

# The new dynamic in European HE

## Education International: the staff perspective.

Education International represents over 3 million academic and research staff worldwide, of whom approximately 700.000 live and work in the geographical area now included in the “Bologna” process. Much more than considering the education offer and funding perspectives of HE, I wish in my presentation to address the staff perspective. After all, it is our members who teach the students, do the research on which quality teaching takes place, and who are directly responsible for putting into effect the transition to the “Bologna” levels of study. They also do the day-to-day work in, the associated quality assurance, merit transfer and accreditation structures which underpin the transition. With a less top down process, and trade-union representing academic and research staff more involved as partners at all levels, our members will even be more involved in the implementation.

I would like to frame my presentation along seven items: The role of academic staff in the Bologna process, the Bologna process and working conditions of academic staff, Academic freedom and the status of academic staff, Higher education and the labour market, Lifelong learning, mobility and the Lisbon strategy and the Qualification framework.

### **The role of academic in the Bologna process**

In February 2005, NIFU STEP undertook a survey for Education International on “The role of academic in the Bologna process” based on a questionnaire to which 31 organisations from 20 countries (+/- 69 % of the countries approached) responded. The results of the survey show the following:

- The most common way of *interacting* with the government level on issues concerning the Bologna Process is for national authorities to inform the organisations and to invite them to meetings. More demanding forms such as being part of national committees for the implementation of Bologna, contributing to writing the national Bologna-reports or being part of national delegation to international meetings are less common.
- Most EI-member organisations report that they have been involved in *informing* academic staff about the Bologna process, through using their newsletters, organising seminars/conferences and in other ways.
- The survey gives a mixed picture of changes in the *working conditions* of academic staff. According to the respondents, the most converging development in working conditions of staff in European higher education is the increasing demands made on academic staff to participate in commercial activities and commissioned research. A majority also reports an increase in the demands on academic staff to contribute to life-long-learning activities. A majority see no *major change* with respect to legal protection over terms of employment, and similar issues. 63 Percent of the respondents report an increase in the use of *short term employment contracts* in their higher education system.
- Most of the changes in working conditions cannot be directly linked to possible effects of the Bologna Process. Yet the changes represent part of the context within which the Bologna process takes place in national higher education systems. Some also report that the focus on restructuring of teaching and learning has as a side effect taken time and capacity away from research.
- There are overall positive attitudes towards the Bologna Process reported in this study. However, there is also a general sentiment that the goal of creating a European higher education area may be too ambitious to be realised. The respondents are split in their

view of whether the Bologna Process represents a marketisation of higher education and also to some extent whether the time and efforts used on implementing Bologna exceed the benefits that can be derived from it.

### **Bologna process and working conditions of academic staff**

For Education International, it is clear that academic staff need to work under conditions which enable them to respond to diverse demands. In many European countries, academic staff have responded to the demands of “massification”, lifelong learning, and the pressure of employers and the market place, without additional resources or recognition of the extra burdens which have been placed upon them. The range of extra demand include pressure to publish, to generate income, often for “core” activities and to supervise PhD students in a climate where institutions are increasingly pressing for students to be treated as “customers”. None of these extra demands replace the traditional requirements, nor do they generally attract any extra pay. We believe that this trend cannot continue without inflicting permanent damage on higher education and quality of courses and research outcomes.

The absence of the issue of the employment conditions of academic staff from the Bologna process is clearly attributable to the fact that this group and the unions representing them have so far not been included enough in the deliberations. Any analysis of the issues under discussion –quality and accreditation, the relationship of teaching and research, student mobility, external relations- in the Bologna process, as well as the massive restructuring needed to conform to the Bologna structures, must include a consideration of academic staffs pay conditions of employment and working conditions, if they are to have meaning. The unions have gathered survey evidence of obstacles to mobility as well as the negative consequences of the increasing “flexibility” demanded of the academic workforce.

Increasingly academic staff are expected to pursue funding, undertake administrative tasks, at the expenses of their teaching and/or research. In some countries, unreasonable reliance is placed on the part-time or casualised staff to deliver teaching. Those who expect high quality from higher education institutions must create for those employed there working conditions appropriate to the academic environment that encourage creativity and innovation.

The unattractiveness of the academic career in European universities is likely to make it difficult for the Bologna process or the Lisbon programme, to meet their objectives. European higher education and research cannot fulfil the ambitious aims set for it if it is unable to continue to attract and retain high quality academic staff. If for example, universities in North America are able to offer greater status, career opportunities and research funding, Europe will lose out, despite the compelling rhetoric of Bologna and Lisbon. The European higher education expansion of recent decades has been achieved through the dedication of academic staff, a high proportion of whom will be retiring in the next decade. In view of demographic developments and the growing significance of higher education and research for the ‘knowledge society’, particular steps must be taken to renew the profession, and to recruit and support young academics to make a reality of the ‘European Higher Education and Research Area’. There is a need to improve working conditions and make career perspectives more attractive in order to recruit and retain teachers and researchers.

### **Academic freedom and the status of academic staff**

The concept and practice of academic freedom is now facing a multiplicity of attacks, which are intensifying and growing in complexity. Academic freedom is being boxed into a corner. The very character of universities and of higher education is under threat. The key attacks include:

- Casualisation and the growing reliance on contingent labour, combined with the undermining of tenure;
- Commercialisation of higher education and research, and dependence on corporate interests and the growth of the private sector and reliance on student fee income including differential fees, trends which together amount to “academic capitalism”;
- The attempts at the marginalisation and weakening of collective bargaining systems and of trade unions, so graphically illustrated in Australia and in Tunisia;
- Managerialism and the application of quantitative measurement of performance and outcomes, leading to pressures towards conformity and institutional loyalty;
- Political and religious interventions, and the prescriptions of the “war on terror”, creating a climate of fear on campus;
- The intellectual property rights of higher education teachers and researchers are more threat, particularly from corporatism.

These trends, taken together, threaten to undermine independent inquiry and analysis and serve to engender a culture of self-censorship.

A core part of academic freedom is a defence against pressures to narrow the curriculum and the range of intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom is inalienable from broader human rights and provides an opportunity to promote and defend equality and challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism and xenophobia. Academic freedom must not be allowed to justify discrimination. Academics are the guardians of civil liberty and their unions must support them in this role.

Trade unions themselves are targeted by many of these attacks, but are a key element in the defence of academic freedom: the fight back must involve reaffirmation of our commitment to academic freedom as defined in the 1997 UNESCO recommendation, and the increase in trade union membership density and visibility in institutions. We assert public values underpinning universities and meet challenges to corporatism, to government’s attacks on academic freedom or unions’ rights. The unions must claim their place as guardians also of collegiality. They must build solidarity and intelligence gathering at the international level, including effective use of ILO and UNESCO conventions and recommendations. We forcefully assert that society needs its universities and academics as independent and autonomous players, to ensure that pluralism and the capacity to meet new and as yet unknown challenges can be successfully met.

Survey data suggest a strengthening of an international academic labour market. The available information on trends in academic staff salaries, conditions and career pattern points to the bleak conclusion that there is a steady deterioration, symbolised by the growth of casualisation and “deprofessionalisation” of academic staff. This has happened at the time when student enrolments are dramatically increasing and the importance of higher education widely acknowledged. Initiatives, like the Charter and Code of Practice for the Recruitment for Researchers in the European Union, are certainly welcome but their impact dependent on the positive engagement of governments and employers in the sector. Still general and academic staff are often invisible within university decision making systems, and in performance measurements which inform those decisions.

## **Higher education and the labour market**

The expansion of higher education, growing differentiation in the range of degree courses and a more diverse student population in terms of capacities, interests and motivations, make it necessary to rethink the relationship between academic studies and the world of work. The trade unions assert that higher education fulfils a number of purposes including the pursuit of knowledge and high level skills in their own right, and the broader social value of a highly educated population, as well as (and at least as important as) the needs of the labour market. However, we accept the need for a discussion of the qualification of graduates with a view to employability, provides this does not lead to an uncritical adaptation to short-term interests in the labour market.

A labour market aspect of Bologna which urgently needs to be examined in more details, is the relationship between the three levels, particularly Bachelors and Masters, and professional qualification and careers –many professions are now having to come to terms for the first time with the implications of Bachelors and Master degrees as the entry routes, replacing the pre-existing qualifications. The solutions which are reached may differ between country and country, but also between for example, teaching, social work and para-medical professions and intermediate technician level studies in manufacturing industries. These potential divergent trends make transparency more difficult but crucial to the portability of the new qualifications.

It must be emphasised that higher education is an important activity in its own right, as well as a route in to the labour market. The emphasis is “employability” of graduates places a responsibility on society, governments and employers to recognise the value of graduates and to absorb them into the economy at the appropriate level. This will depend in turn on the recognition and transparency of the new qualifications.

Teacher education is a major element of the graduate labour market, affected by the new Bachelors’ and Masters’ degrees. Teachers education must remain a matter of policy determination at national level, reflecting the diversity of national culture. While teacher education regimes vary widely from one country to another, it is essential that the application of the Bologna principles must not lead to any dilution of teacher education qualifications, or any shortening of courses. The same principles applies to other professional studies too.

## **Lifelong learning**

Higher education and the Bologna process do not take place in a vacuum. The links to intermediate and vocational education, implications of the Bologna changes for schools, and the relations with research and the labour market, all need to be taken into account. But if the “Europe of knowledge” is to have meaning in a period of the unprecedented expansion of human knowledge, the challenges facing us, and the decay of knowledge, the Bologna process and the teachers in higher education across Europe must embrace lifelong learning. Not only will many aspirants to lifelong learning seek to study at higher levels, but this trend will increase rapidly as a growing proportion of the adult population will already have studied at the higher level. This will require a further shift in institutional and teachers’ responses, which Bologna should facilitate. It will not just be “more of the same”. For these reasons and to meet the potentially massive demand, new resources have to be made available if lifelong learning is to be given a reality.

We support the principle of accreditation of experiential knowledge, particularly in the context of lifelong learning. However, given the complexities of such accreditation, particularly between courses, means that it will have to be handled sensitively according to agreed, transparent guidelines.

## **Mobility**

We call for an expansion of mobility programmes for both students and staff. There are still too many obstacles to mobility. These range from problems in gaining entry to and permission to reside in the foreign country, to unsolved problems in the recognition, in the home country, of the studies undertaken and qualifications obtained abroad, to questions of financial support, student fees and uncertain professional prospects. Problems of language and economic differences channel mobility opportunities so that there are wide disparities in the actual opportunities available, and these should be resolved. The trade unions support the idea of regular reports on the social and financial situation of students in Europe to create the basis of a policy of financial support that would grant students from financially weaker social backgrounds and countries free access to the European Area of Higher Education and Research. This must apply in particular to students from central and eastern European countries, if the brain drain of young graduates from these countries is to be reduced. As for higher education staff mobility needs to take account of career development. It is also important to acknowledge that internal mobility within countries can also be an issue.

## **The Lisbon strategy and the Framework of Qualifications**

In the light of the Framework of Qualifications adopted as part of the Bologna process in May 2005 at the Bologna Ministerial meeting, and the European Qualification framework, the Education International is of opinion that there should be only one qualification framework for higher education. The Framework of Qualifications set up at the Bologna Ministerial meeting on the basis of the Dublin descriptive should be the reference at higher education level for the European Qualification framework.

As for the European Qualification Framework, EI stresses that social partners have a crucial role to play in the development of national qualifications frameworks and in the implementation of the EQF. All social partners should be consulted and the Commissions proposal for an EQF should contain clear recommendations on the importance of involving social partners at both national and European level.

It is clear that, while cooperation between relevant ministries should be promoted, the EQF should be under the responsibility of the Ministries of Education. Quality insurance and the implementation of the EQF must be undertaken by public authorities or public accredited quality assurance agencies.

As for the Lisbon strategy, Education international welcomes the recognition of the role of HE in the development in society but also wants to emphasised that it is not only important to declare that HE has an important role to play, it is also important to make the means available so that HE can match these expectations without increasing the pressure on the institutions, the general and academic staff and the students. We welcome the greater role higher education is playing in the social and economic development, but higher education cannot be reduced to a commodity neither to an instrument to serve economic development. Higher education has always had a mission in society and this role is more than true in the knowledge society.

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