

TRAINING OF FIRST-TIME UNIVERSITY TEACHERS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN EUROPE

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Abstract

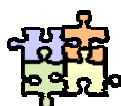
One of the most important goals of the European Union has been to become the most competitive economy in the world. The EU attempts to reach this aim by increasing the numbers of university-educated people. Because of that the way teachers educate their students has become increasingly important. The primary criterion for employing new teachers can not be their publications. Increasing numbers of undergraduate and graduate students require a more specific approach with regard to their abilities and needs. This becomes a special challenge for beginning educators, as their senior colleagues remain more likely to continue applying their usual teaching methods.

The response to these challenges comes from both the European and the national levels. At the European level, the European Political Science Network has organized a series of trainings for beginning teachers since 2004. At the national level, most European countries have paid more attention to teacher training, although in some the situation remains almost unchanged.

In this paper, I discuss the preparation of junior political scientists for their teaching careers on the European level as well as in various European countries.

Keywords

Higher education, training, beginning teacher, political science, Europe



One of the means to reach the ambitious goal of the European Union to become the most competitive economy in the world is to increase the numbers of university-educated people. Europe has invested into various programs in higher education in order to encourage harmonization and improvement of quality, mobility, learning of languages, etc. In particular the Bologna Process has brought about unique and positive changes, even beyond the European Union (Reinalda, Kulesza 2006).

The way teachers educate their students has become increasingly important. The primary criterion for employing new teachers can not be their publication records. Growing numbers of students who enter a university call for a more differentiated approach with regard to their specific skills and needs. This is particularly a challenge for beginning educators, as senior teachers remain more likely to continue using their accustomed techniques and ways.

The developments connected to the Bologna Process are also changing the old academic structures. As labor markets and students demand more specialized knowledge, traditional disciplines, such as political science and sociology, may not be as attractive to students as they used to be. Students may be more interested in more targeted disciplines, such as gender studies, media studies, journalism or other areas. The result is that in some countries as for instance in Britain and the Netherlands the numbers of students taking the

first qualification in political science have declined in recent years. In others as for example in France the question of student numbers has raised its head, whilst in a few others (e.g. in Norway) numbers have remained steady (Goldsmith, Berndson 2002).

The response to these challenges comes from both the European and the national levels. At the European level, the European Political Science Network (epsNet) has organized a series of trainings for beginning teachers since 2004. Recently, epsNet started to co-organize a workshop on graduate education together with the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). ECPR in its journal *European Political Science* has more focused on questions of teaching.

At the national level, European countries started to pay more attention to teacher training, although in some the situation remains almost unchanged. Initiatives aimed at beginning educators have been especially developed in the United Kingdom and in Ireland. Some courses have been held also in Germany, Italy as well as Central European states, such as Hungary and Slovakia, which strive for a better-educated staff. In contrast, countries such as Spain or Austria hardly pay attention to teacher training.

In this paper, I would like to discuss several questions. Firstly, I am interested in how much are the specific trainings for political science teachers developed in different EU countries. Secondly, I examine the reasons why some institutions begun to be active in this field. And finally, I am asking whether there is any need to organize events tailored to junior political science educators. Is it more useful to design joint trainings for participants from different disciplines?

When discussing these issues, I draw from papers recently published in scholarly journals on teaching in higher education, moreover from personal interviews with teachers from various institutions as well as from my four year experience as a coordinator of the epsNet trainings for first-time university teachers of political science. In this paper I am not bringing a comprehensive study of conditions in all European countries, rather I try to stress some examples of different circumstances.

The United Kingdom and Ireland

In the last decade, British university education has been characterized by strong competition of schools to attract students as well as by the increase in the numbers of part-time faculty. As a consequence of selective funding of research and the importance of doing well in research, universities increasingly seek to employ people with a good research profile and encourage faculty to concentrate on research output. The result has been that much undergraduate teaching is often in the hands of part-time staff, many of whom are graduate students or post-doctoral scholars at the start of their careers. This fact has urged universities to provide extensive teacher training for the growing numbers of part-time staff (Goldsmith and Berndson 2002).

Nevertheless, the training has been today provided also to new full-time teachers. Most UK universities have staff development units that offer courses on teaching methods and completion of a series of such courses is now normally compulsory for new academic staff (Buckler 2001). Moreover, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) was founded to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students. One of its aims is to lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of professionals in higher education. During only three years of existence HEA has established itself as a respected organization - its recent annual conference was attended by 550 participants including delegates from abroad. The Academy works with national enhancement initiatives, e. g. the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in England and similar bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It also has a responsibility for

managing the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning. Paul Ramsden, recognized expert on higher education, has been HEA chief executive (HEA webpage, HEA leaflet).

However, there were started some initiatives aimed at university teachers even prior the establishment of the Higher Education Academy. In 2000, the UK Higher Education Funding Councils initiated the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), which consists of a range of centers, covering different academic disciplines, located in higher education institutions across the country. Centre Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP) is located at the University of Birmingham but, as with the other centers, its focus is national. Coordinated by academics in the relevant fields, the centre aims to facilitate and disseminate innovation in learning and teaching throughout their subject communities. The activities cover areas such as teaching methods, curriculum development, and the use of information technology in teaching and pedagogic research (Buckler 2001). Every month C-SAP organizes several specialist events and workshops for teachers and experts in the field (HEA webpage).

LTSN emerged also because some investigations had suggested that courses on teaching methods offered by British universities tended to involve a lot of time spent reinventing the wheel (Gibbs 1995 cited in Buckler 2001). Because of this, LTSN centers seek to promote work that 'embeds' learning and teaching initiatives in the academic disciplines they cover. C-SAP supports projects designed and executed by individual academics or departments within its subject communities, from small workshop projects to larger, more theoretically informed research into discipline-specific learning and teaching issues (Buckler 2001).

Today, LTSN and HEA often collaborate by various activities. For example, HEA has started a special program to enhance trainings of first-time educators. The Supporting New Academic Staff (SNAS) project arose from a desire to share information about subject specific resources to support new academics. In response the Higher Education Academy in York formed a team of course tutors to work collaboratively with subject centers. Their goal is to propose topics covered on initial courses in learning and teaching for new staff, moreover to develop lists of discipline-specific and general resources and to establish an easily searchable online database of the sources (HEA webpage).

Another form of support for beginning educators is the HEA's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme which recognizes and rewards individual excellence in teaching in higher education in England and Northern Ireland. Total funding dedicated to Individual Awards and Projects is £2.5 million per year. Except for this, young academics can submit their teaching portfolio to HEA and its experts decide if it admits criteria (Interview with J. Metcalfe).

In 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England announced funding for 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs). The CETL initiative represents the largest single investment ever made by the Council in the area of Teaching and Learning. As part of this program, the University of Oxford is receiving £3.3 million over five years, to finance the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice which trains postgraduate research students and contract research staff for academic careers. One of its objectives is also to support the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. The Centre aims to connect the activities of the Oxford Learning Institute, within which it is situated, with the academic divisions of the University, and with other UK research-intensive Universities which have demonstrated their commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning. The Institute has for several years run a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. This program is now being integrated into a four-stage teaching development scheme which will provide a framework within which the CETL teaching initiatives can be located (The Oxford Learning Institute webpage).

The University of Oxford has convened a Preparation for Academic Practice Network that will form the basis of dissemination involving large-scale implementation. The network consists currently of seven institutions (including Oxford) which between them contain almost a quarter of the UK's postgraduate students. Expertise on graduate skill development will also be contributed to the Network by the UKGRAD program (The Oxford Learning Institute webpage).

Also the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) caters for the needs of those postgraduates who teach. In its Good Practice Guide for the employment of PhD. students as teachers the Committee stresses the need for an appropriate and adequate training to prepare them for their work (NPC webpage). Moreover, there exist specialized web pages dedicated to specific method of teaching as for instance the webpage focused on experience based learning and team learning managed by David and Alice Kolb (learningfromexperience.com).

In Ireland trainings for beginning university teachers have been organized for about six years. The trainings were first carried only at the University College Dublin (UCD) but today, there are running at three Irish universities. At the UCD all educators who begin to teach are strongly encouraged to attend a four days training on teaching. Later they can decide whether to make a two-module course finishing with a certificate or a four-module course ending with a diploma. The modules include problem based learning, assessment strategies, enquiry based learning, detecting and deterring plagiarism, information skills, enhancing feedback and encouraging students' creativity. UCD Centre for Teaching and Learning administers a website with a large number of scholarly resources on teaching in higher education which can be freely downloaded. Besides, it has developed a system of teaching awards and grants. However, these trainings are not specifically oriented towards beginning teachers of political science (interview with Terry Barrett, UCD website).

Germany

Recent changes in higher education have caused that more than ever before attention is being paid to teaching in Germany, too. University teachers are required to hold both a PhD. title and a teaching praxis. Because of that most doctoral students who wish to stay at university try to sign part-time contract and become *Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter/in* (scientific colleague). This means that doctoral student works on his/her dissertation and teaches a seminar under professor's guidance. Beginning teachers at German universities work as *Hochschule Assistents* (university assistants). It usually takes another six years after obtaining a PhD. in order to be qualified for *habilitation* – becoming *docent* (associate professor). For this title, the candidate is supposed to write a book and to document relevant teaching praxis as well. There is also a new alternative – striving for a title of junior professor which also takes six years. The quality of teaching is evaluated and good evaluation is a precondition for renewing the contract for another three years. Only after *habilitation* one can apply for tenure but this is possible just at different university that teacher previously worked at (Bahle 2002).

However, there are no rules or regulations on courses for first-time university teachers in Germany. Some universities offer courses on how to teach, e. g Free University in Berlin, but there is not any requirement for *habilitation* to undertake them. Evaluation by students becomes a part of teachers' folder submitted for the application for tenure, some times with also peer evaluations. But in most cases they are still the results of research and sometimes also fundraising abilities which are decisive for achieving the professorship (interview with S. Schüttemeyer).

However, a new system of university education in Europe which has introduced two degrees – bachelor and master (Reinalda, Kulesza 2006) puts more system into the education

of social sciences in Germany. Students have more freedom to choose courses according to their interest. In Germany, far more students are accepted to university than fifteen years ago. Today, 35 % of population has completed university degree instead of 10 % in the past. This means, that not any more only the most talented students are accepted to university. Besides, teachers must educate their students within less time, with the same number of teaching staff and with stagnating budget. *There is just one way to cope with this challenge: to considerably improve our teaching methods and to teach students effectively. This is expected from the new generation of university teachers. They should be far better teachers not just the researchers as we were as the generation of and after Humboldt*, says Suzanne S. Schüttemeyer, statutory representative of the German Political Science Association (interview with S. Schüttemeyer).

Spain and Italy

In Spain, similar as to Germany, relevant teaching experience is also obligatory if one wishes to be employed as university teacher. This can be gained at the position of teaching assistant during the PhD study. However, Spanish institutions offer no trainings for beginning teachers and doctoral teachers can receive no credits for teaching (interview with Carlos Closa).

In Italy, pioneering work in teacher training has been done by the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence. This institute was created in 1972 by the Member States of the founding European Communities with the main objective to provide advanced academic training to PhD. students and to promote research at the highest level. Except for educating its associates as researchers the institute is also taking into account that fellows have differing teaching experience, and that teaching methods vary across fields and universities. Three types of activities have been designed to improve the teaching skills. First, some specific workshops on best practices in higher education teaching; second, fellows design new courses and/or critically assess existing curricula (an activity that is followed by appropriate feedback from mentors and fellow colleagues); third, most fellows, on a voluntary basis, are also involved in active teaching during their fellowship. This can be done by collaborating with their mentors, or other EUI professors, in graduate courses or seminars, or by offering (possibly, in other universities) the courses they themselves have designed. To this end, a network of associated universities has been developed to which such teaching service may be provided and the performance of the fellows can be assessed. Most of such teaching activity takes place after the first half year of the fellowship (EUI webpage).

Central Europe: Austria, Hungary and Slovakia

The higher education system in Austria is based upon the idea that every student who has a high school degree should be entitled to a place in the public university of his or her choice. Due to limited material and human resources, most public universities have to couple with an excessively large ratio of students per teacher. Especially in the introductory phase, there are not students less than 40 students in the class. The situation is aggravated by the fact that most first-time university teachers have little time to prepare and no specific training in teaching (Permoser 2007, Hardré 2005, Heinrich 2006). An organization of Austrian doctoral students *Doktorat.at* tries to help with this problem by organizing its first training for junior teachers in September 2007.

In Hungary, first-time university teachers have been systematically trained in the Curriculum Resource Centre (CRC) of the Central European University in Budapest. CRC focuses on helping teachers in social sciences and the humanities in post-communist higher education systems. The Centre coordinates several programs ranging from short-term workshops to two semester course *Teaching in Higher Education* which help junior teachers in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, at the Balkans and in Central Asia. The course

is comprised from weekly lectures and seminars on tutoring students and supervising, moreover teaching academic writing, trends in higher education, development and use of case studies, advanced assessment techniques, developing critical thinking in students, course and teaching evaluation, etc. In addition, all participants learn to prepare own teaching portfolio (Interview with Joanna Renc-Roe, CRC website).

Also, the Open Society Institute (OSI), a private operating and grant making foundation established by George Soros coordinates some activities oriented towards first-time teachers. The Academic Fellowship Program aims to help build academic networks and has discipline specific training sessions which are done with CRC support and with trainers. The Open Society Institute (OSI) has established RESET schools (Regional Seminar in Excellence in Teaching) which support beginning scholars from Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Interview with Joanna Renc-Roe).

CRC and OSI operate also another program of Curriculum Research Fellowship. The scheme enables higher education researchers and teaching faculty to investigate specific questions related to social science curricula and curriculum design practices in former communist countries. The aim of the fellowship is to produce a body of scholarly literature on curriculum design and development which would provide CRC and its strategic partners with an insight into the development of undergraduate and graduate degree programs in various disciplines and their implementation across the region. Application is restricted to resident citizens of Eastern- and Southeastern Europe, the Former Soviet Union and Mongolia. Citizens of new EU member countries are eligible only if they participate in comparative group projects with colleagues from non-EU countries (CRC website).

In another Central European country, in Slovakia, there are also growing numbers of students accepted to the higher education institutions as the government has announced the aim to enable a third of high school graduates to enroll a bachelor program. Nevertheless, due to high outflow of middle-aged teachers to business sector in 1990s at most universities students are taught by professors over 60 and by doctoral students. As universities suffer from the lack of teachers, vast majority of institutes make use of doctoral students as teaching assistants because for PhDs universities receive extra funding. However, beginning teachers are not provided with any training even though many of them actually teach more than four hours per week which is the maximum time stipulated by law and some even lecture which should be according to law done only by (associated) professors.

In order to improve this situation, the Slovak PhD. Students' Association started to organize trainings for beginning university educators. In last two years, four trainings have been prepared with the most recent one in collaboration with the neighbor association of Austrian postgraduates *Doktorat.at*. The trainings have met with high attention and appreciation of doctoral students. More than a hundred people from all kind of disciplines have already participated in these events.

epsNet and ECPR trainings for teachers in political science

As it was stated before the countries and particular universities in Europe started to pay more attention to teacher training only in recent five or six years. However, at national institutions there still exist almost no specific trainings for junior political science faculty. Two professional organizations in Europe have reacted to this challenge, namely the European Political Science Network (epsNet) and the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR).

The epsNet introduced its trainings for first-time university teachers in 2004 with the aim to make junior university teachers more conscious of their in-class performance by discussing and explicating problems they face in teaching. Moreover, the organizers try to

promote sharing of good experience from different teaching traditions. Trainings are focused on several key problems beginning teachers struggle with, as for instance teaching academic writing, encouraging originality, and supervising, improving course structure, fostering students' critical thinking, teaching theory, building synergy in the classroom and achieving respect. More than sixty junior and senior teachers have already participated in the trainings in Prague (2004), Paris (2005) and Budapest (2006). Trainings used to consist mainly from presentations of experience of doctoral students and experienced teachers followed by discussions; however, in Ljubljana 2007 they will be enriched by the interactive training of teaching skills focused on effective beginning of a lesson. Moreover, special workshop will be organized with the goal to promote discussion on how to get research funding and how to get published.

All epsNet trainings have been followed by a publication containing the best papers. So far three volumes have been published (Gregušová, 2005a and 2005b, Ulnicane, Dryven 2006). The contributions contain personal experience of first-time and more experienced teachers with regard to the advantages or disadvantages of some original teaching method they have used or, more generally, problems (and attempted/successful solutions to them) they have faced while teaching. In 2006 a website for first-time university teachers was launched containing freely downloadable materials for beginning educators and detailed information about epsNet trainings and other related events: <http://www.fses.uniba.sk/staff/gregusova/English/EPSNet/>.

Except for the trainings for beginning educators there exists another initiative which aims to promote excellence in teaching political science. In 2007 the epsNet has introduced the epsNet Innovative Teaching Award. The award is given every year for the delivery of a remarkable and/or outstanding innovation in teaching political science, such as an initiative to improve teaching political science in general or for specific groups as for example women, undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate students, PhDs, postdocs, etc. The award may be allotted also for the delivery of an innovative product or service relevant for teaching political science (syllabus, ICT software, handbook, course outline, international exchange, simulation, etc.). It can be given to individual staff and PhD students of political science departments in Europe (as defined by the Council of Europe), as well as to institutions or entities of political science based in Europe. The 2007 Award will consist of 2,500 Euros plus 500 Euros to attend the epsNet 2007 plenary conference.

In September 2006 European Consortium for Political Research has also contributed to the arising structure of training of junior political science teachers with organizing its first graduate conference. One conference panel prepared in collaboration with epsNet was dedicated to debating teacher education in different countries. The conference shall run in alternate years. ECPR attempts to promote discussion on teaching also in its journal *European Political Science*.

Conclusion

In the new millennium European Union has been fighting with an ambitious goal of having more college/university educated people. In some countries as in the United Kingdom, the government has even signed that half of the population will have university education in the near future. However, there has not been that much debate about how to teach students without skills that previous generation of students might have (Evans 2007). Also, there are mixed concepts of university education as a paid (and costly) service on one hand and higher education as a process of seeking of knowledge which should be free from any pressure (Sorokos 2005). However, both concepts involve the need to compete for students. This

competition will not be limited to Europe. It already happens with the US and Canada and might be very soon enlarged to for instance China or Japan.

Recently, Europe started to respond to this challenge with putting more stress on preparing junior university staff. Universities or various associations have developed trainings for beginning teachers in higher education, mostly not related to specific discipline. Although some topics of discussion remain the same for junior educators in all fields (motivation of students, team work, synergy in classroom), many are discipline specific (for political science e.g. teaching academic writing or unusual assignments).

Also my experience from organizing epsNet trainings as well as local workshops in Slovakia and passing a semester course at the Central European University has shown the need to arrange events which are tailored to the particular requirements of teachers in political science. Exchanging the opinion on literature or online sources used in the courses, on the supervision of students or on intertwining research and teaching has usually more sense when debating the issues with a colleague in the same/very close discipline. Interesting insights into the problems of young teachers in different fields and valued, too, but mostly do not help to solve the thorniest problems of teaching praxis. Moreover, I have experienced that the workshops with a majority of participants from one field and only one or two attendees from other discipline the people from later group tended to be much more silent as if their problems were not that important for the majority.

In this contribution I discussed preparation of junior political scientists for their teaching careers on the European level, as well as in various European countries. The format of the trainings has been debated stressing concrete examples of good practice which are available in Europe. It can be summed-up that the best practice in increasing the quality of teaching in higher education provides today the United Kingdom with some good experience offered also by Ireland. Other countries as Germany, Hungary and Slovakia occur in between of the new trend and the older tradition of stressing the scientific results of university staff. As the changes in all these countries were mostly stimulated by increased numbers of university students it can be expected that the changes in other countries as Spain or Austria will follow. The initiatives organized by the epsNet and ECPR can help to increase the awareness of the need to provide teacher trainings. A broader debate on the form, content and possible duplicity of these training, sources of funding and international cooperation is much needed.

As among participants of epsNet trainings have also been some colleagues from the United States (in particular Harvard University, Cornell University and Colby-Sawyer College, New Hampshire) I would like to also use this opportunity to invite more American teachers to join the training events epsNet is organizing and to exchange experiences on a more regular basis. Moreover, with this contribution I wish to encourage a discussion among American and European university teachers of political science in order to compare the needs of developing teaching skills for first-time university teachers. This may be done through such questions as:

- Do political science teachers, in the United States (and other countries), also learn teaching by doing?
- To what extent are schools stressing the relevance of courses on teaching?
- What are the results of such courses and which are the responses from participants?
- Should the topic of beginning teachers' training be a regular issue at APSA Teaching and Learning Conferences?

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