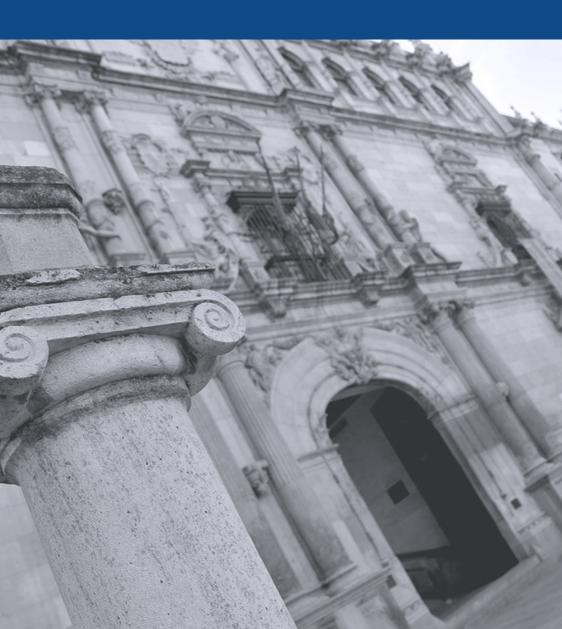Higher Education Reforms in Spain

HERE - ES Project

Student-Centred Learning

Higher Education Reforms in Spain

HERE-ES Project
Peer Learning Activity
on Student-Centred
Learning

Project n.º 559209-EPP-1-2014-ES-1-EPPKA3-BOLOGNA

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN, CULTURA
Y DEPORTE
Secretaría General de Universidades

Index

Introduction

6

The State Secretariat of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport MECD through the General Secretariat of Universities SGU in collaboration with the Spanish National Quality Agency ANECA, the Spanish Conference of University Rectors CRUE, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA and the European Student Union ESU, organized a Peer Learning Activity PLA on Student Centred Learning SCL.

The PLA was organized within the project Higher Education Reforms in Spain HERE-ES, in the frame of the restricted call for proposals EACEA/2014 EHEA - Key Action 3 Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms.

The PLA on SCL was held on 7-8 April 2016 at the premises of University of Alcalá (Alcalá de Henares, Spain) and counted with a participation of around 40 participants coming from 10 countries, who were engaged in mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, concerns and ideas on SCL. Participants included vice-rectors of learning and teaching and internationalization, quality assurance agencies, ministry representatives and national ESU correspondents.

This publication shows a summary of the background documents, surveys and outcome of the discussions during the PLA.

Background

Introduction and context

As defined in ESU's Student-Centred Learning Toolkit, Student Centred Learning SCL represents both a mind-set and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking."

Student-centred learning was first mentioned in the Bologna Process at the Ministerial Meeting in Leuven in 2009. It has been followed up in each successive Ministerial Communiqué since then. It is considered to be essential for improving the quality of education, as well as for ensuring better access to higher education by accommodating to the growingly diverse needs of a diverse student population.

However, the implementation of SCL has been challenging. Countries have not dedicated the sufficient level of funding and resources that SCL demands, both institutions and countries have not developed strategies for the implementation of SCL and teachers have not been provided with the pedagogical development training needed to have an understanding of the concept and methods for ensuring a student-centred approach.

Successful implementation also demands that students are included as full representatives in all decision-making processes, not only university, faculty and programme level boards and formal and informal committees, but also in curriculum design and development, quality assurance reviews and the boards of the agencies. Flexible learning paths are necessary, allowing for student choice in curriculum, learning and teaching activities and assessment.

The implementation of SCL must also be consistently evaluated. Therefore, SCL was included as a standard in the revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, adopted by the ministers at the EHEA Ministerial Meeting in May 2015. Here it states:

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard:

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Guidelines:

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

9

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;

- The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;

- The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;

- Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;

- The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;

- Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;

- A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

The peer learning activity on QA of SCL will present the most up-to-date information on SCL and how SCL can be incorporated in QA evaluations, provide an arena for participants to explore different methods of evaluating the implementation of SCL, interact with different stakeholders to understand their perspectives, share best practices and identify the challenges and opportunities for QA of SCL.

Following the activity, participants will have a better understanding of what SCL is, what types of criteria can be used to identify successful SCL and how it can be evaluated in quality assurance evaluations, have an improved dialogue between university leadership, national governments and students to create a set of criteria that is suitable for accurate assessment of SCL. They will also have developed a set of recommendations for policy measures needed for further development of SCL evaluations on institutional and national level.

Participants

A maximum of 40 participants will attend the event, in order to allow for as much interaction as possible between the participants.

In addition to representatives from Spain, participants will be invited from 10 other countries. Participants should include vice-rectors of learning and teaching, quality assurance agency and ministry representatives and national ESU correspondents. A gender balance criteria will be included in the selection of participants. Students' will be supported on the travel and accommodation arrangements.

Higher education researchers and experts in the field of SCL and QA will also be invited. The selection of countries for the PLA will be based on the following criteria:

- Countries particularly relevant for the Spanish context.

- A balance of countries that have implemented SCL in their HEIs and QA procedures for evaluating its success and those that face challenges (based on ESU's Bologna With Student Eyes 2015)

- Size of the country and the HE system (covering both smaller and larger systems)

- Geographical distribution (including countries from different parts of Europe)

Event preparations

The event be 1.5 days and will take place on the 7th-8th April, hosted by University of Alcalá de Henares.

A short questionnaire will be sent to the participants a month before the PLA. Countries will also be expected to create a 5-minute presentation on the current status of SCL and QA prior to their arrival. This should tackle at least the following aspects:

- Short description on the state of affairs of the implementation in their country (at national and/or institutional level)

11

- Examples of initiatives have been taken at institutional and national level

- Current and possible future challenges

Reading material

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA (ESG) 2015
  https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/ESG_
  endorsedMay2015.pdf

- ECTS users' guide 2015
  http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-
  users-guide_en.pdf

- Student-Centred Learning: Toolkit for students, staff and higher education institutions (Time for Student-Centred Learning project, ESU)
  http://pascl.eu/wp-content/uploads/SCL_toolkit_ESU_EI.pdf

- Overview on Student-Centred Learning in higher education in Europe: Research study (PASCL project, ESU)
  http://pascl.eu/wp-content/uploads/Overview-on-Student-
  Centred-Learning-in-Higher-Education-in-Europe.pdf

- Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities (EUA)
  http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/EUA_
  Trends_2015_web

- ESG part 1: Are universities ready? (EUA)
  http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/eua_
  occ_papers_esg_web

Agenda

Thursday, 7 of April

8:30   Registration and coffee

9:00   Welcome and introduction to the PLA
Mr. Marcial Marín, Secretary of State of Education, Vocational Training and Universities. MECD
Prof. Fernando Galván Reula, Rector University of Alcalá
Dr. Luis Delgado, HERE-ES Project Coordinator

9:30   Session 1. SCL and the ESG for Quality Assurance in the EHEA
What is the logic behind? State of affairs at European level
Mr. Fernando Galán, Chairperson, ESU
Short response by:
Ms. Maria Kelo, Director, ENQA
Chair: Luis Delgado, General Secretariat of Universities. MECD

10:30   Coffee break

11:00   Session 2. European experiences supporting the implementation of SCL
Already existing initiatives focusing on student-centred learning.
Case studies by:
Ms. Patricia Staaf, Head of the Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning, University of Malmö (Sweden)
Ms. Sarah Moore, Chair, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education (Ireland)
Chair: Marisol Morales Ladrón, Vice-rector for academic and student affairs, University of Alcalá

12:00   Session 3. Student-centred learning and its implementation in QA
How can you implement it? How can you assess it?
Case studies by:
Tijana Isoski, Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning project, ESU
Ilze Trapenziere, Vice-president of HE Committee, EI-ETUCE

Manja Klemenčič, Fellow and Lecturer in Sociology of
Higher Education, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard
University
Chair: Carmen Fernández Juncal, Vice-rector for academic
affairs, Salamanca University

13:00   Lunch

14:30   Session 4. Role-play (part 1)
Participants will be divided into different institutions and sets
of evaluators.

16:00   Coffee break

16:30   Session 5. Role-play (part 2)
Facilitator: Erin Nordal. Higher Education Researcher, Oslo
University

17:30   End of the day

20:00   Dinner

Friday 8 of April

9:00   Session 6. Student-centred learning and QA
Case studies by:
Spain. Esther Balboa. ANECA
Belgium Flanders. Noel Vercruysse
Sweden. Kristina Tegler
Chair: Maria Kelo. ENQA

10:00   Session 7. Working groups (by stakeholder)
- Identify suitable evaluation criteria for national, institutional
  and programme level
- Discuss benefits and challenges of evaluation criteria
- Create recommendations for what needs to change
- **WG1. Ministries + QA + Int. Associations:** MECD, MSE
  Saxony, MER (NO), DOW (BE-FI), UKÄ (SW), EACEA, ESU,
  EI-ETUCE, ENQA, ASUCYL, SQAA (SI), ANECA (ES) (tbc)
  Facilitator: Fernando Galán (ESU). Rapporteur: Noel
  Vercruysse (DOW) (tbc)
- **WG2. Universities + Students:** U. Maribor, USAL, UA, ISM,
  AUC, U. Primorska, U. Malmoe, KKUAS, MRU, LNUS (LT),

ASU (AT), NUS (NO), CREUP (ES) (tbc)
Facilitator: R. Bonete (USAL). Rapporteur: Paulius Balkotas (LNUS) (tbc)

11:30   Coffee break

12:00   Session 8. Conclusions of the working groups and role-play feedback session
Chair: Erin Nordal, Higher Education Researcher, Oslo University

12:45   Final words
Mr. Jorge Sainz, General Secretary of Universities, MECD
Prof. Fernando Galván Reula, Rector University of Alcalá
Dr. Luis Delgado, HERE-ES Project Coordinator

13:00   Farewell Lunch

14:00   Meeting of the HERE-ES project consortium

Survey

This survey functioned as a source of information, as well as a tool for self-assessment and reflection on the status of implementation and expectations in regards to the peer learning activity. The project team is grateful for each of the respondents taking the time to provide such thorough and well thought-out answers.

State of implementation of student-centred learning

From a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest, respondents rated the status of implementation on the national level ranging from three to seven. The level of implementation was somewhat lower on the institutional level, even amongst respondents that answered both for the national level and institutional level.

In general, students are more critical of the implementation of student-centred learning in their countries and institutions. Given the discrepancy between students' answers and answers from government, quality assurance agency and institutional representatives, further cooperation with students is strongly advised, since their learning processes and viewpoints form the basis of student-centred learning.

Only two countries have a national strategy for teaching and learning, while the Norwegian government is in the process of developing one. Six out of ten countries have a national access strategy. However, very few institutions have teaching and learning strategies, only two of six, and very few have access strategies.

Balancing autonomy while ensuring coherent implementation throughout the entire higher education system was one of the issues brought up in many of the answers to a number of questions.

Students are represented in all curriculum development at all 7 institutions. However, there were suggestions for having even more student participation, as well as formulating student participation as a learning outcome. Recognising students' involvement is an important motivational factor for students to take responsibility for their education, and participation is also an important skill in society. One example is to award students ECTS for their work in student representation.

In only two of ten countries are higher education institutions provided with financial support specifically targeted at the implementation of student-centred learning.

In only two of six institutions is pedagogical training mandatory. However, a large majority do promote provide continuous staff development using a student-centred approach.

All institutions reported that they reward staff acheivements in teaching and learning. Some teachers receive financial incentives based on a specific set of criteria (e.g. student feedback, use of ICT, completion of teaching excellence courses), while others mention a specific award given based on students' opinions.

State of affairs in the implementation of quality assurance of student-centred learning

Although nearly all respondents on the national level reported that quality assurance evaluations refer to the teaching and learning processes, over 70% of respondents have not yet developed specific criteria for evaluating the status of student-centred learning. However, nearly all countries are in the process of revising their procedures to reflect the inclusion of student-centred learning in the newly revised ESGs.

There were many different challenges identified in fully integrating student-centred learning in quality assurance evaluations. Generally, throughout the questionnaire, one of the largest challenges identified is defining what student-centred learning is. Naturally, this was also identified as a major challenge in integrating student-centred learning in quality assurance procedures. One respondent wrote that standard 1.3 in the newly revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance could be considered too difficult to evaluate and therefore neglected.

Insufficient budgets, 'academic habits' and 'conservatism' or the change in culture were identified as some of the major challenges in integrating student-centred learning in quality assurance procedures.

Challenges in administrative procedures were identified. Here a major challenge is that implementing student-centred learning in quality assurance procedures could lead to the concept becoming too bureaucratic technical, not focusing on the overarching principles, such as inclusivity, access, flexible learning and retention.

Some respondents stated that they were concerned that integrating student-centred learning in quality assurance procedures would mean simply developing quantitative targets and not considering how student-centred learning is considerably interconnected with other elements in higher education. It is important to consider that student-centred learning is more of a qualitative component, and quality assurance procedures must reflect this, as simple targets cannot fully measure the learning experience.

On both the national and institutional level, teaching and learning strategies as well as access strategies are an integral part of developing criteria for evaluating student-centred learning, and again, must consider the qualitative aspects.

Outcome

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, participa-
tion 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 responsi-
bility to review the legislation and remove barriers for implementation.
Additional funding resources may also be required.