



**Education International IVth International Conference
on Higher Education and Research
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Universities: Key Partners for Development

General Report by Paul Bennett

Introduction

This fourth Education International Conference on Higher Education and Research in Dakar, Senegal, has carried forward the work of the 61 affiliates in the sector in a number of important ways. The venue itself has been significant, giving reality to a long-expressed wish by the higher education unions to more fully integrate unions from the South in our work, and to enable their voice to be more directly expressed in the global debate. EI has thus demonstrated the important place of higher education and research in non industrialised countries in its work, and the global solidarity of the unions in the sector.

But this has also been a working conference, putting forward concrete proposals for EI's work on universities' role in development and an alternative view of the international collegiate community of higher education and research, in contrast to the challenge of the global marketplace, driven by commodification and economic imperatives, which dominated our debates at the 3rd Conference in Montreal.

EI has kept its eye on these big long-term issues through a period of exceptional uncertainty in the global society. We have now moved from the unwelcome but relatively clear challenges of the GATS, to a more complex and diffuse environment in which bilateral and multilateral agreements threaten to stand alongside or displace GATS as a challenge to the sector.

The stand-off between the industrialised and developing countries at Cancun, has marked a new and significant stage in the globalisation debate. Whatever the outcome it is clearly only a pause, and a re-grouping. We need EI to be ready to meet the challenges of the next phase, whatever form they take.

A unifying theme of this Conference has been to re-assert educational values as the determinants of the future of higher education and research, fundamentally challenging the validity of the 'trade' paradigm.

EI's higher education and research sector must keep up the impetus achieved by this conference, to carry our work forward at the 4th World Congress in Porto Alegre, and into the program and budget for 2005-2007.

Higher Education, development and trade union solidarity

Development must be at the heart of EI's higher education and research agenda. EI and its affiliates must provide solidarity and concrete support for the unions in Africa and other developing regions, in order that they can find and put into effect their own solutions. We must recognise that the problems and the solutions will vary from region to region and country to country. In rejecting the World Bank's "one size fits all" prescriptions, we must not fall into the same trap ourselves.

The diversity of national responses that are required, can only be achieved by the national union voices in developing countries being heard, and real partnerships being forged between them

and EI and its affiliates in the industrialised world. We have spoken the rhetoric of the international solidarity and of the international community that is higher education. We must do more to give the rhetoric reality.

While the solutions must vary from country to country, this conference has helped to identify and define common themes, and to ensure that there is a more balanced, global approach to issues central to EI's vision for higher education.

These themes include:

Resources: There is an evident need for more resources for higher education and research in the developing countries, and for it to be acknowledged as a key element of infrastructure, and not a luxury to be traded off against primary education investment. Nor in international trade negotiations is it to be traded off against deals in other sectors like agriculture.

The public sector: EI has a strong principled policy that education, including higher education and research, belongs in the public domain. While this policy is clear, and it is straightforward to promulgate the policy when higher education institutions or programmes face threats of privatisation, a more elaborated policy is needed where countries have existing private education sectors. EI must insist that, as far as is possible, such private institutions meet the same standards as public institutions in terms of accountability and transparency, access, democratic governance and academic freedom.. Given constraints in public funds, public institutions must be given priority of access to these funds, and for-profit institutions should not receive general support from public funds.

Academic freedom: Academic freedom is a key theme which needs to be orientated in terms of the realities which exist in different countries and cultures. What have been termed "European-North Atlantic' models cannot simply be lifted and applied in other contexts, for example where the state exercises a close legal role over university governance, or where academics are effectively civil servants. EI must support the unions working in all these environments, in developing solutions which maximise academic freedoms. It is important to recognise that institutional autonomy and limits to government interference in universities' internal affairs, important as they are, are not in themselves guarantees of academic freedom for staff, and particularly in an increasingly finance led system, driven by the principles of management rather than collegiality, academic staff need to confront institutional encroachments on their academic freedom (and also threats to related rights including intellectual property rights).

Linked to this, must be building strong unions in the sector, able to develop and effectively press for these protections. The study of academic freedom in countries of the Asia Pacific region, undertaken by EI for UNESCO, is a valuable resource and a model for further work for Africa and Latin America, and this should be actively pursued in the next action programme of EI.

Staff conditions: Union strength is essential also in defending jobs, fighting casualisation, ensuring that salaries are actually paid, ensuring that wage levels are sufficient to enable academics to live and work in dignity without taking second jobs in other sectors.

Research: A cornerstone of EI's global conception and the academic life is that teaching, research and scholarship are intrinsically linked. It is clear that for many academics in developing countries, resource constraints and conditions of work make this all but impossible. But as well as the concrete problems of access to research, the lingering colonialist mentality in international institutions that denies developing countries the right to their own research capacity must be challenged - and it is EI's job to take the lead in this fight. We have heard from a colleague from Ivory Coast: 'Africa must be allowed to think' and we must help make that simple demand a reality.

Structural adjustment: The failure of structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank on developing countries, places a major responsibility on the international community. World Bank programmes of structural adjustment in education sector have usually been accompanied by preferences for private sector solutions, and while favouring primary education, the imposed policies have been based upon an arrogant assumption that developing countries do not need the capacity building role of robust national higher education and research. The damage done by these crude and inappropriate measures cannot easily be undone. However, there must be a clear recognition by the international institutions of the key place of public expenditure and the public sector in national infrastructure, and equally, a recognition that all sectors of education, including higher education are essential elements of that public infrastructure. It is worth reiterating in this context that, contrary to the effects of structural adjustment policies in some countries, private providers should not be given favourable treatment and should be expected to meet the same standards as the public sector, or go out of business.

Brain drain, offshore institutions, the Internet and cultural challenges

Brain drain: No problem faced by the developing countries' higher education systems is more clearly in need of an international union approach than the question of 'brain drain'. Brain drain is a problem not only of qualified personnel being attracted to other countries by the prospect of better careers and resources, but also of students going abroad either on leaving high school or on completing a first degree, and not returning to their home country. Allied now with the problems of brain drain, are the difficulties created by offshore institutions from industrialised countries, many of which undermine indigenous higher education, or create two-tier academic communities. We have only begun the debate on the problems and the strategies to confront them, here in Dakar. The unions in industrialised countries have an important part to play in taking this debate back to their members and their institutions, whose employment and global market practices are creating these problems.

However, it is not realistic to attempt to stop brain drain, which not only reflects economic and social realities at the global level, and in some circumstances generates 'brain gain', but also arises from the positive international character of higher education. Unions in both developing

and industrialised countries need to work at the national and international levels to mitigate the negative effects of brain drain. For developing countries' unions, this means the negotiation of agreements on job security and career progression and research opportunities including in particular resources for research, as well as social guarantees to the families of returning academics, including pension rights and assured provision for the education of their families.

For unions in industrialised countries, action must include ensuring the status and conditions of teachers from abroad in their institutions, and pressing their national authorities to reach agreement with the countries which are experiencing brain drain, in order to achieve protections for academics wishing to return to their own countries. EI can help to share knowledge among affiliates and to develop model agreements in collaboration with UNESCO and other relevant international authorities.

Brain drain is a national as well an international phenomenon. Academic staff in many countries are attracted out of universities into other national economic sectors by better salaries, conditions, career prospects or research opportunities or resources. In developing countries, this trend may be driven by the actual reduction of academic salaries below a realistic level. National unions need to take up these internal labour market issues both through collective bargaining and through dialogue with government and other relevant national authorities.

Offshore institutions: The growth of overseas campuses of industrialised countries' universities creates serious problems for the developing countries in which they are set up. These problems include: damaging distortions of the local academic provision; undermining indigenous institutions; labour market distortions; and the exposure of students to high cost courses or programmes which may not meet local needs. Staff in the country of origin may face unacceptable demands in their working lives, different and inferior contracts to work on offshore campuses and the erosion of industrial relations in their 'home' university.

It is in the interest of all academic staff and the students they teach for offshore campuses be brought within the bargaining arena of the home university as far as is possible and subject to the same criteria and processes, for example in respect of quality and the recognition of diplomas, and EI must work with its affiliates in developing and industrialised countries to achieve these goals, including action at the regional level where appropriate.

Internet and ICT: The phenomenal development of ICT and in particular the internet is potentially a great democratising tool for higher education and research; however the cost and availability of both hardware and software between industrialised and developing countries is actually creating new inequalities, while the commercial exploitation of ICT in the field of higher education is one of the main threats posed by the growth of the global market place in the sector.

Commercially delivered international testing systems, heavily dependent on ICT, are a further threat to the integrity of national systems, which EI must seek to bring under regulation.

EI and its higher education affiliates must work together on guidelines and strategies to maximise the benefits of ICT, to equalise internet access between regions and to contain the negative aspects, particularly in terms of commercial exploitation. This will require pressure on international institutions to share the educational benefits of the internet, and to regulate its use. EI must work with its affiliates and the international institutions to seek to ensure the availability of both software and computers to higher education institutions in the developing countries - otherwise there is a real danger that as well as the general resource gap between rich and poor countries, access to the internet will impose a new differential between industrialised and developing countries, and create a qualitative gap that will become increasingly harder to bridge.

Cultural aspects: All these trends can threaten the national cultures of the countries which face the challenges of brain drain and offshore campuses, while the internet is likely to contribute further to a 'globalised' culture dominated by 'Atlantic' values and by a version of the English language. EI is uniquely placed to ensure that national cultures are sustained in the face of new forms of commercially determined global imperialism.

Higher Education and Quality Teacher Education

EI's policy for the quality of the teaching profession, depends on the location of teacher education in higher education, the promotion of opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD), and the inter-action of teacher education and CPD with educational research. The growing threat in many countries world-wide, to both the supply of teachers and to the quality of teacher education needs to be urgently addressed, as the teacher shortage threatens to reach crisis proportions during the next decade. This is particularly true in the industrialised countries, as the 'baby boom' generation born just after World War II approaches retirement, and these countries' teacher shortage has a consequential impact on developing countries, as Europe and North America actively recruit scarce teachers in all sectors from developing countries.

EI's affiliates globally have a shared interest in developing and actively pursuing a policy which ensures that quality teacher education and the status and conditions of serving teachers are in developed and sustained in all countries to meet their own needs, so that national systems do not feed on one another in this way. Then teacher mobility and exchanges can fulfill their proper role as enrichment of education in the host country and of individual teachers' professional experience.

EI must address the crisis of teacher shortage, its effect on teacher quality and on curricula. The EI affiliates in higher education and research must seek to ensure that teacher education is sustained within higher education on the basis of high quality educational research, in which serving teachers must all have opportunities to contribute.

Academic staff tenure and conditions

The continuing trends for the erosion of tenure or its equivalents have been noted at this Conference. The reduction in the proportion of tenured posts, the growth of different forms of casual, part-time or contingent employment, all pose challenges for staff working conditions and

career prospects, but also for academic freedom, intellectual property rights and the quality of higher education. The formal or de facto growth of teaching-only academic positions is threatening the vital links between teaching, research and scholarship. These trends are also making it more difficult to implement equalities or affirmative action policies.

Unions must re-double their efforts at the institutional level, with the insistence on the application of existing procedures, and negotiations of improvements on them; and at the national level through negotiation with the appropriate authorities to establish a better environment for the protection of academics' conditions of service.

The underlying trends of both globalisation and decentralisation and deregulation at the national level, threaten to sharply reduce the role of national governments and public authorities. EI and its affiliates need to work to reverse this trend, and we must use the international means at our disposal, including a more pro-active use of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Personnel including in transnational developments.

In the debates and information exchanges within the EI higher education constituency, collective bargaining and salary/conditions of service issues need to be given a greater significance, in particular making use of electronic media for information sharing and mutual support. We also need to collectively address the strategic and organising problems of contingent labour, including the renewal of cadres of trade union activists, for example as the 'baby boom' generation in the industrialised world approaches retirement. The unions themselves must seek to guarantee minimum employment standards to counter decentralised bargaining, for example through the mandatory points of agreement set by the NTEU in Australia.

General Staff in Higher Education

Universities characteristically are large, complex institutions, in which a growing range of professional, administrative, technical and general staff support the teaching and research function in cooperation with academic staff. These workers share many of the challenges and bargaining issues of academic staff, but also face distinct problems including in some roles, poor pay and conditions. They play a key role in determining the quality of student experiences and the quality of learning outcomes.

National systems have different patterns of development, with in some countries (France), the number of support staff growing even more slowly than academic staff in proportion to the massive growth in student numbers, while in others, there has been a remarkable growth in technicians and ICT specialists to support - or potentially in some cases supplant - the teaching function. Contingent labour is at least as much a problem for support staff as for academic colleagues. In some countries, single table bargaining has ensured that academic and professional staff issues can be negotiated within the same national framework.

The EI unions must work together at the international, national and institutional levels to find common solutions to these questions. It is particularly important to address the equalities agenda, to ensure that all forms of discrimination are eradicated. The professional staff are

vital to the university mission and must be able to assert their rightful place in the university community and in the union debates on the global, national and institutional challenges we all face.

From GATS to a more complex globalisation agenda

This brings us to the issue of globalisation in the higher education and research sector. In the 18 months since our Montreal Conference, we have seen the dragon of GATS which dominated our concern then, if not slain, at least temporarily driven back into its lair. However we are witnessing the emergence of a potentially still more dangerous and intractable threat, from an anarchic global market of bilateral or multilateral deals, unpoliced and unregulated. We are even seeing in some quarters, a premature nostalgia for the WTO, 'as the devil we were coming to know' at least governed by identifiable regulations and structures. We are in the middle of this debate and must ensure that we find our voice and put it forward strongly and in partnership with other trade unions, NGOs and even where appropriate, university rectors' organisations, in defence of our sector and our values.

This Conference has played an important part in shaping EI's voice. Our discussion of the framework paper from the Global Task Force, and the proposal for the straightforward removal of education from trade agreements. We have linked this with a set of criteria for inclusion in international treaties and instruments, for the protection of education and of the work and conditions of teachers and researchers. EI and its higher education affiliates must work together to achieve more effective use of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Personnel.

Also, the draft guidelines on transnational higher education which were prepared as a result of the 2001 Jomtien resolution, have for the first time received a thorough debate in an EI forum here in Dakar, and can now be expanded and finalised in a way which takes account of industrialised and developing countries' concerns, as well as making use of the Code of Ethics also approved at the Jomtien Conference.

We have noted that the next Inter-Ministerial Conference following Cancun will be in Hong Kong in 2005, and it would be useful to explore the possibility of the next global higher education conference of EI to be held in a time and place to seek to influence that event.

If these proposals are carried into policy next year at the EI 4th World Congress, we will have a powerful and uniting policy for the defence of our sector. But this will only be the start in Porto Alegre, at the higher education caucus and the Congress and through the next three-year programme of EI, we must deepen our policy and the strategies for its delivery.. The 'strategy' section of the task force report will need to be discussed and put into effect in all our unions, and at national and regional level under the coordinating umbrella of EI and through the continued work of conferences like this one in Dakar.