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**Meeting of Directors General for Higher Education**  
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**SESSION II: EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

European higher education is built around a nexus of acquiring knowledge (learning), discovering and creating new knowledge (research), transferring knowledge (teaching), fostering quality in knowledge (Quality Assurance), and exploiting knowledge (skills and jobs). Increased competition among Higher Education Institutions for attracting students within the European Union, the need for an enhanced knowledge triangle between education, research and business, and the increased diversification of the student population, are challenges that need tackling if European higher education is to preserve its competitiveness in the context of a global knowledge-based economy, and meet the growing need for higher skills.<sup>1,2</sup> Within this broad context, while the research mission of higher education has traditionally been a central focus for policy makers, the value of teaching is currently attracting greater attention and recognition.

It is imperative that policy makers and EU education stakeholders set teaching and learning excellence as a top priority within European higher education. This calls for a better understanding of the conditions required for developing teaching and learning quality for large numbers of diverse student populations, the evaluation methods for enhancing the quality of teaching and professional development and of the transformational benefits of ICTs and other new technologies on teaching excellences.

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<sup>1</sup> As the EU Modernisation Agenda for Higher education recalls, while 35% of all jobs in the EU will require, by 2020, higher education qualifications, only 26% of the current workforce is educated to this level

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO International Centre for Engineering Education, EHQ (UICEEHQ), and European Network for Research and Innovation in Higher Education (RERIES). (2002) Expression of Interest on NETWORK of Excellence. Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality in Higher Education for European Knowledge Society. Available at:

[http://www.cpu.psp.ucl.ac.be/fichiers/Expression%20of%20interest\\_6thFP.pdf](http://www.cpu.psp.ucl.ac.be/fichiers/Expression%20of%20interest_6thFP.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Achieving excellence in teaching, suggests elaborating a multifaceted model. It includes the reform and modernization of Europe's higher education via the application of innovative teaching methods and the exploitation of ICTs and other new technologies, in order to "enrich teaching, improve learning experiences, support personalized learning, facilitate access through distance learning and virtual mobility, streamline administration and create new opportunities for research"<sup>4</sup>. Innovative learning approaches and delivery methods, as well as the encouragement of critical thinking, are essential to improve quality and relevance in teaching, to widen participation in higher education and to improve student retention rates<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, the combination of theory and practice, as well as the link between research and innovation, play a key role in reaching levels of excellence in teaching and, consequently, in pushing individual and societal advancement forward. Higher education institutions have realized that the traditional teacher-centered education needs to be revisited to include a more student-centered approach, and are asked to shift to a new paradigm: producing learning, instead of providing instruction<sup>6</sup>. Through these, the learning experience is improved, personalized learning is enhanced and access to higher education is facilitated for all societal strata<sup>7</sup>.

Excellence in Teaching also depends on the competence and motivation of teachers, professors and researchers<sup>8</sup>. Higher education institutions should invest in staff professional development and design a model that would measure excellence in

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<sup>4</sup> European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission, Supporting Growth and Jobs – An Agenda for the Modernization of Europe's Higher Education System, 20 September 2011, COM(2011) 567 final. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/com0911\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/com0911_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Henshaw, H & Kareva, V. Shifting institutional culture, promoting teaching excellence, evaluating progress.

Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/53/43977438.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> ibid

teaching and consequently, reward it. As the Modernisation Agenda puts it, better working conditions, better recognition and reward of teaching and research excellence, and better continuous professional development “are essential to ensure that Europe produces, attracts and retains the high quality academic staff it needs”.

Undoubtedly, the concept of Excellence in Teaching is complex and should be thought of dynamically. The contextual shifts in the higher education environment, such as the internationalization of studies and the additional missions that education is being asked to fulfill, should be the base for setting policies needed to achieve Excellence in Teaching, which will allow Europe to meet the challenges of the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

### **Proposed Questions for Discussion**

1. What is the concept of Excellence in Teaching and how can it be ranked/measured?
2. (a) How has teaching transformed over time?  
(b) How can we foster flexible and innovative teaching approaches that match the changing environment (a more diverse student body; an emphasis on the relevance of higher education; the potential for delivering curricula in new ways)?  
(c) How has teacher initial and continuous training developed to cater for these changes?
3. What actions, at national and European level, could be most effective in encouraging and promoting Excellence in Teaching, as well as sustaining commitment to this goal?