

Keynote lecture at a conference on  
**TOWARDS BETTER UNIVERSITY TEACHING**

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I would like, first of all, to express my warmest thanks to the organisers of this conference for inviting me to participate in this important event. It is a real honour for me to be here and to address such a prestigious audience. I hope that what I have to say over the next forty minutes or so will be of interest and even of some use to you in your deliberations around the stated aim of this conference: to boost the debate and efforts to enhance the quality of university teaching.

In standing here today, I am very conscious of all the age-old links between my country, Ireland, and the Czech Republic, links of which you may understandably not be aware. During the many centuries when Ireland was a colony of England and when it was therefore difficult, if not impossible, for Irish Catholics to access higher education in their own country, it was to places like Prague that they flocked. A Franciscan college was established in Prague in 1629 to welcome and educate these mostly young Irish people in a city-centre building on the corner of Hybernska, a term which is of course a mixture of Czech and Latin, meaning ‘Irish street’. This Irish college functioned until the late eighteenth century. Because of time pressures, I will skip forward several centuries to September 2017, when a conference was organised in the Centre for Irish Studies at Charles University at which sixty papers were presented not in Czech or in English but in the Irish language. In fact, the Irish language has been taught for almost thirty years now at Charles University where professors like Dr Radvan Markus are well known and respected translators of Irish-language literature into Czech.

At a personal level, I hope that you will forgive me for briefly mentioning my family link with your great city: my husband’s parents were born and grew up here in Prague. My father-in-law held a doctorate in law from Charles University, something he was very proud of all his life. They moved to London in 1939; there my husband was born and grew up speaking Czech as the family language. It was only when he started school in London that he began to learn English.

So, for professional, historical and personal reasons, I am really delighted to be here today.

The stated aim of your conference: to boost the debate and efforts to enhance the quality of university teaching is, as you know, one of the hot topics in higher education right around the world at this time, so I congratulate you on choosing such a relevant theme for your conference. It is easy to see why this question has become so urgent. Teaching is how we connect with our students; the relationship between teacher and student has always been at the heart of higher education. However, the nature of this teacher-student relationship is changing fast; so too is the student cohort itself. We are walking on shifting sands. Hence the sense of urgency and concern around this topic. The past generation especially has seen rapid change in this area, change that is quickening all the time. My experience in my own university is probably far from being unique: when I was an undergraduate, there were four thousand students in my university; the current number exceeds twenty thousand. The student profile now, compared to a generation ago, has changed considerably across the entire system internationally: compared to a generation ago, the student cohort has become more diverse to include more women, more part-time students, more students with family responsibilities, more non-traditional students (who come to university for instance through access schemes designed to support people from disadvantaged backgrounds), more post-graduates, more overseas students and more students whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction. They are digital natives, with a world of information (some reliable, some much less so) literally at their fingertips. Their attention spans are different from ours: they find it difficult to concentrate and to take notes for an hour or two at a time without interruption. So, if we wish for success in this teacher-student relationship, we have to take these new and changing student profiles into account in our practice.

Other factors also come into play: compared to a generation ago, we now know so much more about how students learn. Teaching is not an end in itself: it is effective only if it helps students to learn and to learn better. Thus, we have to take on board recent developments in neuroscience, along with the greater understanding of student learning styles developed for instance by Harvard professor of cognition and education, Howard Gardner, who has pioneered the concept of multiple intelligences: the realisation that students learn not just through words (the talk-and-chalk system so favoured over the centuries, and which suited some but by no means all students) but also through images, sound and movement .... I have witnessed fascinating examples of this in action, for instance at the Sorbonne in a course that teaches ancient Greek through dance and movement, or in a module on the development of new textiles, linking hard sciences (physics and chemistry) with images and art. The aim now has to be to make our students not just better learners during their study programme but to aim much higher: to help them become life-long learners, citizens who will carry with them throughout their entire lives the skills that they learned as students to test, query, disagree and ask hard questions. More than ever, we need an educated population capable of distinguishing between facts and 'alternative facts', between news and fake news, truth and 'post truth'. The dire consequences of the failure to ensure this are becoming more and more apparent every day. If I could make a political point, the future of Europe, including that of my country, is currently being decided by Brexit. On 28 November 2017, Channel 4 news in London conducted a survey in which British viewers were invited to draw on a map the border between their country, the UK, and Ireland. Most of them got it wildly wrong. In other words, the future of my country, not just its economic future but equally the future of peace on the island of Ireland, is right now being decided by people many of whom are incapable of indicating where Ireland is on a map.

Our students need to be more flexible and resilient than students of earlier generations, many of whom could secure permanent a job at an early age and stay in it for their entire career. Many of the jobs that they will do as yet do not exist – indeed they will be the people who invent these jobs. They are stepping into a world in which increased automation and the advent of artificial intelligence are rapidly redefining work and the workplace, a world that is as yet unclear but that is being redrawn by realities such as big data, climate change, terrorism and mass migration. We need, in short, to equip our students with ways of coping with the unknown – therefore new ways of teaching are needed.

So what in this context is our role, what is the added value of the higher education sector? It is certainly no longer the mere transmission of facts, important though that is. This is something that students can access at home on the internet more easily than in a dusty amphitheatre. Indeed, the excellent quality of many of the MOOCs now widely and freely available makes much the kind of basic teaching of yore redundant. Instead of fearing that new developments such as MOOCs may make us redundant, we can harness them in order to free up traditional teaching time for discussion and debate, for instance in flipped classrooms.

To this we can add the challenging and redefinition of the traditional hierarchy between the teacher or ‘*magister*’ who knew everything and the student who was supposedly a blank page. In 2007, the then President of Harvard University, historian Drew Faust, in her welcoming address to the incoming First Year students, greeted them with this rallying cry: ‘We are all teachers, we are all learners’. In other words, she thrillingly placed the professors like herself and the new students she was addressing at the same level, united in what she saw as their common identity, each of them being both a student and a teacher. One interesting example of this redefined hierarchy that I have encountered is the much sought-after French third level computing college, Ecole 42. Here, there are no lectures, no formal classes: students are given computing problems to solve through peer to peer learning and support, and trial and error: the teachers are very much in the background, at their computers which may be at the other end of the country. Drew Faust’s motto is very much in evidence: all are teachers, all are learners.

As a person I try to be pragmatic, so what I would like to do now is to highlight some of the experiences I have had, or seen, in the places that I know best: Ireland, France and the US. Three case studies, if you will. Not that all of these experiences have been successful – far from it, but after all we learn arguably more from our mistakes than from our successes. Or to quote Oscar Wilde, ‘experience is simply the name we give our mistakes’. I hope that some of these experiences may be useful and may resonate with you.

#### Part i:

My own university, University College Cork, part of the National University of Ireland, has what I would see as a genuinely healthy teaching and learning culture. This developed not because anyone at the outset had a master plan or some great design – it evolved small step by small step over the past twenty five years or so almost by accident, through serendipity, teamwork, trial and error, mistakes and good will. When I look back, I can now more easily identify the forces at work than I could when I was *in medias res*. Around 1990, a small group of us got into the habit of meeting informally on Friday afternoons to discuss how our lectures that week had gone. We came from very different disciplines across the university, but we were all passionate about teaching as well as research. There was never the suggestion that learning and teaching activities should be ‘owned’ or ‘legitimised’ by our Department of Education, or

that only academics formally qualified in pedagogy should be allowed to speak: our instinctive position was that everyone involved in learning and teaching had something of interest to say about these activities. We also liked each other and enjoyed each other's company. These get-togethers became almost like end-of-week therapy sessions: a safe space where we could admit in confidence that such and such a module wasn't going well, for reasons that we couldn't see – cries for help, if you wish, from friends to friends. I remember one colleague showing us a video of a class that just wasn't working well. We discussed it and suggested that if she simply moved the tables and chairs around to create less of a them-and-us dynamic in the classroom, this might help. It did! Many other similar small successes followed. One inspirational person in our little group, Dr Marian McCarthy (a lecturer in the Department of Education and later interim Vice-President for Teaching and Learning) recommended that we read and analyse the work of luminaries including Ernest Boyer, Derek Bok, Lee Schulman and Frank Rhodes – a kind of learning and teaching book club. Through Marian, we came to find ourselves in resonant statements such as the following:

We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities: communities of conversation, communities of evaluation, communities in which we gather with others in our invisible colleges to exchange our findings, our methods, and our excuses.

Lee S. Schulman, *Teaching as Community Property*, pp. 140-41.

Such discussions meant that we increasingly left our classrooms on a high instead of walking home, dejected, wondering why despite all the time and work devoted to class preparation we were often left downhearted. Fairly soon, more colleagues heard about this end-of-week event and wanted to become involved. It is said that, in literature, there are just two basic plots: man goes on a journey, a stranger comes to town. Shortly afterwards, a 'stranger' came to town, or rather a dynamic new Professor of Education and Vice-President was appointed in my university, Prof. Aine Hyland. Soon, our Friday afternoon sessions moved to another level. Professor Hyland and our then President, Professor Gerry Wrixon, became interested in our work and gave us support and, importantly, a budget. We set up a series of open, informal lunchtime sessions in which we discussed, as equals, different aspects of learning and teaching. Over the years, because of staff demand, these have evolved into a series of properly resourced accredited courses (certificate, diploma, masters), all the while keeping the informal drop-in sessions. Now 70% of the academic staff of UCC have engaged in such activities.

With hindsight, I can now isolate a number of elements that, I believe, have contributed to the success of this movement:

- the fact that it started as a bottom-up (almost clandestine) movement – not one imposed from the top; it was, in fact, a coalition of the willing;
- the fact that through the good contacts, high reputation and generosity of someone like Professor Hyland, our 'movement' then got strong support from the top (the President with his budget) – this joint bottom-up / top-down movement was key to our success;
- the fact that everyone in our group was treated as an equal irrespective of title (VP, post-graduate) and of specialisation (hard sciences vs humanities): our agreed understanding was that every teacher has something to say about teaching, that this is not a monopoly of senior staff or of departments of education;

- the fact that our group contained many successful, high status academics (VPs, chairs of disciplines) meant that any suggestion or implication that teaching is something you do when you're not good enough to do anything else (an accusation often made by people who themselves are not good teachers!) was clearly not evidence-based. The next related point is politically incorrect but I'll say it anyhow: many of the colleagues interested in our learning and teaching activities were men and/or happened to be from the hard sciences – medicine and engineering, people who were at the top of their game internationally as researchers and who found a new challenge (how to be the best not just in research but also in teaching) irresistible. In the hierarchical world of higher education where disciplines and sexes often occupy a definite though unspoken rung on the ladder, it was very useful for our 'cause' that so many 'heavy hitters' were seen from the outset to be actively interested in learning and teaching;
- the fact that our group was composed of people from very different disciplines was another important factor. For me, with my humanities background, this afforded me the thrilling of seeing up close and personal how doctors thought, how engineers thought. Spontaneously, in this context, interdisciplinary work sprang up: to cite just one of many examples, a colleague from the UCC Medical Faculty, Prof. Tony Ryan and I published a joint paper (based on a 1908 French text illustrating the role of clowns in paediatric medicine), something I would never normally have done;
- the fact that we liked each other and trusted each other was crucial: we knew that the stories of our heroic failures remained confidential. We delighted in each other's company. It is said that one chooses one's friends but not one's family. To this one could add that one does not generally choose one's colleagues, especially not colleagues in the same department. Sometimes colleagues in the same department can, over the years, become like an old married couple: before the other person opens his or her mouth the listener knows only too well exactly what is about to be said: about curriculum content, modes of assessment, time-tables and so forth. Here, our learning and teaching group brought freshness and fun to what could risk becoming jaded.

As our learning and teaching sessions became better known, the question of whether they should be mandatory or remain optional arose. Some believed that they should be compulsory for sound and obvious reasons. I disagreed, arguing that if people were forced against their will to attend these sessions as some kind of box-ticking exercise, the whole spirit and dynamic of the enterprise would be damaged. The sight of sullen colleagues would be no more uplifting than the sight of sullen students forced to sit through something that they clearly disliked; for me, the challenge was always to make these sessions so interesting and useful that people would want to attend. Having said that, among the fifteen key recommendations made in the 2014 *Report to the European Commission on New Modes of Learning and Teaching*, the work of a high-level group chaired by former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, we read the following:

All staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training. Continuous professional education as teachers should become a requirement for teachers in the higher education sector.

*The Report to the European Commission on New Modes of Learning and Teaching*, 2014, recommendation no. 4.

In 2008, UCC established a Vice-Presidency for Teaching and Learning and I was the first incumbent (Professor Aine Hyland, who had been the original *de facto* Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, had just retired). This coincided with the bank crash in Ireland, and with drastic cuts in budgets and public sector salaries. Our teaching and learning sessions usually took place at lunchtime. This may seem like a very small point, but I had always deemed it was extremely important - from a practical but also from a symbolic point of view - that people giving up their lunchtime in order to participate in a voluntary teaching and learning session should be offered the very best food (sandwiches, fruit, coffee etc) that the university could provide – on a par with what would be on offer in the President’s Office for example. Given our decimated budgets, many colleagues understandably argued that we should scale back here, but I succeeded in resisting.

Other factors such as visibility, recognition and validation are of great importance too. Through good relations with colleagues in the room bookings service, we ensured that our teaching and learning sessions took place in the Council Room, the most inspiring room in the entire university, the room where the Governing Body meets, for instance, a room not normally used by most staff. Holding our teaching and learning sessions there meant that learning and teaching were literally and symbolically lodged at the very heart of our institution.

As for validation: colleagues had long complained that although all the time spent preparing classes and now participating in teaching and learning exercises might make learning and teaching more successful and enjoyable, it was still dispiriting to see colleagues who were focused almost exclusively on research with little or no consideration for their teaching or for their students being promoted ahead of them. At this point, our bottom-up movement had so many supporters that we eventually succeeded in getting an overhauled promotion scheme accepted by the Governing Body (of which I was a member). This again is another example of a dual bottom up and top down movement. This currently means that excellence in teaching and in research are both, to differing degrees (depending on whether promotion is to a senior lectureship or to a professorship) among the main criteria for promotion.

Visibility is another crucially important element. Like other universities far and wide over the past few decades, we introduced annual teaching awards. These are conferred by the President at a public ceremony in the Council Room to which family and friends are invited. National teaching awards were organised by NAIRTL / the National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (of which I was Director) and awarded by a senior public figure. In 2009, these awards were presented by the then President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, in Dublin Castle: again, the symbolism was important. Interestingly, teaching awards had been in existence for many years, under the radar, as it were, in our medical school where students vote for the Tutor of the Year, the consensus being that to be designated by one’s students rather than by a combination of colleagues, students and external referees (as was the case for other teaching awards) is arguably the supreme validation.

In an era of budget austerity, the question of the eventual cost of measures to enhance the quality of teaching, can arise. We have, almost spontaneously, succeeded in involving well known international figures in our teaching and learning activities, in a myriad of ways and at very little cost. In this context, the extreme generosity, graciousness and impact of luminaries

like John Naughton (UCC engineering graduate, journalist, author, Cambridge academic and Emeritus Professor for the Public Understanding of Technology at the Open University) and David Putnam (film producer, educator, member of the House of Lords at Westminster and West Cork resident), to whom we offered adjunct professorships, and of Howard Gardner (developmental psychologist and Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard), to whom we offered an honorary doctorate, would be difficult to exaggerate.

#### Part ii:

In France, since 2011, I have been involved in learning and teaching initiatives at *inter alia* the ANR / Agence Nationale de la Recherche and at the Sorbonne. Around 2011/12, learning and teaching had *de facto* relatively little visibility in the French higher education system. However, it is fascinating to see that, in under a decade, learning and teaching are now among the major concerns across the higher education landscape in France. Most universities now have a learning and teaching centre. It would be invidious to highlight just a few, but anyone interested in establishing or expanding a university learning centre should investigate the SUPTICE / Service Universitaire de Pédagogie des TICE at l'Université de Rennes 1, as well as the new Learning Centre of l'Université de Haute-Alsace at Mulhouse with its spectacular award-winning building. National teaching awards have also been established; the award ceremony takes place in the Ministry of Education in central Paris and is attended by the Minister. As of this year a mandatory formation in teaching and learning for academics has been introduced. As one French colleague remarked to me: 'la pédagogie n'est plus un gros mot!' ('pedagogy is no longer a bad / naughty word!').

How could so much have changed so quickly in France, especially within such a huge system? Here again, a top-down impulse is in evidence. In 2010, France began to implement a major initiative called *Investissements d'Avenir* (budget 35bn euro) covering areas including education, energy and information technology; 16bn euro of this was earmarked for higher education, research and innovation. This was arguably inspired by a similar German initiative launched in 2005 aimed at improving the quality, visibility and competitiveness of German research. At the ANR / Agence Nationale de la Recherche I am a member of the international jury charged with bringing recommendations to the Prime Minister on major inter-institutional and interdisciplinary applications for funding under this initiative.

Alongside this came two parallel initiatives at the ANR aimed specifically at improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in France. One is called IDEFI (Initiatives d'Excellence en Formations Innovantes (budget 184m euro); the other, IDEFI-N (Initiatives d'Excellence en Formations Innovantes - Numérique) aims to promote the digital agenda in learning and teaching in higher education (budget c.20m euro). I chaired the international evaluation committee of both initiatives and am closely involved in their on-going support and monitoring.

One of the factors involved here is undoubtedly money: huge budgets. But that is far from being all. What has arguably most struck me in all my involvement in these French initiatives is this: it's quite simply the strength and clarity of the vision of the people behind them. It's not just the original begetters (President Nicolas Sarkozy, Alain Juppé and Michel Rocard): it's everyone involved. Again and again, they will tell you why this is important and why they believe in it. Over the past six years and across two governments, I have witnessed ministers, secretaries of state, *chefs de cabinet* and senior civil servants, principal secretaries of the

Department of Education, university presidents and directors of *grandes écoles* explain with passion and conviction why good teaching matters: it matters because education is what will improve the lives of the citizens; it is *the* priority above all; specifically, new and better thought-out ways of teaching, of engaging with students are the key to a better future in tackling problems such as:

- combatting disaffection among the young
- reducing the high numbers of students who drop out of college
- ensuring students' psychological wellbeing (I well remember this moving statement from a leading academic: 'les étudiants cassent facilement': 'students break easily')
- giving disadvantaged students a better chance (another eminent academic stated that: 'l'enseignement supérieur doit prendre sa part dans la lutte contre les inégalités' : 'higher education must play its part in the struggle against inequalities')
- letting students fly (I once heard a leading university president say that he couldn't see why a bright student who started out in a local technical college in a disadvantaged area shouldn't end up in a world-class engineering school like Ponts et Chaussées)

I have simply lost track of the number of times over the past six years that I have heard politicians, ministers and leading academics pin their hopes to the education system as 'un ascenseur social', as a means of progressing social equality.

You might say that these are just words, mere rhetoric, but from my ring-side seat that's not how I see it. The people working to prepare a better future for France and its citizens are, by their own admission, people who have benefitted from strong state support and who passionately want the same for all their fellow citizens. To quote just a few of countless examples that I have witnessed: in August 2014, I was invited to address the CPU / Conférence des Présidents d'Université in Paris at its annual think-in. The two-day event was to be opened as was customary by the Minister for Education. However, the previous day, in a *coup de théâtre*, a new Minister for Education was appointed, Najat Vallaud Belcacem. Nobody expected the new Minister on the first morning of her first day in this new high office to turn up to open this event. However, she did: she stressed that when she looked in her new diary and saw that this was the first engagement listed for her in her new role, she decided that for nothing in the world ('pour rien au monde') would she miss this event. The symbolism was inescapable: it is well known that Belcacem was born in 1977 in rural Morocco, in a village where, as she says herself, there was no electricity or running water. When she was five, she moved to France with her family to be with her father who was a manual worker on a building site. She came up through *l'école de la République* – free and with no student loans – and graduated from the prestigious Sciences-Po institute in Paris. The President of the presidents of France's universities, in welcoming her, remarked that this was an important day 'pour tous ceux d'entre nous dont les parents n'ont jamais fait d'études' ('for all of us whose parents never got to study / to become students'). It was one of the most moving, powerful and carefully coded statements I have ever witnessed. In other words, advancing the welfare of France's citizens through a free, first-class education system which engages students through meaningful teaching is something intensely personal for many of the key people charged with



implementing the first initiative in the programme for government imagined and drawn up by senior politicians in 2010.

At every level, these concerns and values are what power-charge these initiatives: two years ago, I was invited to address a workshop held in an engineering college built on a former bomb site in Saint-Ouen, Seine-Saint Denis, the poorest department in France, far out in the northern suburbs of Paris. The dynamic young lecturers who organised this workshop focused on just two questions: how could they rethink their teaching in order to attract more students from that disadvantaged area and, through that, how could they persuade more girls to study areas such as hard sciences where there is a skills shortage and where they could get good jobs? In other words, these people are value driven and see their responsibility as not just teaching their subject but, through good teaching, as changing people's lives for the better.

A final element is this: these French committees mentioned earlier, charged with evaluating proposals and bringing recommendations to the French Prime Minister, are composed almost exclusively of outsiders, of non-French people like myself. Since the start of my involvement in 2011, all of our recommendations have been accepted by the Prime Minister in their totality even though some of them later led to contentious exchanges in the French parliament. I once asked a *chef de cabinet* why there were few or no French people on these committees and why so much trust and power is placed in the hands of outsiders like me who, once our deliberations are over, can take the plane and go home, leaving local French officials to cope with the fallout. The *chef de cabinet* was clear: the very fact that we are not French and are not in the system or beholden to anyone is precisely what insures that our judgements are honest and impartial. I admired his courage, audaciousness even!

### Part iii:

Just over twenty years ago, students at Harvard began to complain about the poor quality of the teaching they were all too often receiving. A *New York Times* article of 10 May 2007 outlines the story. One student, Joshua Billings, a future Rhodes scholar, made a typical complaint: 'I think many people spend a great deal of time in large lecture classes, have little direct contact with professors, and are frustrated by poorly trained teaching fellows [...] I don't think the lectures added anything. People were sitting there doing emails on their laptops'. So while many students said that they chose Harvard in order 'to be around some of the greatest minds on earth', the reality often turned out to be different as these 'greatest minds' were off busy somewhere else, leaving much of the teaching to 'poorly trained teaching fellows'. The Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Prof. Theda Skoepol, did not disagree: 'people at Harvard are concerned when they hear that some of our undergraduates can go for four years here and not know a faculty member well enough to get a letter of recommendation'. She did not despair, however: 'It's about the pursuit of excellence in teaching', she said. 'We need to put our money where our mouth is. We can't just mention excellent teachers occasionally. We have to notice and reward their efforts consistently'. These complaints and the listening exercise in which Harvard engaged led in January 2007 to the publication of *A Compact to Enhance Teaching and Learning at Harvard*. It was written by a task force on teaching and career development which consisted of nine senior professors from across the university. It took on board the students' complaints and came up with a document (just 83 pages long and available on the internet), a veritable goldmine of extremely pragmatic, practical measures. It ends with 'a call to action'. I frequently refer to it: though published in

2007, it is still as relevant as ever. The fact that it emanates from Harvard helps to convince doubtful colleagues of its value!

The key proposal was this: **‘We need to appoint stellar scientists who care about excellence in teaching as well as in research’** (p. 47).

It contains general principles such as: ‘teaching, like research, can be continually improved in exciting ways’. But it’s especially full of practical (and often cost-free) advice that certainly resonated with me: this includes:

- there are many **simple** [emphasis added] things that teachers can do to make an immediate difference
- Faculty must ensure equitable contributions to teaching and mentoring within and across departments, lest devoted teachers be weighed down with unequal loads
- Faculty who experiment with new pedagogical approaches should be encouraged to go beyond online course evaluations, using additional means to assess student learning and adjust course practices.
- when possible, visits of candidates should include demonstrations of pedagogical skills important to specific areas of training
- the training of PhD students should include a focus on pedagogy
- Faculty colleagues should visit each other’s classes in order to learn and comment (: the concept of the critical friend)
- teaching commitments and teaching excellence should be taken into account in people’s salaries: teaching contributions should be weighed roughly equal with research achievements in recurrent [salary] adjustments
- research on teaching should be taken into account as part of a professor’s research record: we should give credit for the presentations of talks and papers about teaching, learning, and pedagogy in professional settings.

As you undoubtedly know, as well as making this report available on the internet, Harvard also puts much of its pedagogical material online so that it is available for all: Harvard’s teaching and learning centre, the Derek Bok Center (named after the inspirational lawyer and former President of Harvard) and the Harvard Bureau for Study Council are absolute gold mines in this respect. In this context, the website of the EUA / European University Association is a veritable treasure trove, offering *inter alia* analyses of the up-to-date state of the debates on the key issues in learning and teaching, as well as invitations to become involved in communities of practitioners, alongside interesting leads and practical information, for instance regarding forthcoming conferences and related events.

There is one key issue that I have not touched yet on in this short presentation: the often fraught relationship between research and teaching. As we know, this is often seen as a relationship between unequals, with research being more respected than teaching, leading to the establishment of a hierarchy between activities perceived as dichotomous and mutually exclusive. Research is valued as the core activity, with teaching somehow relegated to the periphery, a burden to be pushed down the ladder, offloaded if possible onto early career academics or post-graduates. Allied to this is the notion that research can be evaluated but that teaching cannot, that someone can be an excellent researcher or an excellent teacher, but not

both. Then there is the idea that that it needs significant expertise (a doctorate and a clutch of post-docs) to do research, but that teaching is some kind of instinctive activity that can be done by anyone. What too often happens here is that in the absence of the kind of training that Mary McAleese has recommended in her EU report, new lecturers all too often teach as they themselves were taught, repeating bad practice down through the generations. This dichotomy and, indeed, hierarchy between research and teaching is increasingly being called into question by scholars and practitioners, and not before time. In my own experience, the best researchers are often the best teachers, because they are passionate and competitive about everything they do, and because they are life-long learners, eternally young at heart. We are now seeing an increased focus on research-led and research-informed teaching at every level, and not just from First Year university onwards: a fascinating example of radical new thinking on the fusion of research and teaching is the CRI / Centre de Recherche Interdisciplinaire where Nobel prize laureates like Professor Lee Hartwell of Arizona State University rub shoulders with very young children from disadvantaged areas in the greater Paris region, on the grounds that both are researchers, that children – with their endless questions – are in fact instinctive researchers (until formal schooling all too often represses this), and that both ends of the spectrum are, in the words of Drew Faust, teachers and learners.

If I were a dictator (which fortunately I am not!), I would encourage all university presidents as well as the internationally known researchers – the ‘heavy hitters’ - among my colleagues to do some teaching, preferably to First Year undergraduates. Many of them may object that they are too busy to do so: I would ask them what is more important than inspiring the next generation while they are still listening, still open to persuasion. I would not force people who are not interested to follow my wishes (what could be worse than taking a class from a teacher who clearly wants to be somewhere else?!) and I would not impose heavy teaching loads on those willing to listen to me: perhaps no more than a handful of (widely publicised) lectures every year, but the impact of seeing the most senior person / the ‘heaviest hitter’ in an institution teaching to First Years is more powerful than any PR message could ever be. Practice here varies of course from country to country and even from institution to institution. All too often the academic stars are ‘reserved’ for post-graduate teaching rather than being ‘wasted’ on First Years: I strongly believe that by the time students become post-graduates, they are surely already ‘converted’ to the importance of their discipline, but that in First Year all is still to play for. At a conference organised on the future of European universities, in the Palais d’Iéna, Paris, in 2012, I advocated that all directors of higher education institutes should consider doing some teaching. At the end of my presentation, I was confronted by a group of extremely polite but mystified French university presidents and directors of *grandes écoles* who remonstrated with me that *of course* they were all engaged in some teaching! I have frequently been struck by accounts by leading academics such as these regarding how they came to fall in love with astrophysics or cartography or medieval music or competition law by accident – a passing remark from a teacher, a friend’s father’s map collection, a book spotted in a second-hand shop, a flatmate’s record collection. Convincing first year students that the lives and careers of the greatest academics are often not straight, pre-meditated lines from A to B, but rather a series of detours, happy accidents and pathways followed through curiosity rather than design, can have a powerful, positive and uplifting effect on vulnerable young people who, all too often, despair that at the age of eighteen they do not already know precisely what it is that they want to do with the rest of their precious lives.

I know that many of the issues that I have highlighted in this brief and personal presentation will be analysed at greater length during this rich two-day conference. I wish you every success in your deliberations, and look forward with interest and optimism to your success in pioneering and ensuring better university teaching.