



EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

Statement to the Bologna Anniversary Ministerial Conference

Budapest-Vienna, 11-12 March 2010

I Preamble

Education International, representing 30 million teachers and education workers in 172 countries and territories, of whom approximately 700 000 live and work in the geographical area now included in the European Higher Education Area, congratulates the ministers, the higher education institutions, the various stakeholders but above all staff and students on the 10th anniversary of the Bologna Process, and the official launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Education International (EI) expresses its strong support to the development of the European Higher Education Area, and the development of higher education as a vital public good which contributes to the social, cultural and economic development of communities, regions and states. At this conference, EI is contributing to the discussions by means of this declaration and a study 'Enhancing Quality?' outlining higher education staff unions' perceptions of the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Notwithstanding the many developments since the Bologna Declaration of 1999, a number of challenges still remain at a time when we are delineating the course for the EHEA for the next 10 years. All developments point to the fact that we still need to get on track with the reforms. Unrest has arisen throughout a number of countries and this moment in time is as much one of celebration for all actors involved in the Process, as much as it is one in which we should look ahead to the aims still to be achieved.

II Academic Staff: The Heart of Higher Education and Research

Education International underlines the impact of the Bologna Process on academics' core tasks, working conditions and career opportunities. At a time when extra demands are being put on academics - in the form of administrative tasks, pressure to publish, ongoing curricular reform, and paradigm shifts in teaching and learning there is a strong need for the provision for a more supportive environment for academic staff by the institutions and by the states.

Academics are often forced to work overtime without adequate remuneration. Tenure or its functional equivalent is under threat, as the number of casual, part-time and fixed-term contracts are on the rise for academic work, often without the right to organize or bargain collectively under such employment terms. Research conditions are deteriorating in a number of countries across Europe and salaries for staff, at a time of global financial and economic crisis, are being frozen or reduced. We cannot ignore the harsh consequences that such conditions have on the quality of teaching and learning and how severely they affect the academic freedom of individual academics.

In order to further develop the European Higher Education Area, at a time of high demographic challenge and with the aim of high quality teaching and research, there is an urgent need to attract and retain highly qualified young women and men. Young researchers and doctoral candidates should be perceived as pursuing the first stage in their academic and research careers and need to be employed on doctoral research contracts and paid accordingly, receiving full social security benefits and support in their academic development on an equal basis with other academic staff.

Attractive academic staff conditions are a necessary prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Bologna Process, as well as the European Research Area. Current conditions remain unacceptable as long as there is no respect for basic employment and academic rights, namely adequate salaries, full-time career opportunities, appropriate job security, effective representation in academic governance and a firm guarantee of academic freedom.

III Involvement of Academics at All Levels – institutional, national and European

Education International stresses that it is essential for the ownership and success of the reform process to include academic staff as key players in the implementation of the Bologna Process at all levels. Academic staff and their unions must not be perceived only as social partners, but also as professional associations representing the very persons on whom the practical implementation of the Bologna Process relies on a daily basis. EI notes, with great concern, that there are numerous examples of the lack of involvement of higher education staff unions at the institutional and national levels. In turn, this comes at a time when institutional governance structures increasingly involve more externals - e.g. company managers, industry representatives - threatening collegial governance. This has a negative impact on academic freedom for individual academics and thus on the creation of knowledge and the development of science for the benefit of all the higher education community and society at large.

Quality Assurance represents a key area in which there is a lack of involvement of academics at all levels – institutional, national and European – particularly in terms of design and decision-making related to quality assurance processes. In order to ensure fitness-for-purpose of all types of quality assurance systems, academic staff must be fully engaged in the design of quality assurance procedures within their institutions, within national quality assurance agencies and accepted fully in European processes, alongside representatives of higher education institutions and students.

IV The Funding Crisis in Higher Education

Education International emphasizes the need for sustainable public financing of higher education at a time of global financial and economic crisis, which has developed into a severe social crisis. While some governments have invested more in higher education in a view to boost skills and employment opportunities, a large number of national governments are yet to recognise that higher education and research are necessary components for the successful development of societies and economies in the future.

Education International stresses that while funding shortages compromise quality of, and access to, higher education and research, current solutions which are being devised leading more to privatisation and public-private partnerships in higher education are equally risky. As this trend continues, EI finds, in its 2009 report to CEART¹ that while autonomy for higher education institutions increases in order to accommodate such new arrangements, the individual and collegial academic freedom becomes increasingly restricted. EI stresses that independent fundamental research needs to continue receiving appropriate financial support and the integrity and independence of all academic research must not be endangered, with a clear purpose of wide dissemination and sharing of knowledge for a wider public benefit.

Education International expresses its concerns over the widespread introduction of tuition fees throughout Europe, categorically opposing high fee regimes, which negatively impact the access to higher education and burden young people with debt while conditioning their choice of studies. The Bologna Process calls for better access to higher education for all students in any part of the EHEA in which they choose to study, which must be matched with corresponding public investment in higher education for an improved social dimension in all three cycles of higher education.

V Mobility as the underlying force of the Bologna Process

Education International reiterates its support to mobility as a crucial component for the professional and personal development of academics and students. Mobility remains the driving force of the Bologna Process and the underlying notion on which the EHEA was envisaged. As such, it requires special

¹ Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel

attention from decision-makers in terms of the provision of institutional and financial means for making it a reality.

Education International stresses the urgent need for more attention to be paid to balanced mobility and brain drain. The principle of quality cooperation over competition needs to be the basis of the mobility processes, promoting a sharing and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity, broadening educational opportunities and enriching the experience of students and staff in higher education by enhancing the free flow and exchange of knowledge and ideas. EI calls upon Ministers to implement clearly targeted measures to enhance mobility for both staff and students in a balanced manner, while preventing brain drain of highly qualified individuals particularly from the East to the Western regions of Europe.

VI The Bologna Process in 2020

Education International welcomes the continuous efforts of governments and stakeholders in working towards the fulfilment of all criteria of the European Higher Education Area.

Education International calls upon the ministers to take into account the complexities of the creation of such a complex space and to tackle all remaining challenges in cooperation with other relevant ministers within their national governments.

Education International stresses that any continued reforms need to be undertaken in a manner that is well planned and applied consistently throughout all higher education institutions within member countries, while taking into account the different realities of the countries and acknowledging the different paces and actions that countries might choose.

Education International emphasises the need for the social dimension – as a core aspect of the Bologna Process - to be improved for both students and academic staff. With respect to the latter it is necessary to ensure better access to the academic profession, improved tenure, social security benefits and pensions and the possibility of making these portable, while undertaking additional intensive efforts to make mobility a reality for academic staff.

The next ten years will serve to boost the global dimension of the Bologna. While the Process is likely to become more open to the continents outside Europe, this must not, under any circumstances, be based on a market-rationale. Rather, it should encourage improved comparability of degrees and qualifications and should strengthen cooperation for the benefit of all involved in higher education.

With a view to achieving the core aims of higher education and of the Bologna Process, Education International calls upon ministers and the EHEA community to work intensely towards the social, cultural and economic development of our communities, through which individual talent and creativity are nurtured for the benefit of all.