

14.12.2025

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**Title**

Prescriptions and perceptions of teaching excellence : a study of the national "Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre" initiative in Germany / Lisa Bockerhoff, Bjorn Stensaker and Jeroen Huisman

**Publication year**

2014

**Source/Footnote**

In: Quality in higher education. - 20 (2014) 3, S. 235 - 254

**Inventory number**

37432

**Keywords**

Lehre ; Hochschule : Wettbewerb

**Abstract**

This article discusses how teaching excellence is prescribed by policy-makers and perceived by higher education institutions in the national competition for teaching excellence (Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre) in Germany. Teaching excellence has become an important topic around the world. Its importance can be seen in the increase in policy initiatives promoting teaching excellence, which are nowadays blossoming everywhere. However, the concept of teaching excellence is unclear and lacks critical discussion. The results of this study show that teaching excellence in Germany is characterised by a focus on the central leadership and its responsibility to create the conditions, through structural and cultural changes within higher education institutions to improve teaching quality. The implications of this approach for teaching and learning are discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)