



Sally Hunt, UCU Joint General Secretary

Speech at Bologna Seminar, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007

On behalf of UCU, a new union representing post school education and higher education in the United Kingdom, and the largest such union in Europe, I would like to welcome all of you here on this special occasion for this seminar which is to consider the vital issue of the implications of the Bologna Process on staff and students. UCU is delighted to be part of this initiative by Education International and the European Students Information Bureau. We are also delighted that at last the trade unions representing the academic community in Europe, are now fully integrated in the Bologna Process. Since its inception, the Bologna Process has been monitored by Education International's member unions from across the 'Bologna' area, through their Higher Education and Research Committee, many members of which are present at this seminar. It has taken us a long time to get to this point, and I want to impress upon the seminar's audience how important it is for the government and other key decisionmakers in each country in the Bologna Process, to engage with the staff representatives and trade unions of our universities, and to seek their views on how the Process will impact upon staff.

If the Bologna Process is to be successful in creating a European area of higher education and research, then it will be in large part created by the academic staff of the institutions in Europe (the wider Europe not just the EU). It will be their willingness to move between European states, to take up the challenges of teaching in new cultures, and researching in new areas that will give a vital force to the Bologna Process. We are aware of course that there are many differences between the way our higher education systems are organised in the different European states. Some of these differences may prove to be obstacles to harmonisation and these may at times seem insurmountable, but I believe that with the academic staff and their trade unions engaged fully in the process we will be able to find solutions to these difficulties. The full involvement of academic and support staff in higher education in the Bologna Process will give it the dynamism it needs; without this I fear that it will be a grand idea that does not come fully to fruition.

We are very pleased to have been able to help provide the basic research for the seminar over the coming two days. Our colleague who has prepared the main report on mobility of students and staff is indeed an independent researcher based in France, but actually used to work for one of our predecessor unions, the Association of University Teachers. I hope that you also appreciate that in representing the academic community in the UK, I am expressing the UK's interest in the Bologna Process. In many respects the UK is often

seen as slightly distant from the central drive of European activity. But in this matter we hope the British Government will play its full part, and be central to the development of a European-wide higher education and research structure, which both allows the movement of staff and students, and recognises the difficulties and problems they face in such mobility.

The future task will be finding solutions to the problems of mobility that you may discover in your discussions over the next two days. It is vital that we do this and ensure that the Bologna Process continues with the full engagement of the staff, both present and future. It is for them to deliver the new and harmonised programmes of teaching and research across the European area.

I am also very pleased to welcome you to London (if no-one else has said this), I am pleased that you have made the effort to come here at this time year so soon after the festive season. I hope that you enjoy our company and your stay in the city. But most importantly, I hope that the seminar is able to produce concrete proposals to fulfil Bologna's stated commitment to mobility, to be sent to the Education Ministers of our countries when they meet in London in May. I believe such a message should impress upon them the important part in the Bologna Process that the academic staff and students across Europe have to play.