**HIGHER EDUCATION  EFEE Peer Learning Visit - Promoting Teaching in Higher Education**

On 24-25 October 2019, the EFEE Peer Learning Visit on “Promoting Teaching in Higher Education” took place in Helsinki. The event was hosted and co-organised by the Association of Finnish Education Employers (member of EFEE). In total, 14 EFEE members from Australia, Belgium (French speaking part), Finland, the Netherlands and United Kingdom participated in the PLV.

**Promoting qualitative teaching through innovative initiatives**
The first day of the conference was opened by Mr Martin Björklund, Chair of the Teachers’ Academy at the University of Helsinki who expounded on the history and importance of his organisation. The Teachers’ Academy was created in 2013 in a response to the growing need of more mandatory university pedagogy courses for teachers. The biggest strength of this Teachers’ Academy is that it brings together a community of cross-faculty teachers who share a similar goal to exchange best practices with regards to pedagogy. This community also adds great value to the outreach of this initiative by promoting interaction between the members of the Academy, the lecturers, the pedagogy unit of the University and the researchers. It was highlighted that the success rate of this initiative depends greatly on the support of the university. University rectors have the responsibility to not only help raise awareness about qualitative teaching in higher education by incentivizing teachers to join the Teachers’ Academy but also to assist these academies in finding their position within the organizational chart of the university. The academy on the other hand has the responisbility to engage their members to become active participants as well as empower the teachers to take on a more leadership role.
Mr Tom Böhling, vice-rector at the University of Helsinki, emphasized the need for all teachers to engage in research and for all researchers to develop their teaching skills. Nevertheless, the challenge to rate teaching at the same level as research still exists due to the difficulty in quantifying teaching and the consequential raising of funds. The importance of the Teachers’ Academy can therefore not be highlighted enough as it lays the foundation for quantifying teaching by developing a teaching matrix. Mr Böhling lastly noted the important role that governments play in both the funding aspect of these initiatives as well as the raising of awareness.

These presentations were followed by several national practices from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, for the benefit of peer learning amongst the attending EFEE members.
Ms Cat Wilson, Co-Director at the Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development at the University of St Andrews, focused on the need to start the promotion of qualitative teaching at an early stage by exposing students to teaching moduls during their studies. Paul Hayes, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Portsmouth, discussed the challenges that current models on teaching promotion face at his institution. Examples of these hurdles include amongst others a culture change, a more evidence-based approach to teaching in higher education and the amplification of sharing of good practices on a cross-faculty and even cross-university level. Johan Huysse, Policy Advisor at the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, addressed the need for more international collaboration between EU Member States on establishing fair evaluation criteria for qualitative teaching. These national practices inspired members from EFEE to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that their own national systems provide them. It was concluded that one of the biggest obstacles in promoting qualitative teaching in higher education is the difficulty in achieving a shift in mindset of the academics.

**Towards a future-oriented European Higher Education policy**
The second day, participants were welcomed by Maija Innola from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture at Aalto University. She presented the shared vision on higher education in Finland for 2030. One of the key priorities of this vision is raising the competence and qualification level of higher education staff to prepare them for the guidance of a new cohort of non-traditional students as well as the incorporation and management of new digital tools in teaching. Aside from the priorities of the Finnish government with regards to higher education, Ms Innola furthermore delved into the challenges of the Bologna Process as well as the possible priorities beyond 2020 of the European Higher Education Area. This last aspect envelops amongst other enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, promoting pedagogical innovations, protecting fundamental values such as academic freedom, improving implementation through peer learning, enhancing links between education, research and innovation, and investing in flexible learning possibilities and access to education.
Ms Eija Zitting, Head of Learning Services at Aalto University, expounded on the measures that Aalto University has taken to ensure the pedagogical training and support of their teachers. In order to promote teacher excellence and foster a more learning-centered environment, they have defined qualitative merits that teachers need to fulfill, including experience of your personal portfolio as well as student feedback. Innovative ideas for teaching excellence are currently created in a bottom-up manner but will become more top-down in order to establish a larger university-wide reform.

Participants closed off the PLV by visiting the Aalto Design Factory (ADF), an interdisciplinary product design and learning hub that aims to bring together the fields of engineering, business and arts and to unite students, teachers, researchers, and industry. It was interesting to see how the University of Aalto built with the factory a creative space that contributed to the development of a ‘passion-based’ learning culture within the university, as

they called-it, but which is also open to use for the wider community during for example evenings and week-ends, clearly serving herewith thus also a social role.

On the second day, a meeting was held by EFEE's Working Group on Higher Education. In total 8 participants from Australia, Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom came together to discuss the current policy landscape on higher education, to brainstorm on future projects in this field and to address the role of social dialogue partners in higher education.

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