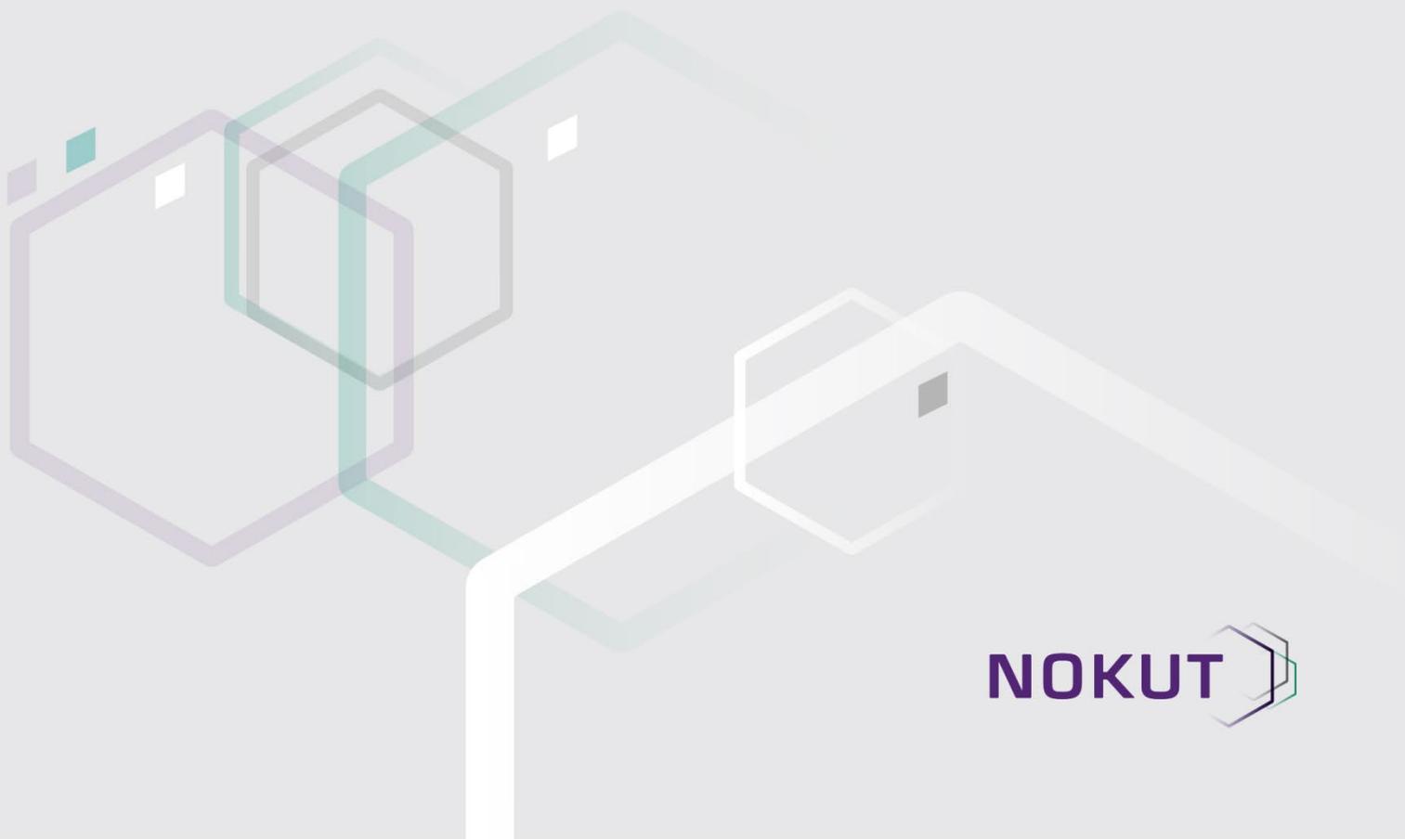


NOKUT's Research and Analyses

# Time-Pressure in teaching and academic supervision

Does this affect the quality in higher education?

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# Time-Pressure in teaching and academic supervision: does this affect the quality in higher education?

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## ***Key words***

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## ***Abstract***

One of the most noteworthy results from NOKUT's National Teacher Survey, is that the time resource allocated to teaching and student counselling is viewed as insufficient by a significant portion of the respondents. These results are consistent across academic positions, subject field and faculty affiliation. In this paper we identify possible causal factors underlying this negative assessment, and examine their potential negative impact on teaching quality. Our findings indicate that, in several academic environments, time allocated to teaching and student counselling may not be sufficient to meet practical needs. This seems to be a key factor in the negative assessment of the time resource. Several developmental trends in higher education seem to underlie (and strengthen) this phenomenon. Though the quality in teaching does not seem to be directly affected by the experienced time constraints, there are indications that they may limit further development and innovation of teaching methods and practices.

## 1. Introduction

NOKUT<sup>1</sup> carried out a national Teacher Survey about educational quality for the first time in 2017<sup>2</sup>. One noteworthy finding from the survey indicated that a significant percentage of the respondents (approximately 40%) viewed the time-resource allocated to teaching and student academic supervision of students as insufficient. Teachers across institutions, faculties and subject fields stated that the time-resource allocated to teaching and academic supervision, “needed to be improved”. The pilot teacher survey conducted in 2016 yielded similar results.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the academic staff reported spending on average 50% of their time on teaching and academic supervision<sup>4</sup>

In this article we have attempted to uncover the underlying factors contributing to the teachers’ negative views on time-resources for teaching and student academic supervision. In addition, we wanted to examine whether these underlying factors may have implications for the quality of teaching and academic supervision. In short, whether the results from the teacher survey are indicative of a potential threat to quality in higher education.

### *The National Teacher Survey*

In 2017 we conducted a full scale national Teacher Survey of educational quality in Norway for the first time (Lid et al 2018). The survey was meant to complement the existing national Student Survey, also conducted by NOKUT, by providing information about teachers’ perceptions of educational quality in Norway. The goal was to acquire a representative picture of the views of the scientific staff on various aspects of educational quality. The survey was distributed to a population of approximately 25000 persons from the academic staff at all higher education institutions in Norway (complete population). Out of the complete population only those who answered that they teach/or have been teaching the last two years were eligible for answering the survey. The total percentage of answers was 26 (out of total population). To our knowledge, there are no other similar national surveys done in Europe, so this is in a way a pioneering project. Tight (2010) has given an overview of surveys to academics on workload in UK, but the surveys does not specifically deal with educational quality.

### *Mass education*

Norway has witness many years of growth in higher education manifesting in a growing proportion of the relevant age groups enrolled in institutions of higher education. High growth rate has led to an increased focus on quality in education and teaching over the last 15 or 20 years. An important watershed was the implementation of the ideas of the Bologna process in Norway, from 2003 and onward. For a relevant (in our context) description of the concept of mass education systems and its challenges, Trow (2005) has pointed among several important themes, to the didactic challenges inherent in the realisation of modern mass education.

Since then several higher education policy initiatives and reforms have aimed to balance growth and high quality. The Norwegian government has responded to the increased number of students in higher education during the last 20 years by funding the employment of more HE staff. A recently published White

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1 The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is an independent expert body under the Ministry of Education and Research.

2 Lid (2018)

3 Amundsen et al (2017)

4 Gunnes (2018)

paper<sup>5</sup> on quality in education signals a clear and continued expectation from the government, of further engagement and responsibility for educational quality in higher education institutions. Among other things, it is expected that innovative educational approaches should be an integral part of the teacher role.

## 2. Research methods

In our original study (forthcoming) we used both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer our research questions. The quantitative methods included regression analysis and examination of bivariate correlations in our survey data. For our qualitative analysis, we conducted a number of interviews with teaching staff from seven academic groups from four separate universities.

Quantitative analysis of the data from the teacher survey helped us to examine potential factors connected to the teacher's assessment of their time resources. These statistical analyses helped sharpen our research questions, and assisted us in developing a plan for the qualitative interviews. The primary purpose of the interviews was to uncover the reason(s) for the negative view on time-resources, and to what extent this could be linked to factors that are critical to educational quality. Due to the constraints in the scope of this paper, however, we only present and discuss the data from the qualitative interviews.

For our interviews, we selected informants from four (randomly picked) institutions and five different subject fields. We chose the different subject fields based on the proportion of time that the informants on average spent on teaching and academic supervision, out of the total time spent on all activities as a member of the scientific staff. The interviews were conducted in groups (divided by their affiliated study programmes) and using a prepared interview guide. Two representatives from NOKUT conducted the interviews. We interviewed 27 informants in total, of which all had experience from teaching. The 27 informants included 15 professors, 8 associate professors, 2 researchers, 1 postdoctoral fellow and 1 assistant professor.

## 3. Presentation and discussion of results

What lies behind the teaching staff's negative assessment of time-resources allocated to teaching and academic supervision?

Our research indicates that the main underlying factor is the experience of time constraints. Behind this feeling of time pressure, we have found several other potential underlying causes. These can be grouped into three main categories: *special features of the teacher role in itself, increase in the tasks of the teacher, and a cultural change in (and around) the teaching role*. Below we discuss each of these three in turn.

### 3.1 Special features of the teacher role

A number of the factors brought up during the interviews are attributed to the role of teachers as such, as well as the manner in which they approach the task of teaching. Three factors in particular are highlighted across the interviews – we discuss each of these in turn below.

*Teaching and academic supervision are potentially “endless” tasks*

The first factor relates to the observation that teaching and academic supervision are potentially “endless” tasks. A recurring point across different interviews was that there was never adequate time to complete teaching-related tasks. Teaching and academic supervision are tasks which have no clear “end-point” and which require a considerable time investment, making it difficult for teachers to limit the amount of time

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5 Det Kongelige Kunnskapsdepartement (2017)

they put in. One interviewee contrasted teaching and academic supervision with research, which has a clearer end-point, and explicit, quantitative benchmarks (for instance research paper publications and citation numbers).

Teaching was described as a «never-ending time-sink», with one interviewee positing that it is an integral part of the “role as a teacher” to tend towards putting increasingly more time and resources into this task. Another interviewee provided an example to illustrate this point: If he were to start preparing for a lecture three days in advance, he would spend all his available time during those three days working on the lecture. The interviewee would limit this tendency by setting a limit to how many days in advance he would allow himself to begin teaching preparations. Another interviewee pointed out that if they were to be allocated for instance 20% more time for teaching, this would not have a noticeable impact on their day-to-day work (implying that the extra time would just be filled with more of the same tasks).

When asked why this is the case, some interviewees responded that the perception of teaching and supervision work as “never-ending” was likely tied to setting high expectations to the quality of teaching, and that there would always be room for improvement.

An implication here seems to be that an increase in the time allocated to teaching and academic supervision, for instance through increasing the share of total working hours dedicated to these tasks, will not in and of itself ease the experience of time as a scarce resource for teaching staff. Our quantitative analyses indicate that there are certain “thresholds” where teaching staff are more likely to be critical of the time allocated to teaching and academic supervision: there is a clear increase in the probability of being critical of the time resource for staff whose time spent on these tasks exceed 65% of total work time. In light of teaching staff’s relatively high degree of autonomy with regard to managing how they spend their workday, as well as the nearly unlimited potential for spending time on teaching and supervision, any additional time resources are likely to be simply “filled up”, provided the teacher herself does not set limits for how much time she allows herself to spend on these tasks.

#### *In a “squeeze” between teaching and research and development (R&D)*

The second factor relates to conflicting pressures central to the position of academic staff. On the one hand, they are researchers, autonomous in terms of managing and prioritizing how they spend their time. On the other hand, they are also lecturers, with a significant portion of their time bound up in mandatory teaching activities. In their role as academic staff, they are required to constantly shift between their autonomous role as researchers, and the stricter impositions on time management that accompanies their role as teaching staff.

Several of the informant groups mentioned the “squeeze” between research- and teaching activities as one potential factor affecting the teaching staff’s evaluation of the time resources allocated to teaching and academic supervision. Academic staff have a limited amount of working hours that have to be allocated between teaching, academic supervision and R&D-activities. Their role as teaching staff can not be seen in isolation, but may be seen as “competing” with their role as researchers.

In all of the interview groups informants expressed that they spent more than the formally allocated time on teaching and academic supervision, and that this had a negative impact on the time they could dedicate to R&D work. One of the interview groups stated that there is a cross-pressure between research and teaching. In this particular academic group, it was evident that teaching was the top priority, and that there was a shared understanding that research work sometimes would have to be set aside in favour of teaching. That being said, formal requirements of the position still dictated that R&D could not be ignored completely. A different academic group told us that they found teaching activities rewarding, and that they

themselves chose to prioritise this work. An impression from the interviews was that the framework governing the balance between these two “competing” activities did not always work optimally, especially in situations where academic staff were required to prioritise between teaching and R&D, and that the result is the experienced cross-pressure between these activities.

In the higher education sector, the lack of uninterrupted, continuous time for research is often brought up as a challenging issue. We do not generally see the same issue brought up in relation to teaching activities. However, one informant stated that planning and conducting high quality teaching requires this type of uninterrupted time – by allowing for continuous, concentrated effort and “slow thinking”. Short pockets of time were primarily suited for administrative and other simple tasks.

Several informants pointed out that, despite the fact that the time set aside for teaching and academic supervision is clearly delimited, there are few signals from the institutional leadership (or faculty or department heads) regarding how academic staff should manage their time when forced to prioritise between teaching and research. In addition, there are few clear-cut goals for teaching at the institutions, beyond the formal learning outcomes. A recent international survey targeting young academics (Susi 2019) finds similar results, highlighting a lack of clarity regarding which tasks are encompassed by the teaching role, how much time these tasks take up, and what the desired outcomes are. In contrast, research activities have considerably clearer (and, to a point, quantifiable) performance metrics, such as publication and citation numbers. Most of the interviewees considered this a dilemma: though the imposition of clearer objectives for teaching might be considered both desirable and expedient, these can on the other hand not come at the expense of the academic staff’s freedom to manage their time with regard to planning, organisation and implementation of teaching. The informants’ statements indicate that the academic staff experience a greater sense of ambiguity surrounding expectations and goals related to teaching compared to research activities.

In one interview, the informants expressed strong opposition to an increase in top-down governance of their activities, for instance through more detailed and systematic time management. These measures in and of themselves would likely not solve the above-mentioned dilemma. However, during some of the interviews some examples of time management measures were mentioned. In one instance, the informant herself placed restrictions on how much time she was allowed to spend on teaching activities; in another, the faculty had implemented an upper limit on how much time academic staff could spend supervising each individual student. Some academic groups had also implemented an upper limit on the total number of lectures. The interviewees nonetheless expressed that it was often tough to maintain these limits in practice, particularly due to high pressure to deliver quality teaching and academic supervision, along with the pressure to treat students equally in terms of the amount and quality of academic supervision. One informant pointed out that the ambiguity concerning what is expected of teaching staff was particularly challenging for newly hired staff.

Drawing some connections to the point above regarding the potential “endlessness” of teaching activities, it may seem like there exists a sort of paradox, where the allocated time for teaching and academic supervision is felt to be insufficient, while at the same time a net increase in the hours allocated to these activities is not likely in and of itself to alleviate the perceived time scarcity. It appears that in many cases the teaching staff themselves set the limit for how much time they allocate to different tasks, which in turn may lead to a tendency to use considerably more than the formally allocated time on teaching and academic supervision – in order to ensure that the quality of teaching reaches what they themselves deem an acceptably high level. This appeared to be an issue tightly linked to the teaching role across the academic groups interviewed, with none of the informants having clear-cut suggestions as to how to

alleviate it. Across the interviews, there was also a marked tendency for the informants to agree that teaching to a large extent was prioritised ahead of R&D-activities.

### *Incentives for teaching?*

The third factor relates to the (apparently) different incentives driving teaching and research activities. The interviews indicate that these differences are perceived as negative, while at the same time not crucial to the priorities of teaching staff. Several informants expressed criticism towards the lack of clear career- and financial incentives to focus on teaching and academic supervision. This critique of a lack of clearly communicated work expectations and accompanying career uncertainties are documented in a recent survey to young academics (Susi et al 2019). At the same time, several informants expressed a certain professional pride tied to the role as teaching staff, and that this contributed to a drive to deliver excellent teaching, which often meant that they would prioritise this work ahead of R&D. As such, it appears that passion for teaching quality becomes a central motivating factor for focusing on teaching and academic supervision, in the absence of clear career- or monetary incentives to do so.

In the Norwegian context all academic staff are expected to conduct both teaching and research – there are almost no purely research-focused positions, for instance.<sup>6</sup> In this context, for academic staff, there are at the same time strong economic and career incentives to prioritise research. However, in some cases teaching appears to be so time-consuming that it considerably diminishes the time left for R&D work. Several informants pointed out that this constitutes a career choice of sorts, where some academic staff end up prioritising teaching ahead of research activities. Partly because teaching *has to be* conducted, but also in some cases because teaching and academic supervision is prioritised highly by the institution itself, and because many academic staff consider student interaction through teaching and academic supervision to be of great value. As such, one can say that many academic staff actively “choose” to focus on teaching, because they consider it both rewarding and important to convey their subject field to their students.

That the overarching goal of “high quality education” becomes an incentive and motivation factor in and of itself may contribute to the mind-set where teaching staff spend the “amount of time it takes” to prepare and conduct what they consider quality teaching. Here it is also worth noting that some informants mentioned that they feel like they “underperform”, despite delivering what they themselves consider an academically strong product. One informant suggested that this might relate to the teaching staff’s high ambitions for their own teaching, which in turn may contribute to the feeling of having too little time to do things “properly”.

When the nebulous goal of delivering «high quality education» becomes the primary motivation for teaching, this reinforces the sometimes self-imposed pressure on teaching staff to spend more time than they otherwise would on these tasks to ensure that the product is “up to scratch”.

As such, the differences in incentives between research and teaching activities may contribute to the observed negative evaluation of the allocated time for teaching and academic supervision, without this necessarily implying that the academic staff are unhappy with the actual *task* of teaching. One could argue that stronger career and economic incentives for focusing on teaching, as well as clearer objectives for teaching, may contribute to alleviate the experienced time pressure.

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6 The Norwegian Act relating to Universities and University Colleges (§1-3a), states that it is a goal for the academic institutions to offer higher education based on excellent research and developmental work.

## 3.2 Increase in tasks encompassed by the teacher role

### *New and more tasks – same amount of time*

When asked about potential explanations for the teaching staff's negative evaluation of the allocated time for teaching and academic supervision in NOKUT's 2017 teacher survey, *all* of the interviewed academic groups mentioned that the scope of tasks that teaching staff are expected to perform has widened. This increase in scope does not appear to have been accompanied by a corresponding increase in allocated time to perform these additional tasks. It is worth noting that some of the informants indicated that the allocated time had in some cases actually *decreased* along with an increase in tasks.

Consequently, an overall impression from the interviews with the academic groups was that the allocated time set aside for teaching and academic supervision does not correspond to the demand, and that a primary reason for this is that the allocated time has not increased along with the increase in the scope of tasks tied to the teaching role. This dynamic also seems to be the primary factor explaining the negative evaluation of allocated time for teaching in the NOKUT teacher survey.

The informants also pointed out that they do not consider the increase in student numbers a primary factor explaining the experienced time pressure – the increase in the scope of tasks in and of itself was seen as the key factor. This corresponds well to data sources indicating that the ratio of teaching staff vs. students has been more or less stable in the last few years.<sup>7</sup>

The increased workload tied to the position of teaching staff appears to encompass both a general increase in the number and scope of tasks, as well as an increase in the complexity of existing tasks. For instance, some informants mentioned a distinct increase in administrative tasks they were expected to perform. Others mentioned the introduction of evaluation schemes (student evaluations, programme evaluations, etc.) as contributing to an increased workload for teaching staff. We see similar tendencies in the higher education sector in other countries as well: Tight (2010) points out that the contemporary academic perception is that academic workloads are increasing to untenable levels in UK higher education, and that this may be linked to the increased time spent on administrative tasks. Tight's findings are based on an analysis of several surveys on workload among academics, from 1960-2004. As such, the alleged increase in teacher workload in Norway *may* be a part of an ongoing trend in modern higher education.

Other examples of additional tasks that were brought up included new course offers (such as academic writing and study methods classes), video recordings of lectures, new mentoring initiatives and various administrative tasks (such as room booking, academic supervision of individual students, managing student feedback, planning and conducting exams, etc.).

In the instances where new tasks have been added to teaching- and supervision, the informants indicated clearly that, additional time had not been set aside in their work schedule to handle the additional workload. Consequently, in practice, the implication is that the academic staff today have to do more in less time. It must be noted, however, that it was not entirely clear from the interviews what constituted entirely new tasks, and what constituted expansions of existing tasks.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: DBH. A measure of number of students per full-time equivalent work year. [https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/statistikk/rapport.action?visningId=159&visKode=false&admdebug=false&columns=arstall&index=1&formel=801!8!802!8!803&hier=insttype!9!instkode!9!fakkode!9!ufakkode&sti=&param=dep\\_id%3D1!9!arstall%3D2018!8!2017!8!2016!8!2015!8!2014!8!2013](https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/statistikk/rapport.action?visningId=159&visKode=false&admdebug=false&columns=arstall&index=1&formel=801!8!802!8!803&hier=insttype!9!instkode!9!fakkode!9!ufakkode&sti=&param=dep_id%3D1!9!arstall%3D2018!8!2017!8!2016!8!2015!8!2014!8!2013)

One informant suggested that teaching staff's frustration with the time allocation may have its roots in all the tasks that come *in addition* to those directly related to teaching and academic supervision, and which they as teaching staff were not necessarily expecting to take on. Another pointed out that, at best, there was a lack of clarity surrounding what can be expected of teaching staff with regard to tasks that go beyond the planning and implementation of teaching, specifically.

Two of the academic groups (i.e. staff affiliated with the same study programme) we interviewed pointed out that the teacher-student ratio had already been somewhat unfavourable for a while, indicating that making time for both teaching and academic supervision of individual students was already a challenge. The introduction of additional tasks had, in their opinion, made the role of teaching staff even more demanding, primarily because the additional tasks were not accompanied by additional time or resources (in terms of material or staff). The overall impression from the interviews with these academic grounds indicate that there are mutually reinforcing effects between a low staff-student ratio, and the imbalance in the tasks expected of teaching staff and the resources they are allocated. Another academic group told us that the institution had conducted downsizing in recent years, while at the same time increasing the amount of teaching. This had, in their opinion, a negative impact on the quality of teaching.

A fourth academic group pointed out that there had not been an increase in staff to meet the demands of growing student population of recent years. They indicated that the number of enrolled students had nearly doubled, while the number of academic staff had remained stable. Again, we must stress that this perception does not correspond well to official numbers, which indicate that the staff-student ratio has been largely stable during the last few years. This does not preclude the possibility that individual institutions or study programmes have experienced such a shift in the staff-student ration – we can, however, not say that there is a general trend towards more students per academic staff. On the other hand, if we accept that the tasks attributed to the teaching role have indeed expanded, it is not unreasonable to assume that a lack of increase in resource allocation to teaching and supervision (in terms of e.g. time or staff) has contributed to a sense of time pressure among academic staff.

#### *Unrealistic estimates of work hours required for teaching and academic supervision*

All the academic groups that participated in the interviews stated that their workplace had some form of formal scheme for recording and allocating time for different tasks – primarily for teaching but sometimes also for academic supervision. It was also clear from the interviews that generally speaking, the budgeted time for teaching and related work was not only sufficient, but *did not reflect the actual time academic staff spend on teaching and academic supervision*.

In one example, the informant told us that the time allocated for academic supervision of students was only sufficient for getting through individual advising on students' theses – limiting the possibilities for providing additional feedback and in-depth guidance on other work. Therefore, group-feedback was widely used in this study programme instead of individual feedback. Another informant mentioned that academic supervision of students would often end up taking a considerable chunk out of the time allocated for teaching.

One of the (apparent) consequences of unrealistic estimates of how much time is required for different tasks, is that it engenders a teaching environment where staff “step up” and spend more time than the allocated time on teaching and academic supervision, without this being reflected in their timesheets. It was mentioned that this type of “volunteer work”, where staff take on additional tasks without it being officially registered, likely contributes to this kind of work is not rewarded, for instance through improved career opportunities.

Our impression from the interviews is that these unrealistic estimates of how much time is required to conduct high quality teaching and academic supervision contribute to employees' negative evaluation of the time allocated to these tasks.

### 3.3 Changes in the teaching role

A commonly held opinion<sup>8</sup> is that a learning environment conducive to high quality education emerges primarily through the interaction between the teaching staff and the students. This "culture for quality" develops within the practical and social framework around the study programme, including constraining factors such as the amount of time available for teaching and academic supervision. In this chapter we examine more closely apparent changes in how students and staff interact today compared to earlier and changes in what is encompassed by the teaching role – from the perspective of the teaching staff themselves. A common thread throughout the interviews is that there have been significant changes in recent years, and that these changes may have contributed to the negative evaluation of the allocated time for teaching and academic supervision.

The informants were asked explicitly whether they had experienced any changes in their role as educators over time, and if they had, what these changes constituted. Informants across the different academic groups indicated that there had indeed been some changes over time – two tendencies in particular were mentioned in almost all of the interviews.

The first tendency relates to the relationship between the teaching staff and students, where the interviewees expressed that contemporary students seem to hold teaching (and teachers) to a higher standard than before. At the same time, the "distance" between staff and students seem to have been reduced, both in terms of formal hierarchies and the availability of staff for guidance and academic supervision. These tendencies may have been strengthened by an increase in arenas where it is possible for staff and students to interact – primarily through technological development and the emergence of electronic communication and social media.

The second tendency relates primarily to a pivot towards the development and implementation of new methods of teaching – particularly those focused on student learning and engagement.

Taken together, these two tendencies illustrate changes in the teaching role which, along with the factors described in 3.1 and 3.2, are likely to have contributed to teaching staff being subjected to stricter time constraints in their workday than previously. As such, these changes appear to be likely explanatory factors for the negative evaluation of the time allocated to teaching and academic supervision observed in the NOKUT teacher survey.

#### *Changing relations between staff and students*

During the interviews, the informants brought up a number of apparent changes that together paint a picture of a shifting relation between teaching staff and students. In short, these changes can be summarised as a pivot towards students seeing education more and more as a "service" to be rendered, and teachers as the providers of said service. As such, they see themselves more as traditional consumers, where higher education is the "product". One apparent consequence of this shift is that students are in contact with teaching staff more often than previously, for instance with regard to academic supervision and individual guidance.

Several informants told us how they felt that the distance between themselves and the students had shrunk in recent years. An example of this is more frequent individual contact with teaching staff, for instance through email correspondences, office visits, etc. In some cases students would contact the informants via SMS and their private phone numbers, and outside of regular working hours (for instance on weekends). Several informants mentioned that this has contributed to a sense of loss of authority and

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<sup>8</sup> See Det kongelige kunnskapsdepartement (2017), p 17

increased stress in the teaching role. They were left with the impression that students today see themselves more as consumers, who feel that they have both the right and opportunity to have certain expectations with regard to the provided service (and perhaps even file complaints if the “product” is not up to par). The sense of lost authority is strengthened by the fact that teachers are often measured and evaluated on their teaching output, in some cases by the students themselves. One informant in particular highlighted the latter development as a key source of insecurity in their role as teachers.

The reduced distance between teaching staff and students appears to have contributed to some teaching staff feeling like they are acting as a sort of parental figure or “psychologist” for their students. According to our informants, more and more of their colleagues experience students coming to them with issues such as mental health problems or performance anxiety. The threshold for seeking out staff members for inquiries and support is lower than before – and for some students, this threshold seems to be exceedingly low. Not necessarily presented as a negative trend, it nonetheless exposes teaching staff to tasks and situations they may not be prepared or qualified for, as well as taking up time both during and outside of working hours.

Another, related point that was brought up by a few informants, was that students today seem to be more inclined to approach teaching staff with academic questions they would previously have handled themselves. It also appears to be more common for students to bring up non-academic issues with teachers. Some informants raised the question of whether this was an indication of a lasting cultural change with regard to what teaching staff are expected to help their students with. A key point here is that the frequent contact with students leads teachers to spend more time and energy per individual student than previously, in many cases concerning non-academic issues.

Furthermore, several informants pointed out that, as a member of the teaching staff today, they have to go further than was previously necessary to accommodate students’ expectations with regard to individual feedback and guidance. Some mentioned that they have the impression that students today are part of a more individually oriented culture, where each student expects to be accommodated for to a greater degree than before. Furthermore, students also appear to be more “pragmatic”, in that they are more results-oriented in their approach to education (as opposed to valuing education in and of itself). One informant had the impression that today’s students are more exam-oriented and career-driven and narrow their focus accordingly. They seek more direct, clear-cut answers concerning exam-related questions, for instance what topics are going to be covered, and are less “curious” regarding topics in the curriculum that are not directly relevant to exams. More generally speaking, it appears that students are more concerned with achieving their desired results than interested in delving into an academic subject field or topic.

Several of the informants also pointed out that these new patterns of contact with students, and the accompanying expectations with regard to individual guidance, express an impression that is something the students can expect from teaching staff – not something that comes in addition to regular teaching and supervision activities. Furthermore, several informants mentioned that students often come unprepared to lectures and seminars – a tendency that reinforces the impression that students see higher education as a “service” rather than something more similar to employment, where there are also expectations regarding their own time investment and efforts.

One informant brought up what he called “perfectionist” expectations about lectures, where students leave teaching staff little room for error. One example of this was students who would “fact-check” lecturers during the lectures themselves, using their personal laptops. The informant did not see this as a negative trait, as it helps ensure that the information they present is correct and up-to-date. However, he thought that students’ instantaneous access to information led to challenging situations where students would sometimes ask for immediate clarifications or explanations to issues or questions the lecturer would not be able to answer (as it would be outside of the material prepared for the lecture).

Another informant brought up how students to a larger extent expect to be “entertained” during lectures – again this was not necessarily seen as a negative development, as it forced the lecturer to reflect on how he

could make the teaching more engaging for the students. A common thread in all these accounts however, is the impression that these changes have contributed to a more complex and faceted teaching environment which makes demands that are more stringent on time management.

The use of social media for educational purposes also seems to have contributed to an increased pressure on teaching and academic supervision. The informants were clear that social media, and being available to students through these channels (sometimes 24/7), have contributed to an increase in inquiries from students. The use of social media also seem to lower the barrier for students to get in touch with teaching staff, possibly due to the informality of the platforms. It appears that the increased use of social media in relation to teaching activities has contributed to increasing the burden on academic staff, rather than increased efficiency in teaching (assuming efficiency is one of the goals of introducing social media in the learning environment).

The increasingly stringent demands on time management these challenges present is, according to the informants, not taken into account when the institutions set up teaching schedules and time allocation for teaching and academic supervision. Some teaching staff have taken measures to limit the use of social media in some courses, to alleviate some of the additional demands on their time.

A dilemma that increased contact with students often raises is who to answer, as well as when and how often none should answer. Do you answer all enquiries from the students, or only respond to the most “pressing ones”? Some informants mentioned that being selective in who they respond to might create a sense of unfairness among the students, where some appear to receive more thorough academic supervision and guidance than others. There was general agreement that the equal and fair treatment of students was an important principle for teaching staff to follow, and that individual contact with students through social media or other channels could potentially create dilemmas for educators regarding how much time to spend on each individual.

In summary, our informants gave the distinct impression that both the form and content of staff-student relations are changing: students approach their lecturers with different challenges and issues than they would previously, and they do so through an increasing multitude of channels. This tendency appears to be closely associated with the increasing tendency for students to see higher education as a “service” they receive, with the expectations and demands concerning teaching and individual supervision this entails. The aggregated effect of these tendencies appears to be increased pressure on the academic staff’s time and resources.

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that the changing relationship between teaching staff and students forms part of the explanation for the negative evaluation of the time allocated to teaching and academic supervision in the 2017 NOKUT teacher survey.

#### *A pivot towards new teaching methods*

The second major change brought up during the interviews was the contemporary shift away from a focus on “lectures and teacher-led activities” to a focus on students’ needs and responsibilities, often conceptualized as “student centred learning”.<sup>9</sup> This seems to have exacerbated teaching staff’s time constraints in primarily two ways. First, through the focus on the development of new and innovative teaching methods, which comes in addition to the planning and implementation of teaching. Second, through the fact that these new teaching methods are in themselves often more demanding in terms of time and resources than traditional forms of teaching (lectures, for instance). Gooblar (2019) describes this development as one that is very demanding. The question is whether high impact practices (active learning methods) in the classroom require so much extra work from the teacher that it can lead to faculty burnout.

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<sup>9</sup> For more(historical) info on the concept of student centred learning see: Damsa et al (2019)

Several informants pointed out that it is increasingly expected that academic staff continuously develop and improve their own teaching methods. Among the academic groups we interviewed, the overall impression was that these expectations come primarily from the leadership of the faculty or department in relation to reforms and development initiatives. The teaching staff themselves hold the main responsibility for the further development of teaching in particular, but also to an extent supervision and advising. Several of the informants mentioned that frequent reforms and other structural changes were becoming common in the higher education sector, and that this too puts additional pressure for staff to find the time in their schedule to dedicate to this kind of work. A common sentiment across the interviews was that this type of development work was generally not accommodated by additional resources in terms of time, but was expected to be completed within the framework of their existing work schedules. One interview group pointed out that changes to teaching methods, content or structure would often require a considerable amount of additional effort and work hours, at least until the academic staff had become accustomed to the new structures. Some members of staff in particular appeared to struggle with such structural upheavals. Stensaker (2018) finds in a survey among academic programme coordinators in Norway that they are generally satisfied with the education and programme quality. However, the survey also indicates that the programme coordinators are dissatisfied with the time available to develop innovative and research-based study programmes. A recently published master's thesis (Sjøbrend 2018) on developmental work in study programs at Norwegian centres for Excellence in Education further supports the idea that time-constraints among academics are the *main barrier* for developing new teaching and learning methods. Academics also highlight the issue of lack of time for development of new teaching and learning methods in a recent international expert evaluation on critical factors for achieving high quality in master programmes (NOKUT 2017).

The development of teaching methods seems to be particularly focused on so-called “student-centred learning”. Several examples of these new types of methods were mentioned during the interviews, including the use of new technologies, project-based teaching, the “flipped classroom” method, etc. Among the informants from the subject fields that tend to lean heavily on traditional lectures, several mentioned the use of teaching methods that aim to increase student engagement, such as workshops and case-work – where the focus is creating arenas for practical and realistic training for future work within the relevant field. This was also described as more time-consuming to carry out than more traditional forms of teaching.

One of the interview groups mentioned the increased use of seminars, while the number of lectures had been held constant. Consequently, the total amount of teaching activities had increased, with a larger share conducted “closer” to the students. Another group noted that the use of student focused teaching methods had increased considerably with the introduction of a new programme design. They were of the opinion that for these kinds of teaching methods to work optimally, it was crucial that students came prepared to class. To ensure that students were indeed prepared, they had introduced a set of control questions, which they would distribute at the beginning of class. The informants pointed out that while the new teaching method was qualitatively better and appeared to be more stimulating for the students, it nonetheless required more preparation than traditional forms of teaching. One informant mentioned that the introduction of new and more varied teaching methods presented a particular challenge to newly hired staff or those new to the teaching role. During the interviews, several informants also pointed out that when hiring academic staff, the institutions set higher criteria for previous teaching experience and pedagogic qualifications, for instance – whereas previously the applicant's research background would be the primary basis for hiring. Teaching competence is tested for instance through so-called trial lectures. These measures may alleviate the transition to these new teaching methods for newly appointed academic staff.

Several informants also expressed the opinion that teaching had become more complex, many-faceted and demanding in recent years. One informant mentioned a shift in focus towards establishing a broader scope in teaching within subject fields, which in turn required more preparation time for teaching staff. Another

informant pointed out that, at the same time, knowledge and research within subject fields are changing at a more rapid pace than in previous years, which also requires more specialised and narrow, in-depth knowledge about a given topic. This contrast between the demand for both broad and in-depth knowledge makes teaching more time consuming, while at the same time contributing to more dynamic and interesting teaching processes.

Another complicating factor that was mentioned was the academic and social heterogeneity within the various student groups. Variations in skill, knowledge and learning dispositions within a student cohort makes it difficult to design a plan for teaching which suits everyone, and requires teaching staff to develop strategies for handling potential challenges stemming from this heterogeneity in various teaching situations. That being said, heterogeneity in student cohorts was not explicitly brought up as a major obstacle in teaching. In some cases, it was even framed as a positive feature, which could help stimulate novel and creative approaches to teaching. The main point, again, seemed to be that planning lectures and seminars for heterogeneous student groups was more time- and resource-intensive – not that heterogeneity in and of itself is a negative trait in a student cohort.

Other complicating factors in today's teaching environment that were mentioned included increased demands with regard to pedagogic competence, following up students where teaching is conducted across different campuses, and the fact that students seem to be more grade-focused and seek increasingly "exam-oriented" lectures and seminars.

Overall, the interviews gave the impression that teaching staff face greater expectations to develop and innovate their teaching, while also having to come to grips with a wider spectrum of teaching methods that are both more time- and resource intensive than traditional methods such as lectures.

## 4. Conclusions

The main conclusion from our interviews is that many teaching staff seem to experience difficulties in finding enough time to perform the array of tasks their position entails, and that these tendencies are found across academic positions, groups and institutions. This sense that the time available to them is "insufficient" to perform these tasks, appear to be the main explanation for the negative evaluation of allocated time to teaching and counselling we see in the 2017 NOKUT teacher survey.

We found a number of factors that appear to contribute to the experience of time scarcity, which we have grouped into three broader points:

First, there are the features of the teacher role itself, which includes challenges relating to limiting the time spent on teaching and counselling activities (which is potentially endless), the dilemma of having to choose between prioritising teaching or R&D, and the incentive structures for prioritising teaching, which seem to lean towards internal motivation and passion for high quality education (as opposed to career or financial motivations).

Second, the tasks encompassed by the teacher role appear to have expanded and become more complex, while the allocated resources (in terms of time, for instance) have been held more-or-less constant and do not seem to accurately reflect the amount of time actually needed to perform these tasks.

Third, there appears to have been some changes to the teacher role itself in recent years, the most important here being changing relations between teachers and students (in part due to changing expectations from and a higher frequency of contact with students), and a pivot towards the development and implementation of new and more student engagement-oriented teaching methods.

As the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, we are also concerned with potential consequences for educational quality these developments may have. Though we did not ask our informants about this directly, some tentative suggestions can be gleaned from the interviews.

First, it does not appear that the three factors above – the features of the teaching role, the increase in workload, and changes in the teaching role – represent a threat to the quality of the teaching *itself*. Rather, that a number of academic staff tend to prioritise teaching ahead of research work, and appear to dedicate a disproportionate amount of their working hours towards teaching and academic supervision, indicate that the quality of teaching remains (and probably will remain) solid in the Norwegian higher education sector. However, there is nonetheless a risk that, as teaching staff spend an increasing amount of time planning and conducting teaching and academic supervision, there is insufficient room to allow for the development and implementation of new and innovative teaching methods. As such there is a danger that the increased workload on teaching staff may inadvertently lead to a stagnation in teaching and teaching methods over time. Furthermore, there is also the issue of whether the workload on academics is sustainable over time, particularly if they are expected to deliver both high quality teaching *and* research – an underlying expectation of the Norwegian model of research-based teaching.

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