



Pan-European Structure

POLICY STATEMENT ON THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN THE 'BERGEN' ROUND

1. Introduction

Education International represents over 3 million academic and research staff worldwide, of whom approximately 650.000 live and work in the geographical area now included in the 'Bologna' process. ETUCE provides a forum for these unions, and The Higher Education and Research Standing Committee of Education International (Europe) has actively developed and represented the views of its member organisations in the sector since the inception of the Bologna Process. We have expressed great concern at the lack of direct representation of the voice of academic and research staff within the Bologna Process. This stands in stark contrast to the involvement of students' organisations which has been continuous since the first follow up meeting in Prague 2001 and which has also been funded from EU and other sources. We do not begrudge the involvement of the students, but we believe that our members as an essential pillar in delivering the transitions called for by the Bologna, Prague and Berlin inter-ministerial conferences, should be accorded at least equal treatment with them. 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. If the process is less top-down, and trade unions representing academic and research staff are involved, we will be able to involve our members in the implementation.

2. The international character of higher education and research

Higher education and research have historically been activities which have taken place regardless of international boundaries almost since their inception: they are truly transnational in character. The underlying philosophy of 'Bologna' is one which the unions can support, insofar as it remains rooted in key principles like the public character of universities, promotion of access and mobility, academic freedom and quality. The relationship of 'Bologna' to the wider debate on globalisation and the threatened commodification of higher education within a global marketplace are a matter of deep concern to us. Experience from outside Europe confirms our fears that such a process can destroy the qualities which provide the value of higher education and academic research, in particular the capacity for objective inquiry and analysis without which modern societies will be unable to sustain and renew themselves.

The higher education and research unions of Europe, represented through EI and ETUCE, have been strong supporters of the proposed European Areas of Higher Education and of Research. Up to now the two processes of integration in the fields of higher education and research have to a great extent been developing separately, in spite of the clear overlaps between the two. Separate proposals reinforce the fear that the official aim is to break the vital link between higher education and research. The trade unions now call for the unification of the two 'Areas' in our members' daily work, leading to the creation of a European Area of Higher Education and Research. We recognise the difficulties contained in this proposal, given the different geographical coverage of the two 'Areas'. However, we believe that integration as far as is practicable is important in order to sustain the links between higher education and research. Strengthened links between the Directorates General in the European Commission responsible for higher education and research would be an obvious first step. It is also important to bear in mind that while quality higher education depends on its links to research and scholarship, research activity also operates independently with its own culture and goals.

3. European higher education and globalisation

The European trade unions representing academic and research staff, acknowledge that European higher education and research policies play an important role in the international debate on the liberalisation of trade in services, and are developed in the context of that debate. They consider that education must remain a public good and not degenerate into a commodity. They expect a clear commitment from the participants of the Bergen conference to measures against the commercialisation of education and research. Neither the market and associated short-term trends, nor primarily commercial interests but rather the pursuit of knowledge should determine the aims and content of academic courses and research. Accordingly, the WTO GATS negotiations regarding higher education should be suspended and the control of transnational education in all sectors should be entrusted to UNESCO. EI has been involved in the work on the UNESCO/OECD guidelines, and we attach great importance to getting them right and then implementing them. We believe that higher education and research must do justice to its particular social responsibility for economic, social, cultural and ecological developments, and inter-ministerial discussions at the pan-European level must promote this objective. As the GATS does not deal effectively with quality assurance, there is a real risk that it will open up the market to rogue providers whose only interest is Higher Education for profit. We are also concerned at the implications of the draft directive on Services in the Internal Market, and urge that there is full consideration of the potential impact on service providers in education and other public domains, and that this consideration should include full consultation with the workers in those fields.

We understand that discussions at the global level regarding accreditation are raising some concerns from outside Europe that Bologna may be putting in place criteria and structures which inhibit the free workings of a 'market' in higher education. We would argue that if that is the case, the Bologna initiative is clearly working as it should, to protect the quality and integrity of European higher education and of the different national systems within it. If external sanctions are threatened for example against the countries which have entered the European Union with more 'marketised' higher education systems, and which now have to

conform to EU standards, we believe that a collective political solution must be reached which respects the value of the EU structures and which resists this attempt at punishment.

4. Higher Education in the public domain

As mentioned above, higher education and research are activities of civil societies which belong in the public domain: the public character of higher education must be sustained. This is essential if the long-term role of higher education and research is to be achieved, in respect of the generation and transmission of knowledge and culture; widening access; and lifelong learning. Exercising this responsibility is a complex task: universities have a social responsibility and must be publicly accountable, but on the other hand they must retain the institutional autonomy which is essential to advance scholarship and inquiry, and to academic freedom.

It is not in the long-term interests of society, the students, employers, or universities themselves, to commodify higher education itself. There is growing evidence that a high fee regime does not guarantee quality, but in fact may be associated with a reduction in quality. One of the clear consequences of a higher education 'market', is the favouring of some subjects over others because of economic criteria, which is already placing humanities courses in some countries under threat. Only the protections that a genuine public sector ethos provides can protect against this erosion of the essence of a university.

Higher education is a public good and it belongs in the public sector. EI does not welcome the growth of private provision and of private institutions, which are the clearest possible manifestation of the commodification of higher education. We believe that the best way of ensuring that the public ethos prevails, in the interest of society at large, but particularly to protect students and staff in private institutions, is to require the private sector to meet the same high standards as the public sector. Meanwhile, we recognise the need to defend those standards within the public institutions themselves, against creeping commercialisation and the erosion of quality.

5. Access

The unions are convinced that there must be greater access to higher education, breaking down the existing artificial obstacles to access based on socio-economic factors, gender, ethnicity or religion, or other factors. Ability to benefit must be the guiding principle. We oppose high fee regimes, which are clearly hitting access, burdening young people with debt, and affecting their choice of study.

Social participation in scientific and technological progress must be guaranteed in the interests of both the individual and society in general. The knowledge society has as its prerequisite, informed and competent citizens who are capable of actively using the new possibilities offered by new forms of learning and working, including information and communication technology, and capable of confidently dealing with a rapidly changing world. Greater access to higher education must be achieved through a programme of expansion of higher education institutions, and a parallel expansion in the forms and media for academic study. It is essential that academic staff are closely involved in these processes, both as creators and mediators of

these new forms and media . The investment in the future necessary to achieve these goals must be realised in the form of a binding plan at European level – increased access without the matching investment will undermine and devalue the academic ‘product.’

Access to higher education must be extended to all those able to benefit from it. Increasing take-up by already privileged socio-economic groups is a distortion of the concept of access. As participation in higher education becomes a steadily more significant indicator of success in the labour market, access to it must be more equitably distributed. ‘Commodification’ of higher education is leading some national systems to a dramatic expansion of their intakes of overseas students, on a high-fee basis. While a genuine mix of indigenous and foreign students can add an important dimension to the higher education experience, this should not be at the expense of access by home students. Nor should it lead to overseas students being corralled in high fee courses with little contact with home students.

Mobility is an important part of access, applicable to both students and staff, and yet there are still serious constraints for example, in terms of languages and socioeconomic differences and these difficulties need to be addressed.

6. The Bachelors and Masters cycles

The trade unions support the introduction of consecutive bachelor and master degree courses in European higher education institutions, provided that the possibility to continue from the bachelor to the master stage is guaranteed, subject only to individual students’ essential academic progress being made. The trade unions reject any arbitrary restriction on access to the master stage, whether in the form of a specific grade average or a quota (eg. such that only 40% of graduates at bachelor level would be permitted to continue to the master level). The students themselves should decide with which qualification they will complete their higher education.

Progress to the new pattern of qualifications, their relationship to pre-existing qualifications, and the level of acceptance by employers, varies from country to country and sector to sector, and this is likely to be the case for some time to come. Bachelor level qualifications pose a number of issues regarding content and the short length of courses which are causing some countries to look at ‘complementary studies’ outside the mainstream course to cover necessary ground. On the other hand, at least one country is introducing even shorter ‘foundation degrees’, which others may be attracted to as a cheap option. Diverse national responses to the requirement for Diploma Supplements may inhibit the use of this potentially valuable instrument.

As the new qualifications are not yet fully accepted by private and public sector employers, the trade unions call for continued work on introduction of Bachelor and Master Level degree courses to flow from the 2005 Bologna conference taking place in Bergen, with the unions representing the staff actually engaged in the process of creating the ‘Bologna’ qualifications now involved in the work of analysis. Unions must be involved in the decision making process. Decisions on whether the new bachelor and master degree courses are of a sufficiently high standard to universally replace the old degree courses and qualifications must be based on

this analysis. Any other course of action would be irresponsible towards the students, and the long term credibility of the institutions.

The quality of the new qualifications must be at least as high as those they replace. Masters' degrees must build on the Bachelor phase and be at a higher level, but it must also be possible for significant mobility to take place between the Bachelor and Master phases – mobility between institutions and countries, and also between disciplines, provided there is a measure of continuity between the Bachelors' and Masters' programme. The Bachelor/Master model has potential advantages in terms of differentiation of study which should be taken up. Bachelor degree graduates should be able to pursue their studies at Masters level according to their interests and abilities: there should be no quotas.

The viability of the three and two year cycles depends on the financial support available to students to complete them: the unions take the view that students proceeding to the Masters cycle must be given financial supported to at least the level of the Bachelors cycle. Tuition fees may soon arise as major political issue as a result of the EU Services Directive, which will limit the ability of different national systems to charge widely varying fees for what (thanks to Bologna) can be seen to be broadly comparable services. The Bologna inter-ministerial process and EU policy developments need to take account of the wider implications of actions in either sphere.

7. The Doctorate as the basis for an academic/research career in Europe?

The trade unions do not consider the positioning of the doctorate as the third stage of higher education as being suitable to increase the attractiveness of this qualification. Rather, the trade unions call for the recognition of the doctorate as the first stage in an academic/research career, and the only formal requirement for promotion to higher academic positions. Young academics should be employed on doctoral research contracts and paid accordingly. Junior academic and research staff should not be kept on 'atypical contracts' which essentially exploit their labour for indefinite periods, or on a series of short-term contracts. For the Lisbon Strategy to succeed in making Europe the most competitive knowledge based economy, will require research at the international forefront. Thus, increasing numbers of young people have to be attracted to a research career in competition with other sectors of society offering creative challenging and well paid careers. Since doctoral studies are the necessary first phase of a research career – or other research-based professional career – the conditions offered to doctoral candidates must be such that the best and most talented will enter. This calls for employment with attractive conditions (including normal social security entitlements), as well as structured and supervised training by professionals for example according to the Norwegian model.

At the Bologna conference in Bergen a Report on the Different Routes to the Doctorate in Europe should be presented. It should analyse concepts and practice and develop perspectives on a recognised European status for young academics. Only in this way will it be possible to develop transnational academic co-operation.

If the concept of Europe as a knowledge society is to be given reality, people qualified to doctoral level must be absorbed into a wider range of labour market roles. While doctorates

are an essential stage in academic careers, they also have much to contribute in business and public administration, and other emerging employment sectors. Research is almost universally under-resourced: research income and fee income from doctoral students must be spent on related research, not absorbed into the general finances of institutions.

The best way of ensuring mutual trust and confidence in the various European doctoral programmes is to facilitate mobility of staff and doctoral candidates. Apart from the individual benefits from such exchanges, the experiences gained help departments identify their weaknesses and develop their strengths. We believe that these practitioner-based mechanisms are more effective than any formal cooperation arrangements between quality assurance systems in Europe. We therefore strongly recommend that all doctoral candidates are offered the opportunity to spend at least one semester at a university or other research institution in another European country as a regular part of their professional training.

8. Research

The Bologna process must recognise the essential relationship between teaching in higher education and research, and ensure that courses leading to the new qualifications benefit from research-based elements. "Bologna" must also be a means of addressing the chronic poor employment conditions which affect research workers, and teachers who carry increasing teaching and administrative burdens which often marginalise their research activities. The unions will urge the adoption and implementation of the European Researchers' Charter. As mentioned above, the autonomous role of research in its own right must also be recognised and supported, through concrete measures to protect the academic freedom of researchers, and to protect their right to recognition as the producers of their own research results.

9. 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, provided 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 detail, is the relationship between the three levels, particularly Bachelors and Masters, and professional qualifications and careers – many professions are now having to come to terms for the first time with the implications of Bachelors and Masters degrees as the entry routes, replacing 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 on '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. Teacher education must remain a matter of policy determination at national level, reflecting the diversity of national cultures. 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 principle applies to other professional studies too.

10. Institutional autonomy

Institutional autonomy alone cannot guarantee academic freedom or quality higher education. Autonomy must be exercised within national frameworks which balance institutional freedom with wider social goals. Within institutions, appropriate means of involving academic staff is a key defence against excessive managerialism and commodification. Put positively, it is a concrete way of promoting the collegiality which is a key characteristic of higher education.

The administrative autonomy of higher education institutions within the framework of the public sector, must be sustained and increased, and the state needs to delegate its authority to approve curricula and examination regulations to appropriate, accountable and representative bodies. Higher education staff must be fully engaged in the quality assurance procedures within their institutions. By these means, higher education institutions must be able to guarantee the quality of their 'product'. It is unacceptable to leave quality to a supposed 'marketplace.' Where private institutions exist, they must be expected to meet the same rigorous standards as the public institutions. The European trade unions in higher education and research, have done work on international comparisons on accreditation in the framework of quality assurance activities in Europe, and wish to participate in national and international evaluation and accreditation procedures. The aim of these procedures must be an improvement in the quality of the content of teaching and study programmes.

11. 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 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

for 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. The academic staff unions themselves can do more to promote and support the mobility of their members.

The trend across Europe to casualisation of teachers and research staff, short-term or contingent employment, and pressures to meet non-academic criteria like the pursuit of external funding, all make our members' working lives more difficult, but they also threaten the delivery of the Bologna objectives. The massive restructuring of study programmes, the shake-up of relationships between courses and new quality assurance and accreditation systems all depend on our members. If they work in good conditions, under conditions of collegiality and academic freedom, such an ambitious reorganisation is possible. We would assert that in the emerging environment of contingent labour, this will not be possible. The Bologna process has generated welcome assurances about quality, which must now be given reality.

Private institutions must not be allowed to further erode staff conditions: they must be required to meet rigorous public sector standards.

Academic careers must not face unnecessary or arbitrary obstacles, for example through the imposition of a requirement for a higher doctorate beyond the PhD for senior posts, required in some countries.

12. 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 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 countries, means that it will have to be handled sensitively according to agreed, transparent guidelines.

13. Staff conditions

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 pressures 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 demands 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 in the deliberations. Any analysis of the issues under discussion - quality and accreditation, the relationship of teaching to research, student mobility - in the Bologna process, as well as the massive restructuring needed to conform to the Bologna structures, must include a consideration of academic staff's pay conditions of employment and working conditions, if they are to have meaning. The European higher education and research trade unions demand that this situation be remedied immediately, in the Bergen round. 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 expense of their teaching and research. In some countries, unreasonable reliance is placed on 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 paper on Researchers in the European Space of Research published by the European Commission shows that these demands apply equally to research institutes in Europe.

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.

The results of the survey conducted by the NIFU-STEP – Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, Norway demonstrate that:

- The involvement and impact of academic unions on the Bologna process differs from one country to another, also indicating the positive influence on implementation where unions are involved at the national level
- The implementation of the Bologna process has resulted in a priority for the development of new study programmes and education resulting in less time for research for the academic staff, less control over their own working time, and decreasing time to pursue their own interest in research is also reported. (It could be argued that 'Bologna' has simply exacerbated pre-existing trends.

14. Conclusion

The higher education and research staff unions of Europe welcome and support the Bologna process as a means of protecting and enhancing higher education and research across the European area, and increasing transparency and mobility. We believe that 'Bologna' acknowledges the place within the public domain. We welcome the emphasis on quality but assert that this will require a greater public investment in the system and its staff if quality is to be sustained let alone enhanced.

We attach great importance to the issue of representation. Academic staff and researchers are an essential pillar of the higher education and research community who must be involved in the Bologna process through their representative organisations. The unions for academic staff and researchers are clear, however, that their role goes beyond the concept of "social dialogue", to embrace a range of professional issues relating to quality, access, public accountability, working conditions, and the public sector values which are central to universities' place in modern societies.

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