

Analysis of the Current State and Innovations in Professional Development and Teacher Training in Higher Education: The Case of Slovenia

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∞ In higher education throughout Europe and internationally, greater importance has been ascribed to the quality of university teaching in recent decades. The quality of teaching is becoming integrated into the complex process of university quality assurance and higher education teacher training is becoming increasingly important. The aim of the present article is to examine the professional development of higher education teachers in Slovenia, particularly with regard to initial entry training and continuing training for educational work. Higher education teachers are active in both research and teaching. If doctoral studies equip future academics for research work, the question arises as to where and how higher education teachers acquire knowledge and develop competences and skills for work in the educational process and how educational training is embedded in the professional development of higher education teachers in Slovenia. The analysis shows that, within the current frameworks for career progression, higher education teachers have to prioritise research work, while lower priority is given to teaching achievements from the early stage of the academic career.

Keywords: higher education teacher, professional development of higher education teachers, higher education teacher training

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Analiza stanja in inovacij na področju profesionalnega razvoja in pedagoškega usposabljanja visokošolskega učitelja: primer Slovenije

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☞ V evropskem visokošolskem prostoru in na mednarodni ravni se v zadnjih desetletjih pripisuje večji pomen kakovosti visokošolskega poučevanja. Kakovost poučevanja se vpenja v zapleten proces zagotavljanja kakovosti univerze in pedagoška usposobljenost visokošolskih učiteljev pridobiva na pomenu. Namen prispevka je preučiti profesionalni razvoj visokošolskega učitelja v Sloveniji, predvsem z vidika uvajanja in usposabljanja za pedagoško delo. Visokošolski učitelj opravlja raziskovalno in pedagoško delo. Če doktorski študij usposablja bodoče akademike za raziskovalno delo, se poraja vprašanje, kje in kako visokošolski učitelji pridobijo znanje in razvijejo kompetence za delo v pedagoškem procesu ter kako se pedagoška usposabljanja umeščajo v profesionalni razvoj visokošolskega učitelja v Sloveniji. Analiza kaže, da imajo z zdajšnjimi pogoji za razvoj kariere – od samega začetka poklicne poti – pri visokošolskem učitelju večjo težo dosežki na področju raziskovalnega dela in manjšo pedagoški dosežki.

Ključne besede: visokošolski učitelj, profesionalni razvoj visokošolskih učiteljev, pedagoško usposabljanje visokošolskih učiteljev

Introduction: Challenges for academic staff in an environment subject to change

Universities have long been developing their dual mission: research and education. Consequently, higher education (HE) teachers have a dual professionalism stretched between research and teaching work. Ideally, these two areas of expertise intertwine and complement each other: becoming an HE teacher requires evidence of academic success in research as well as the demonstration of suitable teaching skills that support the acquisition and development of knowledge (Mezgec, 2020). HE teachers are therefore experts with a broad range of knowledge and competences. They work in an environment that is subject to change. There are changes in research work, spurred significantly by technological development, its application in research and the use of ICT. Teaching work at the university level is also undergoing change. Since access to HE institutions and programmes has expanded in many countries (UNESCO, 2020), HE teachers today have to deal with a larger number of students, who are very diverse and include those with more disadvantaged backgrounds and from wide-ranging social groups (Bucklow & Clark, 2000). Authors (Altabach et. al., 2010) address this trend as the massification of higher education, which is seen as an intermediate step on the way from elite HE to universal access to HE (Trow, 2006). The trends and patterns of change include the social base of the HE population, which will continue to broaden (OECD, 2008). HE is therefore no longer elite education (Jelenc Krašovec, 2003) for a segment of homogeneous groups of successful students, but includes a heterogeneous population (Marentič Požarnik, 2009). One of the consequences of the increasing number of students, which leads to the massification of university studies, is that, on enrolment, many students are equipped with diverse cultural, social and intellectual capital and previous knowledge (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003). Other changes universities are facing in their educational mission include the way students are perceived: at times, students may be perceived and treated as users of services (clients) who have demands and expect certain services, but they are also seen as direct providers of finance, since the number of students indirectly or directly affects the revenues of HE institutions (Bucklow & Clark, 2000). In addition, students have greater expectations regarding the inclusion of advanced technical content in all study programmes as well as innovative and diverse models of teaching and learning, including through the use of ICT (Bucklow & Clark, 2000). The Eurydice review (European Commission/EA-CEA/Eurydice, 2015) mentions other factors related to changes in the European HE area: a diversification of education programmes and institutions providing

programmes; Bologna reforms; and structural changes to national systems, including the area of funding and establishing and assuring quality. Within this context of change, new challenges are arising for academic staff, whose work is constantly more demanding (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). In addition to the aforementioned drivers of change, particular mention should be made of learning supported by information and communication technology (ICT), which places HE teachers in the position of needing new knowledge and pedagogical competences (Fraser et al., 2017). The need for ICT competences for distance learning was even more pointed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Numerous universities found themselves in a situation where, due to the unfavourable epidemiological outlook and measures to prevent infection, they moved the educational process entirely, or almost entirely, online.

Another important challenge faced by universities in recent decades is quality assurance. European HE has focused increasingly on the issue of quality assurance and the quality of HE teaching is becoming integrated into this process. Professional development and HE teacher training are key factors in ensuring the quality of educational work in HE (Mezgec, 2020), resulting in increasing importance being placed on the training of HE teachers (Aškerc & Kočar, 2018; European Commission, 2013; Rutar, 2011). Environments striving for excellence in HE are therefore investing in entry training and developing frameworks to support the continuous professional development of HE teachers and quality assurance in educational work. Throughout Europe and internationally, some form of training for HE teachers is now becoming common practice. Teacher training is at the discretion of individual universities in some countries (e.g., Holland, Australia, New Zealand) and compulsory in others (Norway, Finland), while some countries (UK, Sweden) have been switching from one model to the other (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). Norway, for example, has a comparatively long tradition of compulsory training for HE teachers, with each university developing its own training programme. In the UK, the shift towards mandatory training started with the Dearing Report recommendation that all permanent staff with teaching responsibilities should be trained at accredited programmes (Trowler & Bamber, 2005, p. 86), with adherence being voluntary but strongly recommended. Later, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) guidelines for course accreditation were adopted, aimed at ensuring that all new teaching staff obtain a teaching qualification that incorporates agreed professional teaching standards (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). In Sweden, the HE Ordinance from 2002 states that lecturers must complete compulsory HE teacher training to obtain a permanent position; however, the scope and organisation of the courses are not regulated in the Ordinance and institutional practices vary (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008).

Within the above context, issues concerning HE teacher training have been included in the policy agenda of EU member states, with the EU agenda for the modernisation of the European higher education systems stating: “the reform and modernisation of Europe’s HE depends on the competence and motivation of teachers and researchers” (European Commission, 2011b, p. 5). Today, visible proof of excellence in teaching and learning is an increasingly important aspect of institutional branding in HE and teaching competence is foregrounded as a central dimension of the quality of programmes (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008, p. 123). Nevertheless, for career progression in Slovenia, as in numerous other European countries, greater weight is given to research (Aškerc & Kočar, 2018; Zgaga, 2017) and the initial entry training of new university teachers is managed in many different ways (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008; Marentič Požarnik, 2009).

The present article investigates the professional development of HE teachers, especially in terms of initial and continuous training for educational work, focusing on the case of Slovenia and the level of development of this area in four Slovenian public HE institutions. We first define the different dimensions of the professional development of HE teachers and then turn to the current framework for the initial and continuous educational training of HE teachers. The aim is to analyse where and how HE teachers acquire knowledge and develop competences for work in the educational process, and what kind of weight and support is given to the professional development of HE teachers for educational work in comparison with research work within the current framework.

Although the focus is mainly on the Slovenian framework, an initial analysis of the global and European trends and patterns is sketched in order to shed light on the position of Slovenian universities within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Dimensions of the professional development of higher education teachers

In order to examine the dimensions of the professional development of HE teachers, we will start by analysing the similarities and differences between teachers in general and HE teachers in particular. There are many parallels between these two groups, as well as some major differences (Mezgec, 2020). It should be noted that they operate in different systems with different organisation, and that HE teachers develop two interconnected roles in parallel: the role of researcher and role of teacher. However, comparative analysis shows that, in

numerous systems, the emphasis is mainly on research and academic achievements, and only to a lesser extent on teaching (European Commission, 2013; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017), which means that, for career progression, greater weight is given to excellence in research than in teaching. There has been growing concern across the HE sector about the lack of recognition for educational work in university career advancement (Ramsden & Martin, 1996; Cashmore & Cane, 2013). The systems by which academic staff are evaluated and rewarded focus primarily on their research performance, while teaching excellence has played a much less central role in career advancement to date (Royal Academy of Engineering, 2018). Professional development in the two dimensions – research and teaching – represents a complex and challenging situation. The multiple and fragmented identities of academics can sometimes lead to identity tensions (Shanshan et al., 2021) and the diminished importance of educational work in contrast to the importance of the professional development of HE teachers can result in tensions and emotionally challenging circumstances in their everyday lives. Teacher identity can be in tension with research identity (Shanshan et al., 2021), as university teachers often have to prioritise teaching over research in the daily routine of their academic work. They struggle to meet the ever-increasing demands of systems of research performance management that follow academic normativity, with metrics that characterise the neoliberal university and are considered a reliable measure of academic excellence (Warren, 2017).

It is, however, possible to trace a range of parallels between the professional development of HE teachers and teachers in lower levels of education (Mezgec, 2020). Firstly, this involves a lifelong process that progresses on various levels. Obran and Ivanuš Grmek (2010) maintain that professional development is a constant process throughout all periods of teachers' professional careers. Secondly, a teacher's professional development has an important effect on the quality of learning and teaching (Čepić & Kalin, 2019; Obran & Ivanuš Grmek, 2010). Moreover, on both levels, a positive climate within the working environment contributes to more effective professional and personal development (Obran & Ivanuš Grmek, 2010).

The professional development of the HE teacher is therefore a lifelong process that progresses on various levels (Cenčič, 2011; Makovec, 2018). Beijgaard et al. (2000) identify three dimensions in the educational work of HE teachers: they are subject matter experts, didactical experts and pedagogical experts. In the first dimension, the emphasis is on knowledge of the subject matter field; among university teachers this dimension covers research work in their field. The second dimension concerns expert knowledge in the area of

didactics (Beijaard et al., 2000), conducting learning processes and creating learning environments, while the third dimension of expert knowledge is in the area of pedagogy, which covers the areas of relationships, values, morals and feelings. In the present paper, we refer to the last two dimensions as *educational work*, because we find the term *teaching* reductive, as it fails to give the proper weight to the third dimension.

Besides the aspects listed above, academic work and professional development include the role of community engagement, which refers to the contribution of HE institutions to society (Boyer, 1990) and certain less visible dimensions that develop with the progress of an academic career, such as dissemination of research work, administration and project management, fundraising, leadership, etc.

Research objectives and design

The aim of the present study is to examine the professional development of HE teachers in Slovenia. In particular, the focus is on initial and continuous training for educational work in order to investigate where and how HE teachers acquire knowledge and develop competences for work in the educational process in Slovenia and more broadly in the EHEA.

Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

- to analyse the initial entry training of the HE teacher for educational work in Slovenia;
- to analyse the possibilities for continuous training of the HE teacher for educational work within the existing framework in Slovenia;
- to analyse how HE teacher training is embedded in the academic career advancement framework of HE teachers in Slovenia;
- to place the detected Slovenian patterns in a wider European and international context.

The analysis focuses on the framework of initial and continuous training for HE teachers in Slovenia in order to establish and analyse the professional development patterns of this target group.

The initial step was to select and analyse the official documents of public Slovenian universities, as well as norms and national laws, in order to collect data on the legal framework, entry conditions and eligibility criteria to be employed or promoted as an HE teacher. Within this phase, the Higher Education Act (ZViŠ or Zakon o visokem šolstvu, 2012), the Minimum Standards for the Awarding of Titles to Higher Education Teachers, Academic Staff and Higher

Education Associates at Higher Education Institutions (Nakvis, 2010) and the Criteria for Election to Titles of four Slovenian public HE institutions (Univerza na Primorskem, 2018; Univerza v Ljubljani, 2022; Univerza v Mariboru, 2022; Univerza v Novem mestu, 2020) were analysed and compared, focusing particularly on the entry conditions for an HE teacher. Content analysis was employed for the analysis and comparison of the aforementioned documents. For further reflection, the current framework of entry conditions and continuous training of HE teachers in Slovenia was compared with the framework for teachers at lower levels of schooling.

Data at the European and wider international level were then collected in order to place the Slovenian reality in a wider EHEA context. At the EU level, two types of data were considered: policy papers, such as communications from the Commission; and frameworks and comparative international reports, such as Eurydice reports, based on statistical and educational reports from the EHEA countries.

Finally, the document analysis was complemented with a thematic literature review that includes published academic texts, research and project reports on the highlighted topics: professional development and teacher training in Slovenian HE. The Slovenian national library information system with shared cataloguing (COBISS) was used for this purpose, as it is considered the best source for publications in the Slovenian context. The literature review supports the analysis of the current state and innovations in the field, but always focusing exclusively on the Slovenian reality.

All of these materials and documents are cited throughout the text and included in the reference section of the paper.

The case of Slovenia: Doctoral studies as the start of the HE teacher's career path

In line with the Bologna reforms, academic careers in Slovenia begin with doctoral studies (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017), except in the case of lecturers for whom a doctoral title is not required. If we look at the broader context, the Eurydice Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017), which includes a review of data on the required educational level of academic staff, employment procedures and working conditions, external quality assurance and the main national strategies of internationalisation in 35 countries, indicates that doctoral studies are the condition for acquiring an academic title that opens up the candidate's path to the academic realm. At the policy level, in the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation,

which is the EU's main instrument for implementing its common scientific and innovation policy (European Commission, 2011a), doctoral studies are placed at the starting point of the researcher's career. Even in systems where a doctorate is not a formally required qualification for all categories of academic staff, evidence shows that it is nevertheless an important element for advancement in an academic career. It can therefore be justifiably asserted that doctoral study is a condition for the development of an academic career (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Following the Bologna reforms, doctoral studies last at least three years, are worth 180 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer System) and have a dual function, since they should fulfil two needs: they should signal a period of attaining highly specialised knowledge through research, while at the same time representing the first step on an academic career (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

If the core component of doctoral study is the advancement of knowledge through original research and preparation for research work, while the doctoral title also serves as a condition for the start of an academic career, the question arises as to what extent, in the current framework, doctoral studies also train candidates for educational work, which is a one of the obligations of an HE teacher. However, the link between doctoral studies and direct preparation for an academic career that includes the educational work of an HE teacher is not so distinct. We are interested in understanding where and how HE teachers in the initial stage of their career acquire knowledge and develop competences for work in the educational process in Slovenia and more broadly in the EHEA.

Only in certain countries do the regulations stipulate that pedagogical practice is a compulsory part of doctoral study programmes. Furthermore, in cases where the regulations do stipulate compulsory teaching practice, this obligation applies only to certain categories of doctoral candidates (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). Nevertheless, data from the Eurydice Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017) indicate that a large proportion of doctoral students do in fact participate in teaching activities, although this is not part of the compulsory training and education in doctoral programmes. In some countries, they also have the formal employment position of teaching assistant, which is the case in Slovenia.

The findings of Eurodoc research (2011, in Ates & Brechelmacher, 2013), which was conducted in 12 European countries, provides evidence of a lack of initial training for the educational work of doctoral students. The data show that, at the start of doctoral studies, the majority of doctoral students believe they lack

the appropriate competences for teaching. A large number of them mention that they did not acquire pedagogical experience during their doctoral studies and that they are not happy with their own teaching competences. In fact, Rothwell and Herbert (2007) found that the least experienced university teachers were more likely to engage with a teaching-focused continuous professional development scheme. Similarly, a Swedish study (Ödalen et al., 2019) found that pedagogical training courses seem to be most relevant for individuals with moderate teaching experience (1–3 years), which indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the pedagogical training courses. However, we must bear in mind that career development during and after doctoral studies is influenced by other variables, such as the supervisor, the intellectual support doctoral students receive during their studies, the quality of the doctoral dissertation, published articles, participation at conferences, international references, networking and so forth (Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2015, in European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

In Slovenia, there is no one single path at the start of an academic career (Klemenčič et al., 2015). Data gathered in an international study by the APIKS network (the Academic Profession in the Knowledge-Based Society) (Flander et al., 2020) point to the three most common forms of starting an academic career: young researcher, teaching assistant and outsider, i.e., a doctoral student from outside (candidates who come from a non-academic environment and doctoral students who have obtained a doctoral title abroad). In Slovenia, the Young Researcher Scheme, which is administered through the Slovenian Research Agency (ARIS), is a governmental programme to finance postgraduate study and research training. Potential mentors apply to ARIS in conjunction with their home institutions to gain funding for a young researcher position. Successful applicants are then allocated funds to hire young researchers for a fixed term, up to a maximum of three and a half years for a PhD programme (Klemenčič et al. 2015, p. 24). In the first and second aforementioned mentioned forms of starting an academic career (young researcher, teaching assistant), the supervisor carries significant weight, since their position in the hierarchy of the institution and their informal influence determine whether the candidate will have a real possibility of an academic career in a domestic institution (Klemenčič et al., 2015). Influential supervisors appropriately prepare those in their care for an academic career and advise them on how to ensure the conditions for securing an appropriate academic position. In fact, the Slovenian HE system is marked by a high level of academic homogeneity (Klemenčič et al., 2015; Klemenčič & Zgaga, 2015, in Flander et al., 2020, p. 24), an unwritten policy whereby doctoral students are employed at the specific faculty where they obtained their doctorate, which is one of the barriers to the mobility of

academic staff in the country. While it is typical for young researchers financed within the Young Researcher Scheme to be primarily involved in research and to devote most of their time to writing their doctoral dissertation, teaching assistants are mainly involved in lecturing, with a teaching workload of ten hours or more per week.

Both in Slovenia and more broadly across the European higher education area, doctoral studies are followed by a period of uncertainty, during which candidates either intensify their research or focus on teaching at the HE level, or both (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). The transition to an academic career is not guaranteed. The period of uncertainty and precarious work can differ in length, depending on national legislation and regulations concerning the employment of academic staff. In some countries, a further legal condition for the first appointment to an academic teaching position is so-called habilitation, which envisages additional research work, published articles and trial lecturing, and where the candidate's qualifications are verified by outside experts (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). As demonstrated by the results of a comparative study carried out within the Nettle project, there is an absence of national legislation stating an obligation for HE teachers to have a formal certificate of initial entry training for educational work (Marentič Požarnik, 2009).

In Slovenia, the conditions for entry to the profession of HE teacher are governed by the Higher Education Act (ZViŠ or Zakon o visokem šolstvu, 2012) and the bylaws of HE institutions, i.e., Criteria for Election to Titles. The Higher Education Act stipulates that assistant professors, associate professors, full professors and lecturers hold the rank of HE teachers (Article 52), while one of the conditions states that election to the title of assistant professor, associate professor and full professor is open to anyone who holds a PhD and has verified teaching ability (Article 55). The finer details of the procedure for election to titles are left to the individual HE institutions (Article 57 of ZViŠ). The Council of the National Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Quality in Higher Education (NAKVIS) has defined the Minimum Standards for the Awarding of Titles to Higher Education Teachers, Academic Staff and Higher Education Associates at Higher Education Institutions (Nakvis, 2010). Taking into account the NAKVIS minimal standards, each Slovenian public university has created internal bylaws, Criteria for Election to Titles, which define the stated procedures in detail. These criteria define the elements that constitute the verified teaching abilities mentioned in the Article 55 of the Higher Education Act and mainly refer to teaching competences, as well as the manner of demonstrating teaching training upon first election to a title (Deželan, 2020).

In addition to teaching competencies, candidates must demonstrate appropriate qualifications for research and expert work. What is common to the Criteria for Election to Titles of all four public HE institutions in Slovenia (Univerza na Primorskem, 2019; Univerza v Ljubljani, 2022; Univerza v Mariboru, 2022; Univerza v Novem mestu, 2020) is that, upon first election to the title of HE teacher, the candidate must demonstrate their teaching ability in a trial lecture, with the exception of the University of Primorska and the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo Mesto. The latter envisages either a trial lecture or appropriate evidence of teaching training, while at the University of Primorska, in addition to a trial lecture, candidates are required to attend teacher training or must demonstrate their acquired teaching ability by conducting seminars and/or laboratory work for a period of one academic year (Article 19) (Univerza na Primorskem, 2018). Within this framework, the University of Primorska has developed its own format for an internal pedagogical training programme for HE teachers since the 2010/2011 academic year (Rutar, 2011). With the exception of the University of Primorska, where there is an express requirement for pedagogical training, we may therefore consider that it is assumed that HE teachers have acquired appropriate initial training for educational work prior to their first election to a title, as demonstrated with a trial lecture.

To summarise, at Slovenian universities, as in the majority of European countries, teachers are not required to submit a certificate of competence to perform educational work within the appointment procedures, except at the University of Primorska and partly at the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo Mesto. HE teacher training is therefore not among the conditions for entering the profession of HE teacher (Aškerc Veniger, 2018).

Considering the reality of Slovenia, comparing this framework with the pedagogical expertise and training requirements for teachers at lower levels of the education system reveals some ambiguity. In order to perform educational work, preschool educators study at the HE level for three years, and a class teacher must complete five years. In contrast, an HE teacher must complete three years of doctoral study in which pedagogical content is not prescribed. Then, at the start of their academic career, they must demonstrate teaching ability for which no specific education is prescribed (with the exception of the University of Primorska and partly the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo Mesto). Furthermore, the collective agreement for primary and secondary school teachers and preschool educators prescribes the right of educational staff to five days of further training per year or fifteen days over a three-year period (Eurydice, 2023). We might therefore conclude that teachers on lower levels are required to show certified knowledge and competence to teach, while

at the highest level of education the requirements are set out differently, with a trial lecture sufficing to demonstrate the initial teaching ability of the HE teacher. The described situation is a consequence of the fact that the HE culture has clear rules of behaviour and behavioural codes, which are maintained and transferred to younger generations of HE teachers (Kump, 1994). Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Slovenian HE sphere is typified by a high level of academic homogeneity. In the traditional model of the university, it was self-evident that HE teachers are capable of sharing with their students the knowledge they acquire through research. Younger teachers follow the example of older colleagues; however, the question arises as to whether they possess the appropriate knowledge to judge whether these pedagogical approaches meet the needs of modern HE systems. The danger of this traditional approach is that it is resistant to the change and improvement (Teräs, 2014) that is nowadays required in order to fulfil the quality requirement for teaching and learning (Ograjšek & Ivanuš Grmek, 2024). Another element that needs to be taken into account in the training of HE teachers is that candidates are not that numerous; this does not involve a mass phenomenon such as training class teachers or preschool educators, but a lower number of candidates.

With regard to the aim of the trial lecture, different interpretations are possible. The first one is that, within the continuity that should begin with the work of a teaching assistant and continue with the transition to the position of HE teacher, a trial lecture represents a formal demonstration of acquired competences and the formal conclusion of initial training. It would be hard to interpret the trial lecture as the starting point of training for educational work, since, following the trial lecture, there is no provision for any continuity in the sense of feedback, mentoring, building competences for teaching and institutional support for improving one's own educational work. Another possible interpretation is that, in HE, the main weight is given to training for research, so the training of candidates for educational work is deemphasised; consequently, the process of professional development of HE teachers for educational work is not clearly mapped out.

Further education and training as a factor of professional development of HE teachers

In different documents, we can observe the use of a variety of terms referring to in-service training in higher education. Below, the terms 'further education and training programmes' and 'continuous professional development programmes' are used synonymously. The former is a collocation in use in

Slovenia, while the latter is the collocation used by the European Commission in the aforementioned reports.

Slovenian HE institutions are part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), so they observe the standards and principles both on the national and European level (Deželan, 2020). With the aim of designing a common framework of systems for assuring quality for learning and teaching on the European, national and institutional levels, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, in cooperation with other stakeholders, has formulated the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) et al., 2015), which have been adopted by the competent ministers of the European Higher Education Area. These standards incorporate guidelines regarding HE teacher training (Standard 5): HE institutions should offer possibilities for the professional development of teachers and encourage them, and should promote innovations in teaching methods and the use of new technologies (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) et al., 2015). The EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education also recommends compulsory certified training in member states for professors and other teachers (European Commission, 2013).

As the comparative Eurydice study (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017) shows, however, in Europe there are almost no comprehensive programmes and frameworks of continuous professional development in which academic staff have an opportunity to build upon their pedagogical knowledge and improve their teaching competences, although there are several initiatives regarding the pedagogical formation of HE teachers, with various formats. The results of a comparative study on 35 partners in 23 countries carried out within the NETTLE project (Network of European Tertiary Level Educators) are similar: there is a broad range and substantial variability among courses aimed at improving teaching and learning for HE teachers (Kalman, 2008). As stated in the aforementioned Eurydice study, the majority of such initiatives represent isolated activities of individual HE institutions. Institutions on the national level that are competent for HE and university education, as well as for research work, play a marginal role in ensuring the further professional development of HE teachers. Further education and training of HE teachers is financed from the regular budgets of HE institutions, and special allocation funds are not separately reserved for this purpose. Consequently, institutions may decide independently on the proportion of funds to be allocated to programmes of further education and training of HE teachers. National institutions may arrange provisions for this area by determining the

rights and duties of employed teachers and the entry conditions for eligibility, but apart from certain declarative principles, no clear guidelines on further education and HE teacher training at higher levels are defined systemically (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Continuous professional development programmes for HE teachers are therefore characterised by a large degree of institutional autonomy, on the one hand, and an absence of extensive structured programmes intended for HE teachers, on the other. Initiatives are not systemically organised on the national level, instead arising from within individual HE institutions, although they are occasionally organised on the national level as a consequence of external financing from European funds. This kind of fragmentation is evident in Slovenia, where each public university provides for the education of its employees. One example of good practice is the project Innovative Learning and Teaching for Quality Careers of Graduates and Excellent Higher Education (INOVUP), which directly covers the area of HE teaching and raising competences in this area. The project aim was to improve the quality of HE through the introduction of more flexible, modern forms of learning and teaching. Within the set of envisaged activities, all four Slovenian public HE institutions jointly provided HE teachers with free training in order to improve their pedagogical expertise. The project commenced on 1 October 2018 and concluded on 30 September 2022, with a total of 438 training sessions being carried out, attended by 9,465 HE teachers and associates. In addition to training, the project included 84 multiplier visits, 8 conferences and several publications on the topic of higher education (INOVUP, internal data).

The issue of systemic provisions poses a major challenge in the majority of European countries. Numerous countries are making efforts to develop a framework and regulate this area, and HE teacher training has become common practice in several countries (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). Training is recommended in the majority of national systems; some countries are considering the compulsory training of HE teachers and are developing appropriate models, while in other countries HE teacher training is already compulsory (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). For instance, Norway already has a long tradition of compulsory education and training for all HE teachers. Sweden has also placed a great deal of emphasis on the pedagogical training of HE teachers and the professionalisation of higher education teaching. At most Swedish universities, participation in these courses has become a *de facto* requirement for employment as a lecturer, or for promotion to the position of professor (Ödalen et al., 2019, p. 340). Meanwhile, the UK has established national standards for the professional qualification of HE teachers. The education and training of HE

teachers is not prescribed on the national level, and the entry conditions and requirement are left to individual institutions; however, it is necessary for their own accreditation (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008).

Where policies are not nationally requested and supported, HE institutions develop their own formats, frameworks and infrastructures. Several universities have founded an educational development unit that supports processes related to improving learning and teaching in a variety of ways. One interesting example is the strategy implemented at the University of Alcala (Spain), where teaching innovation teams, learning communities of teachers, were established in conjunction with the Office of Teacher Training to promote teaching innovation and professional development (Margalef Garcia, 2011).

Trowler and Bamber (2005) compare the situation where there are multiple subjects responsible for and involved in the design of policies for improving HE teaching to a Christmas tree on which there are a lot of twinkling decorations: they are characterised by being uncoordinated, fragmented, of short duration and having no lasting effect on the everyday life of the institution. The problem lies principally in the diversity of values and purposes among various actors, which is evident in the variations in the content of the offer and approaches to HE teacher training (Bamber, 2002).

In Slovenia, research conducted in 2013 analysed the status of educational work and HE teacher training. Out of 513 respondents (5.85 percent of the entire population of HE teachers), nearly half (47 percent) were not involved in any form of educational training or programme (Aškerc & Kočar, 2018, p. 165). In the last ten years, a third of teachers completed training for HE teachers (both formally accredited programmes and non-formal education and training) (Aškerc & Kočar, 2018). The researchers then studied the opinions and convictions of HE teachers regarding the need for initial and further educational training in Slovenia. The data gathered indicate that individuals who had pursued further training were more inclined to training and ascribed greater importance to certificates of pedagogical ability in appointment procedures (Aškerc Veniger, 2018). The majority of the respondents had taken part in shorter trainings, with an average duration of 37 hours, which in ECTS terms means a little over one credit point. Another interesting finding is that the respondents ascribe greater importance to initial teacher training if the candidate has no prior pedagogical education qualification, while lesser importance is ascribed to continuous professional training (Aškerc Veniger, 2018). This reflects the marginal position of training for HE teachers in Slovenia, where not even the direct users ascribe great importance to it. We may conclude that there is a conviction that teaching skills acquired for teaching at lower levels are sufficient

for educational work in higher education. As part of the INOVUP project, research was conducted in 2019 among HE teachers and associates at Slovenian HE institutions: the University of Ljubljana, the University of Maribor, the University of Primorska and the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo Mesto. A total of 838 HE teachers participated in the survey, which was intended primarily to determine the need for designing training programmes. The data gathered indicate that HE teachers would like to gain training principally for those forms of work that they use least and in which they feel least qualified: flipped classroom, teaching with the use of MOOC, learning through research, and the use of personal devices (Deželan, 2020). The expressed wish for training that addresses the use of ICT was present before the Covid-19 pandemic, and we can expect it to become even more salient in the current circumstances. A study conducted by Ograjšek and Ivanuš Grmek on the use of a student-centred approach in HE in Slovenia emphasises the importance of continuous teacher training, which should equip teachers with the necessary skills to meet the evolving expectations of their students and the demands of contemporary educational settings (Ograjšek & Ivanuš Grmek, 2024, p. 21).

With regard to career progression, the continuous professional education and training of HE teachers in Slovenia is not compulsory, nor is it directly tied to promotion and salary increases (Zakon o visokem šolstvu, 2012). Even after the first appointment to a position, the criteria for promotion procedures in Slovenian HE institutions stress the importance of research and expert work, with less emphasis on teaching competence (Šarić & Košir, 2012; Aškerc & Kočar, 2018), which is also reflected in the points awarded for ensuing elections to titles and in promotion in titles (Univerza na Primorskem, 2019; Univerza v Ljubljani, 2022; Univerza v Mariboru, 2022; Univerza v Novem mestu, 2020). Candidates receive considerably fewer points for investing in the development of their own educational work (participation in in-service training, seminars and so forth) than in the development of their own research (collaboration in projects and published articles). Marentič Požarnik (2009) maintains that, in this area, there is no clear national policy aimed at raising the level of educational competence of HE teachers and, consequently, HE teaching. Similarly, in numerous European countries, the development of learning practices is not a priority for new HE teachers and HE staff devote greater attention to preparation for a research career than for one in teaching (Pleschova et al., 2012). This imbalanced weighting of dual professionalism (research and teaching) in career progression influences engagement with continuous professional training (Seden & Cope, 2009), with HE teachers prioritising discipline-specific continuous professional training (Wood, 2008). The lack of extrinsic motivators,

such as reward for teaching activities, and the pressure to engage with research discourage HE teachers from engaging with teaching-oriented further education and training (Botham, 2018; Kynaston & Maynard, 2009; King, 2004).

We may therefore summarise that, for the most part, career progression is dictated by research achievements, with educational work playing a lesser role. This has a negative impact on participation in continuous professional development programmes and on the efforts of individuals to develop their own educational practices. On the international scale, we can observe a tendency towards the systemic arrangement of a framework for initial HE teacher training, but thereafter training remains for the most part in the domain of the individual and of the requirements of individual institutions for career advancement. Career structures are mainly research focused.

Conclusions

In the past, the paradigm of teaching (including in higher education) was based on the classic assumption that the attainment of academic seriousness and success required the transfer and transmission of information provided by someone who knows and understands what the students need to know. Hence, the understanding that it is sufficient for an HE teacher to be an outstanding expert in their field. This was perhaps true when HE was dealing with generations of the best, highly motivated students, who themselves knew how (and wanted) to regulate their process of learning and their professional growth (Rutar, 2011). The training of HE teachers for educational work in Slovenia was marked by the conviction that pedagogical success was determined by the teacher's academic qualifications; in other words, that a good academic was also a good educator (Schmidt, 1972, p. 12). In recent years, however, major shifts have been observed in terms of concern for the educational competence of HE teachers (Aškerc & Kočar, 2018). Increased investment in the training of HE teachers and the gradual development of HE didactics as a pedagogical discipline reflects the awareness that the quality of teaching is closely linked to the concept of quality in higher education.

Given the previous findings that, for doctoral candidates who intend to continue their career in the academic world, doctoral studies are not expressly aimed at training for educational work, the question arises as to where and how HE teachers acquire knowledge and develop competences for work in the educational process. Universities had their unwritten rules, on the basis of which new cohorts of HE teachers were trained. Traditionally, the professional career began in the role of teaching assistant and future teachers gradually acquired

the necessary pedagogical and teaching skills from their predecessors. The method of work and training for the profession, which has been in place since the earliest days, is probably not appropriate in today's circumstances, which are characterised by significant growth in the student population, its diversity, the use of ICT in education and the internationalisation of higher education. Whereas there was a prevailing belief that HE is static, today we see an entirely different picture of HE: it involves dynamic institutions that are striving to keep up with social change (Mezgec, 2020).

Doctoral studies, which constitute the initial education for the position of HE teachers, train students primarily for research, and only in small measure, if at all, are they aimed at imparting and developing educational knowledge and teaching competences. Consequently, the need has arisen for additional teacher training that would equip HE teachers to develop new methods to react successfully to changes in the external environment and to respond to the expectations of stakeholders and society. In order to meet these challenges, numerous universities around the world have started developing standards and training programmes for university teachers. Slovenian universities today are also operating in an environment increasingly geared towards teacher training becoming part of the qualification process for HE teachers (Aškerc Veniger, 2018). We can therefore identify the need for high-quality initial HE teacher training, and for the development of a framework of further education and training that must be systematically planned, aligned with the development needs of the individual and institution, and equally accessible to all HE teachers. Marentič Požarnik (1998) has designed a model of HE teacher training with seven components: initial training for teaching assistants; the mentoring of new teachers by experienced HE teachers; (mono)thematic seminars and courses; pedagogical workshops; action research in the field; networks of experts; and job shadowing. In addition to the systematic design of a model of continuous further training, account needs to be taken of other factors that boost intrinsic motivation for one's own professional development within HE (Botham, 2018). Professional development is indeed a lifelong process that includes personal, professional and social dimensions. Within the current framework of academic career development, which involves the criteria for promotion procedures, greater emphasis should be given to the development of teaching competences and teaching excellence.

In conclusion, within the current framework, doctoral study is not a sufficient guarantee of perceived training for educational work in higher education. Within the current frameworks for career progression, HE teachers must prioritise discipline-related content when it comes to further education and training, as lower priority is given to teaching achievements. However, there

has been significant progress in critical reflections and in raising awareness of the importance of pedagogical ability in appointment procedures, and a framework that includes continuous HE teacher training as part of the quality assurance strategy is becoming part of the agenda of several universities. There is an awareness that a culture of continuous improvement and professional development is to be supported, not by providing isolated courses, but with long-term frameworks and schemes that support reflective practice.

The current situation is mirrored in the low number of publications and research reports on the professional development of HE teacher in Slovenia (Ašker & Kočar, 2018). Even at the EHEA level, this research issue addresses a relatively new field of study that is still underrepresented, while adequate studies on the professional development of HE teachers have not even been carried out at international level (Geleta & Raju, 2023). On the one hand, this represents a limitation of the present research, especially in terms of a lack of available and reliable data and the scarcity of prior research studies on the topic; on the other hand, it confirms the need for future study of the field.

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