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Teaching excellence and qualifications of academic staff in the context of quality in higher education

Abstract

High quality higher education includes, among other, teaching and research excellence which encompasses advanced knowledge of core and current research and application of modern teaching approaches through which students acquire the most complex knowledge, competences and learning outcomes, required for a successful life upon the completion of studies and their entry into the work environment. Although research excellence and teaching excellence (the latter esp. at the undergraduate level) are a significant element of the quality of academic staff's work, the practice and history reveal a greater focus on research excellence. However, besides the significance of research excellence, the international environment is gradually recognising the significance of teaching qualifications and teacher training – two main components of quality in higher education; some countries established specialised institutions, agencies and centres for the development of academic staff. Although such tendencies can be also observed in Slovenia, we found that teaching excellence, qualifications and teacher training of academic staff have still not been defined in a clear and unambiguous manner at the national or institutional level.

Keywords: quality of higher education, teaching excellence, teacher training of academic staff

Introduction

The concept of grading, definition of comparable criteria, provision of tools for the implementation of high-quality programmes, etc. are only a few components of the concept of quality in higher education, which – similar to the concept of quality – have no semantically unambiguous definition (Saarinen, 2005). Harvey (2006) defines the quality of higher education as a transformation, which means the development and a number of changes which occur in the student through the learning process; high quality education must create the maximum possible added value (i.e. knowledge) for the student. The learner is not passive in their relation with the other two factors of the didactic triangle, as used to be the case in

traditional systems, but must become an active subject in relation to the teacher and learning content (Harvey and Green, 1993). The problem of quality of education thus lies in its implementation, whereby it is not insignificant that the quality has more than one definition. Consequently the claim (Mužič and Mužič, 2006) that many academic staff understand the term quality “in their own way” is far from surprising. In practice, the quality of higher education is mostly limited to the measuring of quantitative performance indicators, such as the drop-out rate and duration of studies (Puklek Levpušček and Marentič Požarnik, 2005), measurable research performance indicators, etc. However, the quality of higher education should consider the academic level and demonstrate itself through evaluation of research and teaching work, performance of staff, students and graduates (Resolution on the national higher education programme 2011-2010, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 31/2011; hereinafter: the Resolution). The initial input (e.g. teachers) and the final output (e.g. students) are therefore crucial for the maximisation of the quality of higher education.

Besides the mass participation in higher education (Ormel 2012, Dian-Fu and Yeh 2012, Fry 2006, Hazelkorn 2004, Zgaga, 2007), which began in the 60s and 70s of the previous century, Kellerman (2006, p. 30) also warns of another radical change: internal motivation and a stimulating favourable atmosphere for teaching, study and research are being replaced by the increasing external motivation of students and teachers, and by decreasing creativity. This in turn generates the need for better conditions for creative study, which also includes a lower student/academic staff ratio, more individual activities, increased focus on the needs of future careers, elimination of obsolete study materials, alignment of theoretical and practical part of the studies, as well as improved communication with teachers and management (Mužič and Mužič, 2006).

Usherwood (2010) believes it is surprising that, despite the promoted spirit of quality of higher education, so little attention is dedicated to the management of university staff, and – in the present context – also to the training of academic staff. However, the latter is usually perceived (primarily by the providers of funding) as an obligation, and not as a desired aim or opportunity to increase the quality of individual’s work and the institution as a whole (Fielden, 1998). Fielden (ibid.) believes that the institution’s management should provide the funding and accept responsibility for the development of academic staff by establishing a central unit for the provision of training and development programmes. It would be also reasonable to establish a national body for the development of academic staff, which would provide advice to higher education institutions, and function as a forum for the discussion on policies, related to the development of academic staff. Nadoh Bergoč and Kohont (2007) also stress the significance of internal quality assurance in the form of HR management within higher education institutions, and add that this aspect is too often ignored in the management of higher education institutions. The aim of quality assurance in higher education should really

be to improve the quality of teaching, research and university management, with the aim to introduce overall improvements (Jelenc Krašovec, 2003), while Hämäläinen (2003) goes even into further detail and stresses that high quality higher education also needs to consider the following aspects, such as: quality of teaching and learning approaches, quality of end results, links between research and teaching, etc., despite the fact that these aspects are often excluded from the evaluation processes.

Research and teaching excellence in higher education

Only after we try to understand the development of European universities from the 12th century, through the age of Enlightenment, and to the modern “knowledge-based society”, we can recognise what breaking with tradition really means (Kellermann, 2006, p. 32). The research function traditionally held a secondary role; usually it was carried out outside of universities and it was mainly intended for postgraduate students (D’Andrea and Gosling, 2005). Teaching was teacher-centred and not student-centred, as is the case in modern approaches (EI and ESU, n.d.). Today, research has been recognised as an important social role of the university, although university’s mission includes both research and teaching (D’Andrea and Gosling, 2005). However, in the modern co-existence only one side prevails (i.e. research), with reference to which Cross (2001) claims that the university favours production of knowledge over teaching, inevitably resulting in a (lesser) progress and development of the teaching process. Academic staff thus have two main roles – research and teaching; however, the definitions of an individual’s academic excellence remain almost entirely based on research activity and contribution to science, often to the detriment of teaching (Dill, 2003, in Rosado Pinto, 2008). The decisive academic staff appointment criteria remain the volume and quality of research, while innovation in teaching is almost completely neglected, despite the increasingly larger and more diverse population of students, and the attention dedicated to quality and responsibility, etc. (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). The increased stressing of the role of teaching in modern times reveals the need for the changes of approach, i.e. from a teacher-centred towards a student-centred approach (Hagström and Lindberg 2013), which in turn requires the knowledge and application of academic staff’s teaching skills.

In the recent decade a few agencies for quality assurance in higher education introduced approaches for achieving effective and good teaching and assessment¹ in higher education, while the demands of students, the state, employers and other stakeholders forced universities to accept centralised responsibility, including the responsibility for teaching (D’Andrea and Gosling, 2005). The aim of high quality teaching according to OECD (2009) is to encourage teachers to apply the best teaching practices and consequently improve and ensure the best possible student learning. Due to the lack of reliable information which would

¹ Na primer: Quality Assurance Agency v Veliki Britaniji, University Grants Committee v Hongkongu, Australian Universities Quality Agency itn.

enable comparative assessment of the skills of students from different institutions and countries as well as the quality of teaching, OECD (2012) launched a comprehensive and methodologically complex AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes) project with the aim to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure better students' learning outcomes. The absence of such information in the context of core higher education learning and teaching activities leads to the situation when higher education institutions are evaluated on the basis of their reputation and research activities. The project Time for a New Paradigm in Education: Student-Centred Learning (T4SCL)² is an example of an initiative which would serve policy makers when drafting student-centred teaching strategies and approaches (EI and ESU, n. d.).

As a result there is no joint opinion regarding the emphasizing the significance of either the teaching or the research role of the organisation. Authors like Newman, Ortega y Gasset and Sir Walter Moberly believe that it is not reasonable that universities participate or that they should even be allowed to participate in research activities, while Jaspers, Philips, Griffiths and Wegener claim that research is an important component of the term "university" (Barnett, 1992). Today, this is no longer simply a philosophical matter, but also a political one. In this context Barnett (ibid.) claims that it would be reasonable to claim that there is no university without research, while he also provides reasons why research does not have to necessarily be a part of higher education. Conceptually, he makes a distinction between "university" and "higher education". When categorising universities as research or teaching institutions, research would constitute a luxurious added value and not the main component of a higher education institution. Research is conducted under the watchful eye of funding providers, and it has become a part of academic value/reputation, whereby a larger range (and not necessarily the quality) of research publication implies higher value/better reputation. Academic excellence has thus been defined within the context of research excellence, and (often) by ignoring the academic quality within the context of teaching and/or the teaching role.

Barnett (ibid) lays out six theses to define the conceptual relations existing between research and higher education, whereby: 1) research is defined as public and higher education is defined as private; 2) research refers to outcomes, while higher education refers to the process; 3) the aim of higher education is to teach and learn, while learning is a side product in research; 4) higher education, as individual's awareness and dissemination of knowledge, is open, while research, as the finding of a path to a specific conclusion or formulation, is closed; 5) research is an inevitable, but not an adequate element of higher education; 6) academic community is directly linked to research and indirectly to higher education. Gordon (2010) joins the Humboldt view and highlights the role of the university and its attitude

² Vodilista ga Evropska zveza študentov (European Students' Union, ESU) in Education International (EI), december 2009–november 2010.

towards the society, esp. the significance of converging the research and education function, although Humboldt's view never reached general support. Many education systems (e.g. in France, Eastern Europe and China followed the Napoleon's model of parallel structures of separate prominent research institutions or science academies with different level of connections with and or influence on the work of universities. In this context many systems developed their national research institutions or centres, mostly, but not always exclusively in the field of science. Altbach, Resiber and Rumbley (2009) cite a study of the relation between teaching and research in the European university system, which was conducted by Schimank and Winnes (2000). The study revealed three different patterns: 1) the first pattern includes parts of universities focused on teaching and/or research; due to the pressure of mass higher education and limited state funding these institutions are becoming increasingly focused on teaching at the expense of research (e.g. Germany and Italy, although the situation is changing in both countries); 2) In the second pattern the undergraduate education has been entrusted to lecturers, while professors and research staff can focus on research, which is conducted in a smaller number of institutions (e.g. Sweden, Great Britain, Norway and, later, the Netherlands); 3) in the third type there is a strict distinction between research and education institutions, whose funding is organised independently (e.g. France and countries of the former Soviet Bloc) (Altbach, Reisber and Rumbley, 2009).

A different approach is typical of Latin America, since research is carried out by separate institutions, as indicated by the third type, and is mostly concentrated on a few elite universities. Research activity is often concentrated in separate university centres, away from education activities, dedicated to first cycle study programmes. This is also the case at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), where postgraduate education and research are located within the so-called research institutes, which are physically and administratively separate from the "facultades" which provide the undergraduate programmes. In China higher education is organised hierarchically. At the top there are elite universities which educate the majority of doctoral students. They are focused on research and play a leading role in the national development and cooperation in international research achievements. These are followed by universities focused on education and research, which educate master's and undergraduate students, while these institutions only educate doctoral students in specific disciplines. Third are universities, which are focused on education and are intended for undergraduate students. At the bottom of the ladder is a new type of institution, the so-called higher vocational colleges offering 2 and 3-year study programmes. The last two categories represent the majority of Chinese higher education institutions and students, while increased participation at the elite research institutions is merely symbolic (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). As reported by Fielden (1998) even at institutions, which attribute higher significance to teaching excellence, the academic culture always favoured research excellence over teaching. However, the development of academic staff should not only include the scientific research components, since academic staff reach success and quality only when

research excellent is accompanied by the relevant teaching excellence. In practice the policy initiatives are (still) focused on the division on research and teaching institutions, however, the universities (mostly in Europe, North America, and parts of Australia) focus on the implementation of teaching and assessment policies at the level of the entire university, and not its individual parts, as used to be the case in the past.

In higher education the rankings of academic institutions and study programmes are emerging at the national, regional and global level, however, there are also a few initiatives for the development of European academic rankings). Although methodological problems exist for all existing commonly used rankings nothing indicates that their significance would be decreasing (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). The majority of rankings measure only specific variables, e.g. research performance, publications with an international reach, scientific publication index, etc. and favour those institutions where English is used as the main language of instruction and research, as well as institutions which have a longer tradition, and offer a wider range of disciplines and study programmes. Due to their research achievement these institutions receive significant funding from the state and other research funding sources (Sadlak and Liu, 2007, in Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009). The main international rankings include ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2011) and THE-WUR (Times Higher Education – World University Rankings, 2012) which apply different methodologies, however, both favour mostly research performance and quality. The main or even the only indicator is usually the ratio between the number of students and the number of academic staff. Research universities enjoy a greater reputation and are placed at the top of higher education institutions. Such institutions are usually also the most notable and expensive institutions in the higher education system, they award high quality higher education degrees, and provide material conditions according to the highest international standards, while they educate the social elite and are distinct from the remaining mass higher education systems (Salmi, 2009). The status of a research university is usually highly desired.

Teaching excellence of research staff

In the past teaching meant giving lectures to very smart and highly motivated students. Assessment reflected which students memorised and understood most the most lecture content. Bad results reflected the student's lack of talent or motivation, and very rarely bad teaching, which was considered a teacher's gift and not a skill which could be learned. It was important, what the teacher did, and not what the students learned. Less attention was also dedicated to functional knowledge and/or transfer of theory into practice (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). However, in the recent decades and at the level of demographic trends higher education has been facing mass enrolment, which was all supported by politics, since higher education undoubtedly solves the social problems of youth in the turbulent times of economic and business pressures (Možine et al, 1994). To a specific extent the developments

in higher education which are the consequence of Bologna aspirations resulted among other in a renovation of content, which – from the aspect of teaching – also includes the introduction of education supported by modern ICT and ICT training. The efficient use of ICT in the teaching process can be an indicator of the quality of teaching, esp. with older academic staff. Mass participation, privatisation, commodification and market approaches increased the need for stressing the significance of teaching and learning, while also contributing to increased focus on the mentoring, monitoring and evaluation process, not only in the undergraduate, but also in master's and doctoral study programmes (Zgaga, 2007). In the modern competitive knowledge markets the universities should strive towards quality and relevance of teaching activity in a never before experienced way (Altbach, Resiberg and Rumbley, 2009).

Barnett (1992) believes that it is the responsibility of academic staff to engage in the preservation of research tradition, even at the minimum level of commitment, since it is not necessary that all academic staff participate in research. Pure higher education cannot be offered completely separately from research, therefore teachers must follow the key findings of the research community, which we usually call “scholarship” (ibid, p. 629). Barnett thus differentiates between the terms “research” and “scholarship”, where the latter is an inevitable commitment of academic staff, whereby the first part is not mandatory; however, he stresses that the mentioned position refers solely to undergraduate study programmes, while research is inevitably and closely linked to education in postgraduate programmes. In postgraduate study programmes academic staff must engage in research, esp. when working with student researchers, although – due to the challenges of the recent decade or two – the traditional *doctoral training*, which was usually left to individual mentorship, is gradually transforming into “structured” doctoral education (Zgaga, 2007). At the undergraduate level the research culture could even harm the education process since research can consist of a narrow problem-solving routine with little theoretical and sometimes even some empirical content. Moreover, research addresses rather narrow topics which could have a detrimental impact on the widening of students' horizon (Barnett, 1992). It is very important that the academic staff do not only conduct research, but research must be integrated in the curriculum, whereby the direct integration of research findings is not desired, esp. in the undergraduate study programmes. If the staff is involved in research, which directly supports the curriculum this definitely constitutes an advantage due to the intertwining and connections between research and teaching. Nevertheless, all staff should be provided with adequate time and sources to follow and deepen their knowledge in the respective field.

In this context Barnett (1992) writes that the difference between a successful teacher and a successful researcher is that “a teacher is a failed researcher” (ibid, p. 663), which he refutes immediately afterwards by stating that being a successful teacher means to lead students to intellectual and professional independence, e.g. like the ability to articulate one's own views to others, which can sometimes constitute an even greater achievement. From the

perspective of a (undergraduate) student the teacher's engagement in research is rather irrelevant, therefore the teacher's top commitment (towards students) is teaching and not research, although it is important that students – when studying literature, writing essays, citing sources, participating in research – use content and findings discovered through research. Under the assumption that academic staff can improve the quality of its teaching, e.g. in case of low permeability of students, more attention should be dedicated to teaching and not research.

During education students should not only acquire “a specific quantity of theoretical knowledge ‘on stock’, but /.../ also diverse abilities or competences, which will enable them to adapt to the fast-changing and complicated future world” (Puklek Levpušček and Marentič Požarnik 2005, p. 12). High quality academic staff apply teaching methods, which more actively involve students in the acquisition of knowledge and competences, e.g. project and group work, problem-based study programmes, etc. Shuell (1986, p. 429, in Alrbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009, p. 113) states that teaching, which attracts students' learning activities, refers to: 1) idea of the constructivist theory, according to which the knowledge is constructed by students through their own learning activities, and 2) clearly defined learning outcomes aligned with teaching methods and assessment strategies. On the basis of the constructivist theory of learning and the related transformative learning concept, at the start of the 20th century the basis of the “student-centred learning” (SCL) have emerged in the beginning of the 20th century began to emerge. SCL could be summarised by the following elements (Lea et al, 2003): increased trust in the active over passive learning, focus on global learning and understanding, increased responsibility and accountability of students, increased student's autonomy, interdependence of the teacher and student, mutual respect in the student-teacher relation and a reflective approach towards the learning and teaching process focused both on the teacher and student.

Under the new working conditions and with consideration of the modern learning and teaching conditions Fielden (1998) lists the essential competences and roles of a high-quality member of academic staff in the field of teaching: 1) awareness and understanding of different students' learning modes and styles; 2) knowledge of different ways to assess and evaluate students' work; 3) preservation and knowledge of professional research standards, knowledge and current developments; 4) application of ICT for access to information sources and application of modern teaching approaches; 5) knowledge of market needs in the relevant discipline; 6) consideration of the impact of internationalisation and multi-cultural factors on the curriculum; 7) skills related to the teaching and learning of a large number of diverse students without decreasing the quality of such teaching and learning, and the knowledge of modern didactic-teaching approaches. To achieve the latter it is critical to apply modern methods and forms of work. Puklek Levpušček and Marentič Požarnik (2005) write that if teachers wish to successfully introduce new methods and forms of work it is essential that the

new forms are introduced gradually, that teachers reflect and evaluate their work, whereby both authors refer to the process of changing names and teaching methods in academic staff's career, described by Kugel (1993). This process consists of two phases: the phase of teacher's self-focus and their focus on teaching, which is focused on the teacher's "self", and the phase of focus on (student's) learning. The first phase consists of two sub-phases, i.e.: teacher's self-focus, focus on the subject, and focus on the student. The second phase, however, is focused on learning and consists of the following sub-phases: student as receiver, active student and independent student. Modern approaches thus introduce the so-called instructional paradigm which is based on instruction and aims to substitute the learning paradigm, according to which the key decisions concerning the education programmes and their implementation originate from learning and the learner (Cvetek, 2004).

The requirement for the developed forms for ensuring the quality of academic staff at the level of internal quality assurance activities of higher education institutions is also defined by the European standards and guidelines (ENQA, 2007, p. 18), which – among other – state that academic staff must be of adequate quality, and possess professional and pedagogic-didactic knowledge and skills. The appointment of staff must be based on the minimum level of qualifications, which also includes the possibility of teaching improvements. In case of staff who continue to apply inefficient approach, these standards propose that such staff is relieved of their teaching duty. The communique from the conference of European ministers³ (2009) responsible for higher education, as a priority regarding the further implementation of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance, also invites the higher education institutions to – among other – dedicate special attention to improvements of teaching in their study programmes at all levels by 2020. The communique stresses the teaching mission of higher education and the significance of student-centred learning. "Student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all three cycles./.../." Student-centred learning requires the empowerment of specific participants in education, new teaching and learning approaches, efficient support and guidance structures, and the curriculum which is more clearly centred on participants in education./.../." Communique also highlights that higher education should be based at all levels on state of the art research and development thus fostering innovation and creativity in society. Higher education institution must satisfy the requirement for the research and teaching excellence of its staff prior to warning from it employees, the state, students and their parents on the (in)adequacy or (ir)relevance of the higher education services (Fielden, 1998). Despite new requirements, including those on the teaching qualifications of academic staff, there is only a handful of countries where successfully completed teacher training is a

³ Leuven, april 2009: Bolonjski proces 2020 – evropski visokošolski prostor v novem desetletju.

requirement to become a member of academic staff. However, there are notable differences (mainly) between universities⁴ which assumed responsibility for the teaching and learning.

Teacher training of academic staff

The purpose of academic staff development is, among other, to improve working with students, and consequently their knowledge. Professional teacher training can only be used to resolve or improve specific teacher's conduct during teaching. Pedrosa (2001, in Rosado Pinto, 2008) states that the social, economic, political and cultural changes in the modern society call for learning strategies, which correspond to the needs of the recipients' population that has become larger and more diverse than ever. With respect to this specific members of academic staff are (justifiably) worried that the professionalization of education could result in the administration and intervention in universities' autonomy (Bucklow and Clark, 2000). There are also claims that teaching constitutes only one element of academic activities and that professionalization of teaching could impair research activity. There is also a belief that university teachers are already experts in their specific field, therefore there is no need for further professionalization. Rosado Pinto (2008) summarises Zabalza (2006) who states that, within the context of teaching in higher education addresses mostly the didactic aspect of higher education, while she then references Cachapuz (2001) who differentiates between first-tier didactic transfer (i.e. how to transfer knowledge into the teaching process) and the second-tier didactic transfer (i.e. how to transfer the teaching process into the learning process).

The successful attainment of this objective significantly depends on the professional development and training of academic staff whereby Sparks and Loucks Horsley (1989) identify five models of teachers' professional development: 1) the first model is based on individually managed development of teachers, who can themselves find the activities and problem solutions by applying teaching methods, which they believe will encourage their own learning; 2) Observation/evaluation model provides teachers with objective information on their work in the class or lecture room, with an emphasis on the feedback as a priceless tool for growth, critical added value, reflection and analysis; 3) the "inclusion in the development/improvement process" model allows teachers' involvement in the development of the curriculum, design of study programmes or improvement processes with the aim to resolve problems; 4) the training model refers to teachers' participation in the process of individual or group acquisition of knowledge and skills; 5) the inquiry model demands that demands that teachers identify the interest for training, collect information and introduce change in their teaching on the basis of collected data's interpretation. Rosado Pinto (2008)

⁴ V Severni Ameriki in Evropi, tudi v Avstraliji in Hongkongu, so številne ustanove že razvile politike, ki spodbujajo kakovost poučevanja in ocenjevanja vseh delov ustanov (ustanavljanje razvojnih centrov za poučevanje in učenje, ki nudijo podporo, imajo svetovalno funkcijo, vplivajo na kakovost poučevanja, učenja in končnih izidov, študentom nudijo tutorske storitve itn.).

summarises Wilson and Bernet (1999), who claim that there was little reflection on whether academic staff can teach and build their professional skills by considering the model, which they follow.

Formal training of academic staff was already required in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Fielden, 1999). The Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTE) was established in Great Britain in 2000. The employment contracts at some institutions in Germany, Great Britain and Norway included a clause, stipulating that upon the beginning of work such staff must participate in professional teacher training. In Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland the number of departments for the development of (academic) staff within universities is also increasing, and despite not being mandatory, the number of training participants is increasing. Systematic preparation of initial academic staff, who continue to develop their career is today a norm/standard at the national and institutional level in Great Britain, USA and Australia. Nearly all universities have comprehensive professional development programmes for research and teaching, although their scope and impact vary significantly. The programmes often provide formal qualifications in university teaching which became (or is becoming) accepted despite the initial opposition. The activities supported by formal mentorship, supervised training, annual performance reviews and career counselling (McInnis, 2010). At the Singapore Polytechnic staff are requested to self-evaluate their skills and award points in specific fields (Fielden, 1998). Academic staff who collect more points are then requested to provide training for those with less points.

At the University of Melbourne HR development strategies are embedded in the university's business and development plan. The remuneration process must be included in the university's objectives and financial services. E.g. , the members of academic staff are entitled to bonuses and financial remuneration depending on the position of universities in the national teaching and research rankings (James and Baré, 2007; Usherwood, 2010). Ramsden (1994) believes that the teacher's own teaching concept and self-evaluation are crucial for their professional development, while presenting the teacher evaluation process in Australian higher education. The teacher's self-evaluation process is followed by an external review of results, and/or testing and assessment through a dialogue between the evaluator and the evaluatee with elements of feedback, while promoting openness and cooperation, in the absence of any inspection elements. The Australian system is thus characterised by the promotion of responsible self-evaluation, which is an integral and not an additional component of teaching and learning, thus leading to a trustworthy assessment of academic conduct.

At the level of Slovenian higher education Nadoh, Bergoč and Kohont (2007) believe that the past practice needs to be upgraded with a development, education and training system, which will – by taking into account the professional development, needs of the teaching process,

development possibilities and expectations of the individual – also provide for competent work of the facilitators of the teaching process. The Resolution on the National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 states among other that the university must demonstrate excellent teaching. It also foresees that the higher education institutions will offer support activities to the teacher training of academic staff, which shall – in turn – contribute to better quality (Measure 24). As of 2012 the National Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Quality in Higher Education should have been verifying institutional teaching support since 2012, while the higher education institutions should have been including it in the internal quality assurance system. Staff, who will participate in the higher education teaching process after 2013, should have been systematically included in the teaching support. However, the current practice in Slovenia⁵ and the currently applicable Minimum standards for the appointment of academic, research and associate staff at higher education institutions (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 2010; hereinafter: the Minimum Standards) include only two direct requirements related to the verification of teaching qualifications of academic staff, i.e. trial entry lecture upon initial appointment, while the results of student surveys (Article 11) must be enclosed upon each re-appointment to academic staff positions. The Minimum Standards also include the requirement concerning the presentation of proof of completed teacher training of academic staff, however, there are no detailed definitions of the scope and type of such training, nor the objectives and competences which an individual would acquire during upon the completion of training. On the basis of the Minimum standards higher education institutions adopt their own criteria for appointment to academic titles, where the teaching qualifications are specified in more detail, but this is usually measured by mentorship and co-mentorship of graduation theses, master's theses and doctoral theses, writing of textbooks and similar materials, lectures at foreign universities, etc., while teaching qualifications are left out or awarded with the smallest number of points. Moreover, in most cases the procedures for appointment to academic titles focus more on individual's research activity while teaching qualifications and excellence of academic staff are not as stressed, since – in the procedures for appointment of academic staff – the number of points for teaching is up to a half lower than the number of points awarded for research (UL 2012a, UL 2012b, UM2012a, UM2012b, UNG 2011, UPR 2012a, UPR 2012b, UPR2012c).

Conclusion

Teaching qualifications and the excellence of academic staff at both international as well as the national level are (still) in the shadow of research work. In most countries teacher training is still not a prerequisite for teaching. Although Peček (2000) states that according to Oldroyd and Hall (1991) the general principles for the development of staff in higher education should follow: the clear objectives of the higher education institutions, detailed identification of the academic staff's educational needs and the needs of organisation, as well as the mission of

⁵ S pisanjem prispevka smo zaključili junija 2012.

the higher education institution's management, who must provide their employees with high quality professional training (summarised after Peček, 2000), we agree with the more detailed claims of Hazelkorn (2004) that the institutions should – among other – also implement and supervise not only research excellence, but also the learning and teaching excellence with student support. Putting students in the centre of the system is a significant change compared to the past academic paradigms, which have been traditionally oriented towards the teacher. The context of teaching thus highlights the following requirements (Mužič and Mužič, 2006): 1) the programmes must be based on the student load, not teaching load; 2) it is the learning results that matter, and not the learning content; 3) working methods put the student in the centre of the study process; 4) more freedom is intended for the selection of courses, with which the students can shape their study path; and 5) the preparation of students for lifelong learning, employment and self-employment is important.

The most important prerequisites for high quality teaching and learning at universities thus include: interaction among professors and students; the environment, e.g.: place, time and duration of lessons; and the content taught and studied (Kellermann, 2006). It is essential that the learning and teaching are not negated within research, and that they are adapted to the learning needs of adults. In the development of teaching in higher education it is important for the teachers to learn/teach also how to examine their own professional teaching practice.

However, Usherwood (2010) warns that in today's world of global universities we need to ask ourselves whether the structures and practice still correspond their purpose, or is there the one and only model which suits all universities. We definitely do not believe that the examples of good practices of renowned foreign universities are the best for a specific national system which follows a specific tradition and practice, however, raising awareness about examples of good practices can lead to a shift towards the progress and development of quality in the home country. It is a fact that the demands for improved efficiency and excellence of academic staff's work in the spirit of quality indicate an increasing pressure on, not only the research productivity and excellence of academic staff, but also their teaching excellence. In this context it is essential that the teaching provided by academic staff should never be subject to administration, rigorous control and constant endeavours to implement the evaluation of study performance with an emphasis on the formal aspect.

Teacher training should never be linked to additional administrative obligations, however, such qualifications could undoubtedly provide at least minimum added value, higher quality of academic staff's teaching and/or their "input", as well as the higher quality of the final output (i.e. student's competences and learning outcomes). Both at the international level as well as at Slovenian higher education institutions more emphasis is given to research, which is a significant and inseparable concept of high-quality higher education, however, the aspects of teacher training, teaching qualifications and teaching are left on the brink and characterised

by inconsistency. Nevertheless, the question of actual implementation of the words written in officially adopted acts, and the question of what different stakeholders in Slovenia (esp. academic staff) think about the concept of teaching excellence within the context of high-quality higher education, remain open for further research. For an in-depth understanding and acquisition of data and information on the actual state, practice and positions of relevant groups in Slovenian higher education concerning teacher training, individual's qualifications and the concept of teaching excellence in the field of teacher training, it would be reasonable to acquire the opinions of various stakeholders, e.g. academic staff, members of academic staff appointment commissions as well as providers of past teacher training activities in Slovenia, which is another subject of further research.

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