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Introduction

## Teaching, Learning and the Profession

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Welcome to the first edition of the JCER Special Section entitled *Teaching, Learning and the Profession*. This is an exciting new venture for JCER. Indeed, it is now just some 12 months since the JCER editors approached us, in the autumn of 2013, about establishing a special journal section devoted to issues associated with teaching and learning. As proud members of JCER's Advisory Board we were delighted to accept and are today glad to be presiding as Guest Editors over, what we hope will be, the first of many such sections.

We accepted the challenge of putting together a journal section on *Teaching, Learning and the Profession* because of the importance we both attach to teaching European Studies, defined as a subject area in its broadest sense. Moreover, we are well aware of some of the specific challenges associated with teaching in this particular field whilst also recognising that many of the more generic challenges of teaching in the UK HEI sector have a significant impact on our subject area.

In our view, a special section, which addresses issues of teaching and learning in European Studies and an examination of the specificities of this dimension of the profession is warranted because of at least three aspects of the subject area's uniqueness. Perhaps foremost amongst these is that the study of European Studies requires the synthesis of multiple and diverse insights from a wide variety of academic disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, arts and economics. This means that European Studies curricula tend to respond in a highly engaged way by adopting a rather more multi and interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning than perhaps other subject areas do. This section is thus intended as a forum for the profession to debate issues associated with this teaching and learning approach.

Second, European Union Studies as a distinct aspect of European Studies, is inherently characterised by a dynamic, fast-evolving body of knowledge, and also necessitates the development of certain core competencies such as understandings of EU administration, EU governance and the management of EU institutions. This in turn necessitates a particular emphasis within the profession on continuous learning and development, which presents specific challenges, which can also be given a voice in this section.

Third, the fast-evolving knowledge base referred to above places significant importance on the need for innovation in teaching. The EU, as we know, is an important driver for lifelong learning and the development of a knowledge based economy and society. This impetus manifests itself particularly in the European Studies field through increasing pressures on the academic community to disconnect from traditional teaching methods characterized by passive delivery and limited class participation. In their place, there is significant and increasing momentum for the adoption of new and innovative teaching methods based on the development of negotiation, strategic thinking, and problem solving techniques and ones that are embedded in new technologies and social media.

With this context in mind, let us turn to the nature of the contributions to this first edition of the *Teaching, Learning and the Profession* section. Following on from this introduction, there are five research papers and one book review.

The first paper by Helene Dyrhaug is entitled *Teaching Qualitative Methods in Social Science: a Problem-Based Learning Approach*. This paper addresses the issue of research methods modules, which the author posits "are often seen as a tedious necessity by the students and teachers" and compares a general first year module with a specialised graduate module. This comparison seeks to explore the way in which alignment between learning objectives and other aspects of the degree programme can promote and foster active and deep learning; particularly through the integration of students' own research skills and experiences into the research method module and assessment.

The second paper by Patrick Bijsmans and Pia Harbers is entitled *The Use of Matching as a Study Choice Aid by Maastricht University's Bachelor in European Studies: Facilitating Transition to Higher Education?* This piece addresses the recurring challenges of maintaining sustainable student cohort numbers on European Studies programmes and subsequent student retention. It does this by discussing student study choice through an exploration of the technique of "Matching" - an advisory procedure consisting of a questionnaire and, in specific cases, an intake interview. This innovative admissions technique has been used since 2011 by Maastricht University's Bachelor in European Studies as a means to ensure that prospective students' expectations match with the programme's content and teaching philosophy.

The third paper is by Mary Murphy entitled *The Future of European Studies: a Perspective from Ireland*. As the title suggests this contribution uses the Irish HE context as a lens to explore a number of serious, diverse challenges confronting universities, students, graduates, and individual disciplines and Mary charts the specific impact of these challenges on the European Studies field. The paper discusses the 'demise' of European Studies in Ireland in terms of a decrease in the number of European Studies programmes, falling student numbers and an evident downgrading of the subject area and argues that this trend away from European Studies in Ireland is concerning, but that it can be reversed. Moreover, Mary identifies "opportunities for the European Studies field to become a pedagogically innovative programme of study capable of nurturing a vibrant and dynamic student community and of producing highly skilled and coveted university graduates" and offers some comfort to ES scholars in so doing.

The fourth paper is by Charles Dannreuther entitled *Engagement as an educational objective* and focuses on research based learning and its capacity to generate research and evidence for policy debate. The empirical lens focuses here on a final year undergraduate module that explores Britain's relationship with the EU and uses this case as a means to assess the pedagogic role of policy engagement on student learning, motivation and reflection. Charlie argues that although practitioner engagement incurs supplementary costs such as the preparation of additional teaching resources creates, it offers at least two distinct benefits. The first is what he terms a "cognitive disequilibrium" within students enabling them to learn. He also posits that engagement offers students motivational factors such as achievement, recognition and employability.

The final research paper is contributed by Andreas Müllerleile and is entitled *European Studies and public engagement: a conceptual toolbox*. It examines public engagement strategies for academics working in the field of European Studies and asks whether academics should engage with the public, what the most effective outreach strategies are for ES scholars and explores the subsequent implications for such outreach activity for universities and departments. Müllerleile makes the case for engaging with the public as an integral part of ES scholars' work, through in particular an online presence, and relates this practical and empirical aspect to the theoretical nature of public engagement.

We hope that the first set of papers that we have brought together here under the banner of the inaugural JCER Special Section *Teaching, Learning and the Profession* will spark much interest and discussion.

If they do, and as a result you are interested in contributing to this new section in the future, please get in touch with us for an informal discussion. We welcome all sorts of articles that reflect the diverse range of issues we face in the profession and future submissions may take the form of inter alia longitudinal studies, surveys of the literature, single or comparative case studies.

We are optimistic that the papers brought together here will provide a basis on which we can reflect, as an academic community, on the challenges confronting us as a profession generally but also give particular voice to specific challenges for ES scholars. We trust it will serve as a forum for

debate, not just as a talking shop but rather as a provider of practical, viable and realistic ways in which the challenges we face as a profession can be met and shared. In so doing, we hope to contribute in our own small way to taking the European Studies field forward as an academic subject area and securing its place as an important university degree programme.

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