## 7. Higher Education and Research

*Introduction*

Cooperation in higher education and research in Europe has a long-standing tradition, in which staff plays an increasingly important role. EI’s Pan-European structure and the ETUCE, which represent the education unions working in the field of higher education and research, cooperate to influence these developments. Regular meetings, such as the Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) are organised to gather members to discuss recent developments. Many discussions at the meetings are about the Bologna Process, which aims to establish a European Higher Education Area and in which EI is a consultative partner. In this framework, a campaign called ‘Let’s Go – Making Mobility a Reality’ was organised with the European Students’ Union (ESU), to push decision-makers to implement agreed action lines on mobility of students and staff. The fact that the campaign was organised in partnership with ESU follows a strategy of linking up with organisations that have similar goals to EI, making our work more interesting and influential. Other work consisted of focused activities on central concerns, such as the EU’s Modernisation Agenda, academic freedom, trade in higher education and rankings. Work was also undertaken to participate in a regional UNESCO conference, which prepared for the world conference on higher education. Below, details are given about activities and lessons are drawn for the future.

*HERSC Meetings*

Twice a year, EI’s Pan-European Structure organises a meeting of the Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) to discuss recent developments in higher education policy. The meeting is attended by EI-Europe members, which specialise in higher education and research topics as well as invited relevant partner organisations. Jens-Vraa Jensen, from DM Denmark chairs the meetings with vice-chairs Razvan Bobulescu from Alma Mater Romania and Dominique Lassarre from UNSA-Education France. The ETUCE contributes to the meetings by preparing reports on activities in the European Union area and participating in discussions. In February 2007, the HERSC meeting in London prepared for EI’s participation in the Ministerial Conference in the Bologna Process, taking place in London in May 2007 (see next point). Later that same year, the October HERSC meeting was used to discuss the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference as well as EI’s World Congress. Also a number of EU initiatives in higher education, such as the European Qualifications Framework and the EU’s Modernisation agenda for universities were discussed. In 2008, both meetings focused primarily on student and staff mobility in the European Higher Education Area. Throughout the year, EI and the European Students’ Union (ESU, formerly ESIB), organised a campaign to push for the removal of all obstacles to mobility (see point four). Another topic on which the HERSC started working was climate change, as the world of higher education has a responsibility to fulfil in contributing to the fight against global warming. In 2009, the meetings primarily focused on the Ministerial Conference in the Bologna Process that took place in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009. Other agenda items included the preparation for the UNESCO regional meeting on higher education in Bucharest (see point seven) and several OECD initiatives, such as the AHELO project (see point eight).

*Bologna Process*

The Bologna Process is a political project to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), driven by cooperation between 46 countries, the European Union and eight consultative partners. Since 2005, EI’s Pan-European structure belongs to the latter group, participating in the governing body of the process (the ‘Bologna Follow-Up Group’ or BFUG) and organising several activities to further improve the position of academics. From 8-9 February 2007, EI organised, in cooperation with the University and Colleges Union UCU an official Bologna seminar on Mobility of Staff and Students in Higher Education, addressing one of the main concerns of the process head on. The conference called for a removal of all obstacles towards mobility. Also, it was concluded that mobility should no longer be an individual responsibility, but become a core responsibility of the higher education institution in order to make mobility a reality. At the Ministerial Conference in London in May 2007, EI presented its work to the Ministers responsible for higher education, which made its way into the adopted communiqué which makes mobility a key priority. Other aspects mentioned in the communiqué include the social dimension, the creation of a ‘European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies’ (EQAR) and the cooperation between the European Higher Education Area and the rest of the world. After the Ministerial Conference, EI joined several working groups to follow up the agreed action lines on the global dimension, on mobility and on employability. One of EI’s main concerns was that the relation between the EHEA and the rest of the world should not be based on commercial reasons, but on academic ones. EI was also asked to nominate a member for the so-called ‘Register Committee’ of the EQAR, which evaluates applications from quality assurance agencies to be part of the register.

In the period between 2007 and 2009, discussions took place on the future of the Bologna Process, as the initial deadline would be reached in 2010. EI made several contributions in this process, stating that the initial goals, such as those on mobility, have yet to be reached and that the process should be extended towards 2020. Furthermore, EI argued for a more prominent place for academics in the implementation of the action lines on the national level and the inclusion of their conditions of work as a concern.. Warnings of the risk of commercialisation remained one of EI’s concerns all along. The latest Ministerial Conference took place in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium in April 2009 and the agreed communiqué outlined the agenda for the Bologna Process towards 2020, again taking up some of EI’s concerns. The agreed agenda includes action lines for mobility, social dimension, lifelong learning and employability of graduates. A controversial topic at the meeting was a proposal to include so-called ‘transparency tools’ and ‘rankings’ as an instrument of policy. EI and a number of its partners spoke vehemently against this idea, fearing a further commercialisation of higher education. After a heated discussion, all references to the word ‘ranking’ were removed from the text. Towards the future, EI will remain committed to its participation in the Bologna Process. The opposition to commercialisation will be one of the main concerns, particularly with regard to international rankings which will be one of the core topics in the future (see also point below). For the Bologna Process Celebration Ministerial Conference which is due to take place in Budapest and Vienna from 11-12 March 2009, EI plans to issue a publication with an academics’ view of the state of the Bologna Process in Europe, and their involvement in its implementation. More information about EI’s involvement in the Bologna Process can be found on the revamped website [www.ei-ie.org/highereducation/en/bologna.php](http://www.ei-ie.org/highereducation/en/bologna.php).

*Let’s Go Campaign – Making Mobility A Reality For All Students And Staff*

Throughout 2008, EI’s Pan-European structure partnered up with the European Students’ Union (ESU) to campaign for more opportunities to (temporarily) study or work in other European countries. The campaign received financial support from the European Commission and was politically supported by the Bologna Process. The rationale behind the campaign was that while Bologna Process strives for a Europe without borders, only a small elite of students and staff in higher education are mobile. Among the many obstacles towards mobility we find stringent visa procedures, restrictions on work-permits, a lack of grants and many other problems. A joint seminar, organized in London in February 2007 by ESU, EI and UCU concluded that governments and higher education institutions must solve these problems, as individuals cannot bare this responsibility. The campaign therefore aimed to convince politicians and heads of institutions that this situation must change. Efforts focused on national actors, such as rectors’ conferences and cabinet ministers, as they are most often decision makers on these issues. National education unions and student unions created national coalitions and organized various activities, such as conferences, sports days or manifestations to draw attention to the campaign. A website [www.letsgocampaign.net](http://www.letsgocampaign.net) was launched to promote the activities by members as well as news on European developments. A petition aimed at the 46 ministers of education was signed by thousands of persons and organizations on the website. A research project, a so-called ‘Barometer’ of mobility policies, was conducted by the independent researcher, Conor Cradden, giving information about the problems and opportunities for mobility in each European country. In October 2008, a final conference was organized in Lille, with the supported of the French European Union Presidency, which gathered around 150 education and student union representatives, as well as policymakers to discuss and present the outcomes of the campaign. The campaign was a success, establishing more political attention to the problems of students and staff. In the future, the European University Association will join the work, which shows that higher education institutions want to carry a responsibility for mobility. EI has now set up a working group with ESU and the European University Association (EUA), in order to work further on mobility issues at three key levels in Europe – the level of students, staff and higher education institutions.

*Establishing Partnerships*

Following the motto ‘together we stand, divided we fall’, EI’s Pan-European structure has found it important to establish strong links with other organizations in Higher Education over the last few years. Such partnerships give recognition to the work and provide stronger political pressure for our policies. Already since 2004, the European Students’ Union (ESU, formerly ESIB) and EI have a partnership agreement, which strengthens a coordinated political agenda and joint projects such as the one mentioned above. Over the past years, attending each other’s meetings and coordinating joint political messages have strengthened the relationship even further. Over the same period of time, EI has strengthened ties with the European University Association (EUA). It has participated in its project that developed a Lifelong Learning Charter, which was presented to Ministers of Vocational Education and Training in 2008. Also, EUA has joined EI and ESU’s joint work on mobility of students and staff. A third organization with which EI has strengthened ties is the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO), which promotes the fundamental values of the university, being academic freedom and university autonomy. The President of the MCO attended a meeting of the HERSC and EI attended the MCO’s annual conferences in the University of Bologna in September, 2007, 2008 and 2009. Contacts with UNESCO have remained strong, as EI was part of the preparatory committee of the World Conference on Higher Education. EI has also strengthened cooperation with ENQA, the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Europe and attended a number of its meetings. It was asked to nominate a representative to EQAR – the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies. Finally, EI applied to become and received the observer status in the Council of Europe’s Committee on Education, Science and Research (CDESR). The Council of Europe has a long-standing record on issues such as academic freedom and human rights, as it was established in 1946 to protect the European Convention on Human Rights. Through these partnerships, EI believes that it will become even more effective in addressing the issues affecting staff in higher education in the upcoming years.

*The EU agenda: Modernising universities*

The European Commission launched a modernisation agenda for universities which was welcomed by the Member States in 2005. The modernisation agenda for universities is part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. The main fields of reform are:

* Curricular reform: The three cycle system (bachelor-master-doctorate), competence based learning, flexible learning paths, recognition, mobility.
* Governance reform: University autonomy, strategic partnerships, including with enterprises, quality assurance.
* Funding reform: Diversified sources of university income better linked to performance, promoting equity, access and efficiency, including the possible role of tuition fees, grants and loans.

The Commission defines the areas of challenge in their Communication from May 2006: ‘Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation’

In May 2007, the European Commission launched a broad consultation on what should be done to create a unified and attractive European Research Area. In August 2007, the ETUCE responded to the Green Paper consultation with a statement focusing the answer mainly focus on the issues related to the mobility of researchers and the strengthening of research institutions. Amongst other issues, the ETUCE called for Commission attention to the lack of comparable data on researchers’ career paths and mobility patterns. The need for a change in the culture of management of research institutions was also raised by the ETUCE in order to facilitate mobility of staff and stop seeing it as an individual initiative. The issue of brain-drain from poorer regions within Europe to richer ones equally needs consideration. Underlying the importance of twinning the principle of institutional autonomy to the one of academic freedom, the ETUCE also warned the Commission that the system of funding and assessment of universities and research institutions are deeply embedded in the cultural and national contexts, including the national organisation of the public sector.

In 2008, a draft Joint Progress Report on progress in the implementation of the ‘Education and Training 2010 work programme’ underlined that in the higher education sector, seven countries have recently either introduced or increased tuition or registration fees. In a statement released in November 2007, the ETUCE rejected the argument that tuition fees are a main solution in dealing with the ‘funding gap’ in higher education and expressed its conviction that equity in higher education must be achieved through offering equal opportunity to everybody, not only to access, but also to successful completion of studies, and governments must do more to eliminate all barriers to participation in higher education, including financial barriers.

2007 was also the year of adoption by the European Commission Communication on improving the Quality of Teacher Education. In its response to this initiative, the ETUCE welcomed the Commission’s approach towards the professionalism of teachers and made the case for teacher education being fully integrated into Higher Education and Research. Taking into account the broadly perceived fact that teachers take on an increasingly greater degree of responsibility in the classroom as well as in the school environment, the ETUCE presented its statement that all teachers should be educated at least to Masters’ level.

In response to the European Commission proposal for a revision of the guidelines for implementing the next cycle of the Lisbon Strategy in 2008-2010, in March 2008, the ETUCE addressed a statement to the EU Council before the adoption of these guidelines. The statement strongly made the case for greater attention at EU level to increasing equity in higher education. The ETUCE has thus warned again about the dangers of the Commission’s simplistic reference to the merits of output-based funding that will jeopardise the quality of higher education. The ETUCE also reiterated its protests against the excessive emphasis that the Commission places on the relationship between universities and the business community in terms of funding of research and on the number of negative consequences such an approach could have.

During the discussions on the priorities for the new strategic framework for EU cooperation on education and training beyond 2010, the ETUCE has called for a redirection of the EU policies in higher education in a statement released in May 2008. There is a need for a much broader approach to higher education, which takes a much wider view than the immediate needs of the labour market. Higher education and research are vital public goods that contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of the European communities, regions, and nations.

*The EU cluster on higher education*

During the reporting period, the ETUCE participated in the Cluster on Higher Education and participated in its peer-learning activities. The Cluster was setup to discuss the so called Modernisation agenda. The Cluster met 9 times in the period; however the Cluster showed little activity during late 2008 and the beginning of 2009.

Most discussions in the Cluster were centred on the work to compile a compendium of good practices that comply with the modernisation agenda. The Commission planned originally to draft guidelines, but some countries were against such guidelines. The ETUCE supported these countries.

The compendium was finalised in April 2008 and included examples from 12 different countries on issues from funding to curriculum. The Cluster was revoked in June and it is foreseen that it will keep up with the working programme 2009- 11 that includes the following themes. One more meeting is called in 2009 on the 29 October.

According to the new strategic framework 2020 it is expected that different working groups will be setup to deal with the sub-themes ‘New skills for new jobs’, ‘Funding’, ‘Governance’ and ‘Higher education systems to support LLL’.

*Academic Freedom*

The 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel firmly establishes academic freedom as a guiding principle for higher education. Nevertheless, this principle continues to be violated all over the world, making academic freedom a core concern of EI in its defence of the interests of academics. Every three years, EI publishes a report to the ‘Joint ILO-UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (CEART), outlining the main violations of and threats to academic freedom. The latest report was published in September 2009 and finds that there are a number of key trends which are a cause for great concern – namely the worldwide shortage of teachers, the ever-increasing casualisation of the employment of teachers and educators at all levels of education, and the high incidences of violence against teachers and higher education staff. A number of references to European countries are made, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. EI participated in the CDESR meeting in March 2009, which launched a new initiative for the promotion of academic freedom, in which EI will be involved. In order to further promote academic freedom, EI’s Pan-European structure invited the President of the Magna Charta Observatory to its HERSC meeting in February 2009, who represents an organisation that promotes academic freedom and university autonomy. He agreed with many of EI’s concerns, mentioning many threats to academic freedom, such as intellectual property rights, global security problems, social deprivation, the collapse of certain academic fields, direct censorship and the shrinking reservoir from which excellent, critical and open minded students can be drawn. Finally, EI and UCU published a report about academic freedom in five countries (Burma, Colombia, Israel, Palestine and Zimbabwe) in July 2009, authored by James Cemmell. The report argues that academic freedom in these countries depends highly on other types of freedoms such as cultural and political liberties. In the coming years, these issues will be further taken up by EI in order to better contextualise the problem of academic freedom.

*Trade in Higher Education*

Since the General Agreement on Trade in Services was signed in 1995, EI has been concerned about its effects on higher education. EI’s strategy is to inform members, policy makers and negotiators about the dangers of liberalisation of higher education policy in the WTO/GATS framework, calling for the removal of higher education from these trade regulations. EI regularly publishes a newsletter ‘TradEducation’ about new developments in trade negotiations that have an effect on (higher) education. Another concern was the development of intellectual property law, such as the TRIPS in the WTO-framework. In 2009, EI applied to become an observer at the World Intellectual Property Rights Organisation (WIPO) in order to enlarge the audience to which it lobbies on trade in higher education, as well as to tackle the issue of intellectual property rights for teachers and for higher education staff.

*Rankings and AHELO*

In order to further stimulate competition between higher education institutions, a number of European governments have pushed for the development of international rankings of ‘education quality’. While EI is strongly opposed to these initiatives, they have found some support within the Bologna Process and the OECD. The latter institution has dedicated a project to rankings, called ‘Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes’ (AHELO), in which EI was invited to give feedback. In 2007, the Malaga Conference adopted a statement on ‘Assessing higher education learning outcomes: ‘PISA’ for Higher Education?’ which outlines methodological and political critique to these developments. In the coming years, EI will continue to battle simplified rankings of higher education, in order to protect diversity, quality and academic freedom. To this end, it will be involved in several working groups and conferences on the topic.

*UNESCO Regional conference in Bucharest*

In 1998, UNESCO organised a world conference on higher education, which outlined an agenda for higher education in the 21st century. In July 2009, UNESCO organised a follow-up to this conference, taking stock of activities, and discussing new challenges, which was preceded by a number of regional conferences in all UNESCO regions. EI was involved in the preparatory conference for Europe and North-America, organised by UNESCO-CEPES in Bucharest, Romania in May 2009. The agenda included many controversial items such as international rankings of higher education institutions. EI gave two presentations at the conference and was part of the drafting group for the ‘Bucharest Message’, which contained the outcomes of the meeting. In its representation, EI argued against the increased commercialisation of higher education, the continued investment in higher education despite the financial crisis and for better conditions of work for academics, based on the 1997 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation. The Bucharest message contains several recommendations on equity and access, values, quality and competitiveness of higher education. It also contains a plea for increased public investments in higher education in reference to the financial crisis. The conclusions can be downloaded from [www.cepes.ro/forum](http://www.cepes.ro/forum).

*Web site*

For a number of years, EI has maintained an informative website on all aspects of the Bologna Process and other European reforms of higher education. On the website, visitors can find information on conferences, on the core issues of higher education in Europe today and on EI’s positions. In recent years, more and more information has been added, making it a genuine portal on issues of interest to academics who want to know more about change in higher education and the role of education unions. For its members, EI furthermore maintains an online knowledge base, which is updated more regularly with internal documentation. Recently, the information has been moved to a Sharepoint server, making it easier to update and access.

*Conclusion and future*

For the past three years EI has reinforced its visibility and credibility on higher education and research issues and developed new partnerships. Those positive outcomes need to be continued and further developed both at the European and national levels in the future. Therefore, EI will use its regular HERSC meetings to inform members and discuss political developments. The website and intranet will be kept up to date to provide members with the most recent information. With its partners, EI will be involved in several European projects, in particular on the topic of mobility, as a follow-up to the ‘Let’s Go!’ Campaign.