as well as other stakeholders such as the EC, ENQA, ESU and EQAR, met in the University of Alcalá at Alcalá de Henares for the purpose of a Peer Learning Activity PLA on Student Centred Learning SCL.

The PLA was organized by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD) in the framework of the Erasmus + project Higher Education Reforms in Spain. The HERE-ES PLA was led by MECD in collaboration with the project partners ESU, the Spanish Quality Agency ANECA, the Spanish Conference of Rectors CRUE, ENQA and the University of Alcalá hosting the conference.

Based on intense and constructive discussions during the PLA, and considering the state of the art and recent trends on the subject presented by experts in the field, the participants noted that:

On the definition and terminology of Student Centred Learning:

- There are currently several definitions of SCL, the most common originating from the project "Time for a new paradigm in Higher Education: Student Centred learning (T4SCL)" and the ESU Student-Centred Learning Toolkit. From these definitions it is clear that the SCL concept entails both a mind-set and a culture in a given higher education institution as well as a learning approach.

- The Leuven 2009 Communiqué clearly states the need for SCL to be integrated in the quality assurance procedure as it is now as a new quality standard "1.3 Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment", in the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance, ESG 2015 adopted in the Yerevan 2015 Ministerial Communiqué.

- These definitions should be the starting point to put students in the centre of the learning process and give them autonomy and responsibility in the learning process.

Conclusion

SCL as defined in Part 1 of the ESG 2015 is a good base to work and there is no need to look for a new and agreed definition by all the stakeholders.

On the role and responsibility of Higher Education Institutions HEIs

- HEIs have the main responsibility for the implementation of SCL both as a new academic culture and more specifically in the design of study programmes, involving on an equal foot HEIs academic bodies, teachers and students.

- One of the major challenges for the implementation of SCL is to involve teachers, convincing them that it is not just another bureaucratic burden. A right set of incentives could help to get more teachers involved. Lack of inclusive leadership among the staff and mass higher education are also challenges for implementation.

- As SCL entails a change of culture, a dynamic of dialogue within HEIs should be created for its implementation, considering issues such as: the diversity of students and their different needs, pedagogical methods and different ways of delivery, autonomy of the learners, guidance and support from the teachers, teacher – learner relationship, procedures for student complains, etc.

- Learning outcomes and their measure is a key part of SCL. Though they can be difficult to measure, it is important that HEIs show that they have reflected upon their students' achievement of learning outcomes.

Conclusion

As the main responsible for the real implementation of SCL, higher education institutions must create a culture of and motivation for SCL throughout.

On the Quality Assurance of SCL

- In developing quality assurance criteria, SCL has penetrated the entire Chapter 1 of ESG 2015 on Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality

Assurance. SCL is an overarching concept that must be broken down to be able to evaluate.

- On the use of indicators it is clear that quality in teaching and learning is more difficult to measure than research. Qualitative aspects of teaching and learning should be used. An example was the Teaching Heroes Award in Ireland as well as the Malmö University's work evaluating the level of support among the faculties.

- Criteria using drop-outs figures and the socio-economic background can be useful to assess how well HEIs support the diversity of students. Student surveys if well designed may also be useful. These data should be connected with quality assurance procedures and used by HEIs to address SCL.

- The following indicators among others could be considered for the evaluation of the implementation of SCL:
    - Mention of the social dimension in the HEIs' strategies
    - Providing choices for students on courses even at other universities and on different learning methods
    - Participation of students outside the classroom
    - Social support systems to part time workers students
    - Time to graduation
    - Links of ECTS to learning outcomes and workload

- There is a need of a dialogue between quality assurance agencies and HEIs about how to implement and evaluate SCL, as the implementation of SCL is institution specific and depends on the university model, national framework and institutional culture. There is not a "one size fits all" solution.

- Given the cultural change involved in SCL, one has to be careful and ensure that there aren't too many prescriptions on institutions, avoiding rigid rules and allowing HEIs to develop their own methods. Therefore in quality assurance evaluations of SCL it can be better to observe the dynamics within the institutions on the culture and motivation for SCL than to focus on the details.

- Quality assurance agencies should support the HEIs in the implementation of SCL for quality enhancement, not simply control. A good example of this is the Docentia Programme in Spain, which provides a framework and guidelines as support for assessing teaching performance, while ensuring that each institution develop their own models within their own specific contexts.

Conclusion

Quality Agencies need to adapt and update their assessment protocols at both programme and institutional level to really address SCL as a new quality standard as stated in ESG 2015.

On the Implementation of SCL

- The implementation of SCL must consider different dimensions: Basic data, Student Support Services and Involvement, Teaching Support, Curriculum Design and Culture.

- A combination of a top – down and bottom – up approaches avoiding rigidities on the way to approach SCL can be useful to address SCL at institutional level. There must be some coordination at the top level to ensure that resources and support are spread evenly throughout all the faculties.

- The role of the Ministries is to set a framework that allows and enhances SCL at institutional level

- National regulations concerning SCL should be checked against the bases of the ESG 2015, to develop an enabling framework that fosters and supports SCL.

- Implementing SCL has also budgetary implications. HEIs must have a supportive funding scheme, i.e. providing funding for part-time students may be important to support diversity. Although SCL may require an increase in funding, non-implementation can cost even more. SCL is essential in getting transversal skills that can be helpful to prevent unemployment.

- The focus should be more on the learning process than on the results. SCL should facilitate the achievement of the university mission of delivering well educated citizens.

- It is important to develop a learning community based on the values of democracy, personal development, participation and trust. It is not just about developing guidelines and procedures but also about creating a common ground and respect between teachers and students.

Conclusion

The implementation of SCL at institutional level requires of the support of the national authorities in higher education that have the responsibility to review the legislation and remove barriers for implementation. Additional funding resources may also be required.