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Teaching skills, academic rewards and promotion

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Abstract

The quality of a university depends on the quality of the conditions for learning, teaching and research which it offers and on the value it attaches to all these three aspects.

Traditionally, universities have focused on research qualifications when promoting and rewarding their teachers and recruiting new teaching staff and paid lip service to teaching qualifications. One reason, it is maintained, is that there are reliable criteria for assessing research but not teaching. A Swedish commission of inquiry argues that there exist valid criteria but that they are not used sufficiently by either applicants or recruitment committees. Regulations to ensure that such criteria are developed and used are proposed.

Introduction

The quality of a university depends on the quality of the conditions for learning, teaching and research that it offers and to the value it attaches to all these three aspects. This is one of the conclusions of a Swedish Commission of Enquiry into Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

The situation in Sweden

A new study on the relative value attached to teaching and research, respectively, shows that the debate on teaching versus research qualifications is about 100 years old in Sweden (Rovio-Johansson & Tingbjörn, 2001). The first Ordinance to establish a requirement for teaching skills was that of 1908. In the last three decades the debate has focused on documentation and assessment of teaching versus research qualifications in recruitment and promotion of academic staff.

One classic argument against judging teaching qualifications is that teaching is a private matter between teacher and students and that there simply is no valid and reliable documentation. An investigation of Swedish university policy documents shows that serious attempts have been made during the last decade to establish criteria for use by applicants and recruitment and promotion committees. A few universities require university teacher training for tenure. Several other institutions require that teaching experience at various levels, including postgraduate level and supervision of postgraduate students, should always be considered alongside research qualifications. Some institutions specify, as particularly relevant, experience of course and programme leadership and responsibility for planning teaching at various levels.

Previous investigations

In a major investigation into the recognition and rewards of university teaching Ramsden *et al.* (1995), referring to Boyer's *et al.* (1994) enquiry into university teachers' view on teaching versus research, conclude that research enjoys considerably higher prestige. In Boyer's *et al.* investigation the country where research enjoys the highest prestige relative to teaching among university teachers is Sweden.

One problem is that academic teaching is not regarded as a professional activity. It lacks features which characterise professions: job practice, professional training and strong professional associations. For university teaching to become recognised, Ramsden *et al.* (1995) conclude, there is a need to develop such functions. It is also necessary that teaching should develop a culture of openness, similar to that which characterises research and other scholarly activities (Boyer 1990). It must be permissible and natural to evaluate the performance of university teachers to submit documentation of such performance and to take it into account for the purposes of recruitment, promotion and salary negotiations.

Ramsden *et al.* recommend that higher education institutions:

- establish criteria for excellent teaching;
- establish minimum criteria for teaching skills for employment, tenure and promotion;
- encourage teachers to use teacher portfolios for documenting teaching skills;
- train recruitment and promotion committees;
- open up career opportunities for excellent teachers;
- support networks to develop teaching.

The importance of presenting and assessing documentation

The fundamental issue for recognising and rewarding good teaching is that of documentation and how to assess it. The documentation recommended by Swedish universities includes results of evaluations, testimonials and peer reviews. Articles, conference presentations and reports on pedagogical development and research projects represent further useful documentation. Many institutions also require that candidates declare their personal view on university teaching.

Several universities recommend the use of a teacher portfolio. One example is the Karolinska Institute which requires that postgraduate students and teachers build up and maintain a systematic portfolio in the areas of teaching, clinical work, research

management and service. For the purpose of judging candidates' qualifications a matrix is used by the recruitment or promotion committee, which takes into account both quality and quantity (See the Institute's home page: www.ki.se):

	<i>Very little</i> 0	<i>Little</i> 1	<i>Average</i> 2	<i>Substantial</i> 3	<i>Factor</i>	TOTAL
Teacher training					1	
Administration					1	
Teaching material					1	
Development and research					1	
Experience					1	
	<i>Poor quality</i> 0	<i>Difficult to assess</i> 1	<i>Good quality</i> 2	<i>Excellent quality</i> 3		
Quality					1	
TOTAL						<i>max 18</i>

Similar matrices are used for the other three areas, and the results are added. This use of a portfolio may give an impression of impartiality but does not, of course, do away with arbitrariness. It is, however, an attempt to establish the essential qualities looked for and to assess them quantitatively and qualitatively.

Conclusions

Although the relative role of academic teaching in Sweden has improved slowly in the last three decades, and more rapidly in the last ten years, there still remains much to be done for university teaching to be recognised as a professional activity, on a par with research, for the purposes of promotion, recruitment and salary increments. The Swedish commission of enquiry proposes the following measures:

- university teacher training should be a requirement for tenured teaching positions at higher education institutions;
- recruitment and promotion committees should include experts on academic learning and teaching;
- all higher education institutions should prepare guidelines for the assessment of teaching qualifications;
- all higher education institutions should establish models for teacher portfolios. The portfolios should serve as tools both for recruitment, promotion, decisions on salary increments and as a basis for systematic in-service training.

References

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