



Joint letter to OECD Ministers of Education from ESIB and Education International

Representatives of Education International (EI), composed of 29 million education workers worldwide, including 3 million higher education staff, and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), representing more than 10 million students in 34 European countries met in Athens on June 26. We agreed to address the OECD Ministerial Meeting on the following points in relation to the key topics of the conference:

We are concerned that (the issue of) **equity** figures far less predominately in the Ministerial meeting than the other themes identified. Yet, ensuring greater equity in participation and access is one of the central challenges we are facing. Equity in higher education must be achieved through the promotion of greater accessibility. Governments must do more to eliminate all barriers to participation in higher education, including financial barriers. In many OECD countries, tuition fees and rising student debt now constitute a serious obstacle to access, particularly for students from lower socio-economic groups. We reiterate that public funding is the most equitable and efficient way of financing higher education.

The growing commercialization of higher education has adversely affected the **quality** of education. The proliferation of low-quality providers is of particular concern for students and staff and underscores the need for renewed public investment. Our organizations insist it is essential that all higher education institutions meet the same high quality standards.

Assuring quality in higher education also requires that governments and institutions recognize the importance of attracting and retaining qualified staff. Without a talented and committed complement of higher education staff, quality education is simply not possible. Improving the working conditions and terms of employment of staff, including promoting academic freedom, must be a priority.

EI and ESIB stress that traditional collegial governance structures are not contradictory with institutional **efficiency**. Collegial governance structures, involving meaningful representation and participation of students and staff, allow for more informed decision-making and thereby contribute to the effective educational management of higher education institutions.

If higher education institutions are to fulfill their public mandate and to make their full contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of societies, we believe that a renewed public service vision of higher education must be embraced. Our organizations have begun the process of discussing different visions of this, which each of us have elaborated in the two attachments to this letter.