



Education International

5<sup>TH</sup> HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CONFERENCE

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH STAFF IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Melbourne 7 – 9 December 2005

GENERAL REPORT  
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## Introduction

The fifth International Higher Education Research Conference of Education International, held in Melbourne from 7<sup>TH</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> December has continued and deepened the work of EI in higher education and research. This is the sector which has been recognised to be at the forefront of the key trends affecting EI, particularly globalisation and the battle to defend education values in the face of both commodification and the wider attacks on human and trade union rights from the neo-liberal agenda and from the so-called “war on terror”.

It became clear during the Conference, that our Australian hosts are facing an unprecedented assault on the trade union rights painfully accumulated in labour struggles over more than 100 years. They and the wider trade union movement draw strength from the continuity and resilience of the indigenous peoples of this ancient land. On the other hand, we must be aware that Australia in recent years has been a test bed for neo-liberal trends which have spread to other countries. EI members must be on the alert, as we see long-held principles being scrapped by a government of ideologues unchecked by any effective political opposition. If the clock can be turned back this way in Australia, it could happen anywhere.

The conference reflects EI’s growing strength in Higher Education and Research, with 90 delegates from 46 organisations in 33 countries. Thanks in part to support from UNESCO’s participation programme, this conference has achieved a significant increase in the proportion of woman delegates, compared with its predecessors. EI Vice President, Susan Hopgood, welcomed the newly strengthened dialogue with students symbolised by the presence of student representatives at our conference. She also urged higher education affiliates to strengthen their work on human and trade union rights including academic freedom.

The conference themes were well summarised in the address by Sharan Burrow, President of ACTU and ICFTU: "how to get a just globalisation". One key aspect of this search for justice is the issue of "brain drain", which was put on the EI agenda at the 4<sup>th</sup> Higher Education and Research Conference in Senegal in 2003 and was the subject of a resolution at the World Congress in Porto Alegre last year. Brain drain has moved to a more central place at this conference.

Our sector is uniquely well placed to meet these challenges, as a genuinely global phenomenon, built on principles of autonomy, objectivity and collaboration across national frontiers. It is clear that the affiliates of EI, working nationally, regionally and globally, increasingly recognise the need to integrate their work at these three levels, and to collaborate with one another, from information exchange through to solidarity and concerted action, and representation at the highest level forums like the GATS meeting in Hong Kong later this month. It is hoped that this conference will help give the EI delegation the arguments and the authority to speak effectively on behalf of staff in higher education and research, at the inter-ministerial meeting in Hong Kong.

### Brain Drain

The conference considered the issue of Brain Drain in the context of the EI policy adopted at the Porto Alegre 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress and project work particularly in the UK and joint EI/UNESCO studies in African countries. The complexity of the issue (including global and regional trends) requires further analysis, but some clear principles can be identified which urgently require further debate within EI:

- The right of migration must be upheld by EI and its affiliates.
- Reciprocity, mitigation or pay-back by beneficiary countries must be a core principle.
- Protocols may be part of the solution, but unions in the countries who are experiencing the worst effects of brain drain need to be fully integrated in the debate.
- Where appropriate, common policy positions and actions should be developed with other sectors, notably health professionals, without losing the distinct features of the higher education and research sector.
- The global and national level approaches to governments should be strengthened.

The conference urged EI to take up these issues to deliver the terms of the Porto Alegre resolution.

### Academic freedom and the status of academic staff face multiple attacks

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 must 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 must 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.

EI could usefully refine its own understanding of academic freedom, and disseminate information and key documents to raise the level of debate among EI members. It was reported that the next EI Barometer will address some of these issues and will be given a high profile at the 2007 World Congress and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNESCO recommendation.

Survey data suggest a strengthening of an international academic labour market. The available information on trends in academic staff salaries, conditions and career patterns points to the bleak conclusion that the unions in the sector have failed to hold the line against a steady deterioration, symbolised by the growth of casualisation and “deprofessionalisation” of academic staff. This has happened at a time when student enrolments are dramatically increasing and the importance of higher education widely acknowledged. Unions must make greater efforts to organise casualised workers and meet their needs.

Some initiatives, like the Charter and Code of Practice for the Recruitment for Researchers in the European Union (EU), show the way in which a different model can be developed, but this example is dependent on the positive engagement of governments and employers in the sector. The European Union's structures are inclusive of all the stakeholders concerned. There may be lessons here for other regions.

General and academic related staff are often invisible within university decision making systems, and in performance measurements which inform those decisions. EI and its affiliates must do more to build solidarity between higher education teaching and research staff and general staff, enabling each group to draw on one another's strengths and identify their shared interests.

## GATS

The conference in Melbourne was organised with regard to the 6<sup>th</sup> inter-ministerial Conference under the auspices of the WTO to be held in Hong Kong in the following week. Representatives at the Conference reported on the widely varied levels of dialogue on GATS at the national level. The potential pressures on developing countries in particular, to make substantial commitments under GATS, for example through the so called benchmarking process, were reported. It was recognised that while higher education is in the most exposed position, other education sectors also face potential threats. It was agreed that a capacity building approach, building on relations between universities, would provide a positive and proactive alternative to that currently put forward within the GATS.

A draft statement was considered by the Conference and approved in amended form, to be used with the national delegates to the Hong Kong meeting and as a basis for the work of EI in Hong Kong and after. (This statement is attached as an annex to the report).

## Student bodies

EI's evolving relationships with the student organisations nationally and regionally reflect both the range of our shared interests and objectives, and the changing role of students as 'customers' in the higher education market. EI and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) have reached an important agreement in 2004, and are working to deepen our relationship. There is considerable scope for collaboration, for example in the European 'Bologna' process, but this can only be effective on the basis of honest dialogue and the identification of areas of both agreement and divergence. Work at the European level will need to be complemented by cooperation between EI affiliates and student bodies at the national level.

Conversely, academic staff and students must guard against attempts by governments or employers to divide them for example over the role of tuition fees in funding universities.

## Challenges to ethics

The new globalised corporate university generates new challenges to ethics. The unions are central to the fight to retain the historic values of the universities and the development of codes of ethics which give a framework within which the new challenges can be met. Ethics issues now arise at every level from admissions and marking of papers to the independence and integrity of research. Several examples were cited, of corporate partners or sponsors seeking to suppress research findings that were against their commercial interests or are merely embarrassing to them.

The unions must also be equipped to deal with ethical challenges which might arise from time to time from the conduct of their own members. Difficult though this might be, it is essential to enable the unions to demand high ethical standards from the universities.

## EI's working methods

The strengthening of EI's work in the sector includes important survey work, like the update report on Academic Freedom in the Asia-Pacific region prepared by NTEU, and the survey prepared by CAUT, on the Status of Higher Education Personnel in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. This way of working, and other more research-based methods, are essential to deepen the authority of EI in its dialogues with decision makers.

With reference to the higher education sector, EI should give high priority in the coming years to :

- Developing intelligence, networking and action on behalf of general staff including continuous professional development programmes, and strengthening their presence within EI;
- Fighting casualisation as a major problem for all staff in higher education;
- Work on behalf of young researchers again, engaging them in the unions, with targets for recruitment bearing in mind the existing representative bodies for these groups.
- Tools in this programme include further comparative studies of pay and conditions of service, the consideration of a handbook on casualisation: studies of stress and overload. These activities should be fitted into a programme of activities phased over the next few years.

EI needs to maximise its opportunities to work with and within the international and regional organisations and processes shaping higher education and research. This will include working with OECD and UNESCO for the implementation of the Guidelines on Quality provision in Cross Border Higher Education. At the European regional level, full participation in the Bologna Process, of convergence of over 45 national higher education systems, will place major new demands on EI and its European affiliates. The unions in the European region must intensify their efforts in order to respond authoritatively to their new responsibilities as members of the Bologna Process.

## CONCLUSION

This conference has once again demonstrated the wide range of issues on which we have shared concerns and on which we need to develop our common strategies. It has demonstrated our capacity to do so as the most truly globalised sector within EI, and we have been able to develop strong and authoritative advice for our delegation at the forthcoming inter-ministerial conference in Hong Kong. Finally, we must learn from the assault on trade union and human rights faced by our host organisations here in Australia, and declare to them our ongoing solidarity and support.