

MAPPING ENGAGED EDUCATOR CAREER PATHWAYS

Policy Recommendations Report

Mapping Engaged Educators Career Pathways

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The project "Mapping Engaged Educator Career Pathways" (Map EEC) aims to support universities with designing and implementing transferable strategies to recognise and incentivise engaged educators, as well as contribute to designing support structures that would embed these strategies within HEIs across European regions.

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Executive Summary

The *Mapping Engaged Educators Career Pathways (MapEEC)* project, co-funded by the European Union, addresses the need for greater recognition and support for engaged educators within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Europe.

As universities increasingly embrace their societal and economic roles and opportunities, this project highlights the importance of embedding engagement into academic career structures, institutional strategies, and policy frameworks at a number of different levels.

Through literature reviews, discovery workshops, interviews, and case studies, the project identified key barriers and enablers experienced by engaged educators. It developed practical tools such as the **Engaged Educators Matrix** and complementary **Strategic Roadmaps** and **Supportive Mechanisms** to support both grassroots and leadership-driven change.

This report presents a collaboratively developed set of **policy recommendations** across three levels:

- **University Level**: Formal recognition of engagement in recruitment, retention and career progression; capacity-building initiatives, structured institutional support, incentive systems, explicit strategic alignment with university missions, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- **National Level**: Integration of engagement into quality assurance and accreditation systems for universities, dedicated funding streams, reform of career progression frameworks, and clearer alignment with broader national development agendas.
- **EU Level**: Inclusion of engagement in EU higher education strategies and funding initiatives, development of EU-wide benchmarks for academic career progression, and creation of transnational infrastructures to support and evidence engaged education.

These recommendations aim to foster a culture where engagement is valued, supported, and strategically integrated into the fabric of higher education, ultimately enhancing student outcomes, institutional relevance, and societal impact.

MapEEC Project Introduction

The concept of the 'engaged university' and the growing expectations around the role a university can play in societal development and economic growth has surfaced as a theme in recent decades. This has led, in some literature, to a focus on university research outputs and the translation of those outputs into licensing opportunities or spin-offs. However, the interactions between higher education institutions and enterprise are many and varied and they have the potential to impact significantly on teaching, learning and assessment as well as research collaboration. Engagement activities encompass relatively simple interactions like an expert lecture or a student work experience opportunity, through to more involved activities such as the development of a customised course in response to a particular upskilling need within an industry sector or a joint application for a funded research collaboration.

And while the benefits of engaged education are many for students, university staff, enterprise and society generally; the literature reveals that, within universities, there is an overreliance on research publications as a measure of success. It is also noteworthy that a focus on teaching standards or excellence in teaching rarely involves consideration of an engaged pedagogy. Meanwhile, many third level institutions refer eloquently to engagement and societal impact in their mission statements and strategic plans.

It is within this context that the **Mapping Engaged Educators Career Pathways** (MapEEC) project aimed to contribute to an improved understanding of the changes needed to ensure enhanced recognition of, and support for, engaged educators in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The project brought together experienced practitioners across the consortium and developed a number of supportive outputs which are summarised below. These outputs, along with expertise from several additional contributors were part of the process of developing this report and the policy recommendations contained herein.

Project Outputs

The ***Investigation phase*** of the project included a review of relevant literature and discovery workshops and interviews to explore what is currently working in universities, how it works and what the motives and incentives are, as well as the perceived and real barriers, and costs of being an engaged educator. The exploration included the views of the individual engaged educators as well as course, department and university management.

Discovery Report

The outputs of this phase were a discovery report and a collection of case studies. The conclusions of the Discovery report could be summarised under a number of headings:

Culture and Partnerships

To foster and grow engagement with external partners the institutional culture needs to illustrate that these relationships are valued. Support from senior management can translate the words in strategic plans into meaningful enthusiastic actions.

While engagement interactions can be treated as one-off transactions, sustained collaborations and stronger value are ensured by developing and supporting long-term partnerships. Universities should foster an institutional culture that values engaged education through awards, recognition events,

Students benefit considerably from engaged educators and a tri-partite approach which includes students, external partners and university staff in planning and executing engagement activities is valuable

Recognition and Support

The lack of visibility of engagement activities can lead to a situation where the value of these activities is not as evident as it should be. It is recommended that universities identify, record, and seek to track interactions as well as identifying and evidencing the impact.

Many educators commented on the lack of recognition for their engagement efforts. It is recommended that engagement activities be integrated into academic recruitment, review, promotion and tenure criteria.

In order to ensure more sustainable engagement by educators it is recommended that universities provide structured support, for example, time allocation, funding, administrative support and materials.

Coordination and Development

Recognising that the challenges and opportunities of the external partners do not divide neatly into academic disciplines, the report recommends enhanced internal communication and cross-departmental coordination through meetings, workshops, and centralised supporting offices. This would provide universities with the opportunity to present a coherent external interface and to collate information on engagement.

While it is generally accepted that engagement is positive for students, staff and external collaborators it is also clear that universities need to establish clear guidelines to ensure that interactions are in line with strategy and that external relationships are responsibly developed and supported. In order to derive optimum benefits, best practice sharing mechanisms across the university should be developed.

Professional development opportunities including workshops, training programs, and conferences should be offered for educators who engage or wish to engage externally.

Best Practice – Case Studies

The book of Case Studies provides a compilation of good practices identified by the project partner institutions, capturing engagement from a number of different perspectives. They include contributions relating to educator practice, institutional support and policy support.

The purpose of the book offering these exemplars of practice is to provide ideas and inspiration for engaged educators, external partners, institutional support representatives and policy makers. The diversity of practices shared include ground-up initiatives built on peer support and peer learning, as well as rewards and recognition programmes developed at university level. There are examples of specific interactions focused on individual courses and also central university coordination of engagement through interface units.

Engaged Educators Matrix

The Engagement Mapping Matrix was developed to support educators in documenting and analysing their engagement activities and as a tool to further the recognition and promotion of engaged educators. Working together to develop the matrix the project team was motivated by the need to:

- categorise the types of engagement, distinguishing where appropriate between in-bound, out-bound and co-creation opportunities.
- describe the engagement activities in detail, including the context, stakeholders involved, and the nature of collaboration.
- assess the estimated impact of these activities using both quantitative measures (such as number of students, hours of engagement, evaluation

scores) and qualitative reflections (such as perceived value, feedback, and long-term outcomes).

Having tested the matrix in diverse settings the final version is a flexible tool that can be used by individual educators to map and measure their own engagement activities, or at a collective course, department or university level to map engagement patterns, contribute to strategic development and organisational learning.

By making engagement visible and supporting a deliberate reflection on engagement interactions and potential impacts, the matrix is a valuable step in ensuring that engagement is better embedding in career development processes, peer reviews and institutional performance reporting.

Strategic Roadmap

While the matrix provides a means of identifying and logging interactions at different levels, for effective lasting change this needs to be accompanying by deliberate, meaningful adoption of supporting practices.

Two complementary strategic roadmaps were developed to support that change: **a Bottom-up Roadmap** and **a Top-down Roadmap**. In each case a clear, adaptable process to foster engagement is illustrated from different institutional entry points.

The Bottom-up Roadmap empowers educators and peer networks to build visibility, foster collaboration, and advocate for recognition. The Top-down Roadmap equips institutional leaders with structured steps to align strategies, systems, and support for engagement across the university. Together, these roadmaps guide higher education institutions in the adoption, implementation, and sustained integration of the Engaged Educator Matrix. They promote a shared vision of excellence in teaching — one that values real-world relevance, student-centred learning, and societal contribution.

The following are examples of supporting mechanisms to enable the kind of institutional change that might be required:

- Customer Relationship Management System
- Dedicated Engagement Facilitators
- Engaged Educators Awards
- Engagement Recognition Framework
- Co-creation spaces, Living Labs
- Recognition for the Invisible Work of Teaching
- Collaborative Hub for Extra-curricular Initiatives
- Engaged Educators Newsletter
- Engaged Educators Support Group
- Engagement Activity Repository

Policy Recommendations

Each of the project work packages and deliverables yielded insights and exemplars and allowed the project team to consider the elements that supported good practices. Through reflection on what worked in various settings, as well as exploration of the success factors in a collaborative workshop, the following recommendations were arrived at – for the most part these recommendations are at a policy level, however some might be considered to be at a practice level. For convenience these are considered through the lens of the problem identified and the potential actors for the resulting recommendation.

Recommendations at University Level

Formal Recognition of Engagement in Academic Careers

- **Problem**: Engagement activities are undervalued in promotion and tenure processes.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at University Level: University Executive, Human Resources, Deans, Academic Quality)
    - Integrate engagement into academic promotion, tenure and hiring policies – ensure that these policies explicitly value engagement.
    - While it is acknowledged that metrics to assess the impact of engagement on student learning and employability, community development, institutional reputation, course relevance and academic satisfaction are difficult to arrive at, it would be valuable to develop processes to evidence and demonstrate the impacts
    - Include engagement in workload models and performance evaluations.
- **Potential indicators**
    - Role profiles and retention and recruitment data
    - Percentage of promotions citing engagement
    - Staff surveys on perceived value of engagement

Capacity-Building and Professional Development

- Problem: A lack of focused opportunities to develop capacity and capabilities in engagement
- Policy Recommendation: (at University Level: Centres for Teaching and Learning, CPD Units, Academic Quality Units, Human Resources)

    - Include opportunities for focused training, mentorship for engaged educators in professional development strategies
    - Provide structured support for special interest groups in engagement or communities of practice
    - Include funding opportunities for focused external training, peer learning and mobility exchanges wherever relevant and possible,
- Potential Indicators:
    - Self-assessed improvement in engagement skills
    - Participation rates in training and other relevant CPD activities
    - Number/frequency of networks, communities of practice

Structured Institutional Support

- **Problem**: Support for engaged educators is informal and inconsistent.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at University Level: University Executive, Deans, Timetabling, Human Resources)
    - Establish dedicated offices or roles (e.g., Engagement Coordinators) to ensure consistent approach and administrative supports.
    - Allocate protected structured time and resources (reduction in teaching hours, administrative support, seed funding).
    - Create institutional frameworks for engagement and include collation of evidence of engagement in order to justify resource allocation.
- Potential Indicators
    - Numbers of administrative supports
    - Percentage of staff with allocated time

Incentive Systems for Engagement

- **Problem**: Lack of financial and non-financial incentives.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at University Level: Academic Affairs, Senate Awards Committee, Communications Office, Teaching & Learning Units)
    - Introduce mechanisms to recognise and reward engagement such as timetable reductions, sabbaticals.
    - Incorporate professional development and leadership opportunities into staff development policies and practices.
    - Recognise engagement through awards, honorary titles and public acknowledgments.

- Increase funding allocated to support engaged educators

- Potential Indicators
    - Numbers of nominees and awardees
    - Visibility in institutional reports and media

Policy Alignment and Strategic Integration

- **Problem**: Engagement is not sufficiently embedded in institutional missions, performance measurements or national higher education strategies.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at University Level: Governing Body, University Executive, Strategic Planning Units)
    - Publish clear objectives or goals for engagement in Statements of Strategy, Corporate Plans or Performance Delivery Agreements.
    - Seek to ensure that university missions clearly align with relevant national strategies and policies
    - Seek to ensure that university performance is in line with international best practice in engagement
- Potential Indicators
    - Clear engagement targets in strategic documents and clear communication around targets
    - Developing reputation as an engaged university – through perspective of local employers for example

Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Problem**: Lack of KPIs and data on engagement effectiveness.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at University Level: University Executive, External Affairs Offices, Quality Assurance Offices, Faculties)
    - Support the development of tools and systems to collate data, measure and exemplify engagement (both qualitative and quantitative measures),
    - Include goals linked to strategic plans and encourage KPIs such as number of partnerships, development of relationships, student outcomes, societal impact, university impact
- Potential Indicators
    - Numbers of engagements tracked

- Partner testimonials and feedback
- New interactions created

Cultural Change and Leadership

- **Problem**: Institutional culture often lacks explicit priority for engagement in practice.
- **Policy Implication**:
  - Promote leadership that champions engagement.
  - Foster dialogue and shared understanding of the variety and value of engagement.
  - Encourage faculty-wide discussions and training on engaged pedagogy.

Recommendations at National Level

Engagement in National Quality Assurance and Accreditation systems

- **Problem**: Lack of focus on engagement in quality assurance and third level accreditation processes at national agency level.
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at National Level: Higher Education Quality Assurance or Accreditation Agencies)
  - Revise QA and accreditation standards to include engagement as a formal criterion.
  - Require institutions to report on engagement metrics (e.g. partnerships, WIL integration, collaboration in course development, delivery and assessment)
  - Link engagement activities to enhanced student attainment and outcomes – such as retention, employability, satisfaction ratings, development of professional identity etc
- Potential Indicators
  - Percentage of accreditation reviews including engagement indicators.
  - Year-on-year improvements in engagement activities evidenced and reported
  - Percentage of courses with embedded engagement components
  - Student feedback and graduate outcomes

Dedicated funding streams for engagement

- **Problem**: Lack of focus on engagement in higher education funding or performance related funding structures
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at National Level: Higher Education Funding agencies, Ministries for Education and Enterprise)
    - Allocate national funding for teaching engagement projects, especially those with societal or regional impact.
    - Include engagement in competitive grant schemes and innovation programmes.
    - Advocate for funding models that reward institutions for integrating engagement into teaching and research.
    - Use engagement metrics in institutional performance reviews
    - Create awards and recognition schemes aligned with national frameworks.
    - Introduce tax and procurement incentives for (e.g.) university/SME/NGO partnerships on student projects.
    - Encourage enterprise representative groups to co-fund engagement initiatives
- Potential Indicators
    - Budget Allocated to engagement
    - Number of funded projects and associated impacts
    - Number of educators recognised annually
    - Number of external partner-supported projects and initiatives

Reform Career Progression Frameworks

- **Problem**: Lack of clear career impacts and progression opportunities for engaged educators
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at National Level: Higher Education Funding agencies, Ministries, Relevant Trade Unions)
    - Update national academic promotion and recruitment guidelines to include engagement as a valued criterion, ensuring a focus on engagement in academic career structures.
    - Encourage HEIs to adopt these frameworks.

- Offer training on engagement practices as part of teacher education and CPD.
- Align engagement objectives explicitly with national lifelong learning strategies

- Potential Indicators
  - Percentages of universities applying engagement criteria in recruitment and promotion processes
  - Participation in educator training and evaluation of the competences gained
  - Surveys illustrating increase in the perceived value of engagement within the academic career

Align with Broader Policy Agendas

- **Problem**: Engagement in Universities should be more explicitly linked to National Development Goals etc
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at National Level: Higher Education Quality and Funding Agencies, Ministries of Education, Enterprise, etc)
  - Align higher education missions with labour market, social inclusion, digital and green transition policies.
  - Use innovation and human capital development as indicators of success .

Potential Indicators

- Higher education clear contributions to national development strategies and metrics,

Recommendations at EU Level

Engagement in EU Higher Education Strategies and Funded initiatives

- **Problem**: Engagement initiatives and objectives in universities should be more obvious within EU-strategic framework, policy documents and funding initiatives
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at EU Level: European Commission, Council of the EU, European Parliament (actions such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Fund))
  - Integration of engagement activities into the European Education Area (EEA) and European Research Area (ERA).

- Explicit mentions of engagement activities in the various actions that emerge – for example Knowledge Alliances, Skills Initiatives or European University Alliances
- Support for infrastructure and digital tools that facilitate engagement
- Support for engagement as a part of the digital and green transitions – academic/enterprise engagement to address societal challenges

Potential Indicators

Inclusion of engagement metrics (KPIs such as enterprise partners, SME involvement, collaborative interactions) in proposal evaluation and progress reviews

Focus on Engagement in Academic Career structures across Member States

- **Problem**: Lack of clear career impacts, recruitment and progression opportunities for engaged educators
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at EU Level: European Commission, DG Education and Culture, EURAXESS, Bologna Process follow-up group, European University Association (EUA), EIT, DG Research & Innovation)
    - Encourage national governments and HE systems to include engagement in promotion, tenure, and hiring frameworks through EU-wide guidelines or benchmarks for career progression. Perhaps explicitly integrated into the ESG or similar.
    - Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe calls that reward engagement in academic roles Potential Indicators
    - Create pan-European awards or fellowships for excellence in educational engagement
    - Support professional development and peer learning for engaged educators
    - Support broad EU communities of practice and educators networks focused on engagement.
- Potential Indicators
    - EU-wide guidelines or benchmarks for recruitment, progression widely adopted
    - Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe calls that reward engagement in academic roles

- Annual EU – Engaged Educators awards
- Inclusion of engagement in European University rankings and visibility platforms
- EU-wide training and development opportunities and participation rates

EU-wide platform documenting and facilitating engaged educators

- **Problem**: Educators often have difficulty in connecting to other universities or enterprises - particularly those that are geographically remote
- **Policy Recommendation**: (at EU Level: Interreg, EIT Knowledge & Innovation Communities (KICs), European Universities Initiative, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Fund, Eurostat)
    - Support the creation of shared tools and indicators to identify, codify and track engagement across institutions and regions
    - Facilitate transnational collaboration between universities and external stakeholders.
    - Create a pan-European infrastructure to evidence engaged education and to build relationships around specific regions, sectors or themes,
- Potential Indicators
    - Clear data on engagement forms and activities at institutional, national and regional levels
    - Co-creation platforms for universities, regional actors and enterprises
    - Funding and resources for joint engagement projects across borders

Conclusions

This report builds on the work of the *MapEEC* project, summarising the outcomes and proposing a number of recommendations at a variety of levels. The recommendations were arrived at through an exploration of the project's finding and a collaborative workshop process.