



# 'Academics United for Quality Higher Education':

The Views of the European Education Trade Unions  
on the Future of the Bologna Process



Published by the European Trade Union Committee for Education - Brussels 2018  
Reproduction of all or part of this publication is permitted without authorisation. However, accreditation to ETUCE must  
be made and copies must be sent to the ETUCE secretariat.

05/2018

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and fundamental values</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Increased public investment in higher education and research</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. A supportive working environment for staff in higher education and research</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Quality education, student centred learning and the recognition of teaching</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6. Conclusions and the future development of EHEA</b>	<b>26</b>

# 1. Introduction

The European Trade Union Committee for Europe (ETUCE), the European Region of Education International, as the representative of academics and education support personnel in Europe, believes that the future success of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) requires a greater focus on a number of strategic priorities.

**In the following report, we identify four such priorities:**

1. The better protection of **academic freedom** as one of the **fundamental values** of the Bologna process;
2. The importance of greater **core public investment** in higher education and research;
3. The need to ensure a **supportive working environment for staff**, and
4. A call for better **recognition of teaching** in higher education.

The report also calls for the EHEA to build on existing international instruments and policy frameworks in higher education, in particular, the **1997 UNESCO recommendation on the status of higher education teaching personnel and the current United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals**.

Finally, the report proposes a number of **structural changes to the Bologna process** itself, in particular regarding the implementation of essential requirements for the participation of member states in the further building of the EHEA.

## 2. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and fundamental values

One of the defining features of the Bologna Process is the commitment to fundamental values such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, staff and student participation and civic engagement.

ETUCE believes that fundamental values, including institutional autonomy, collegial governance and academic freedom, are vital to a successful higher education system. We also believe that they lead to wider social, economic and cultural benefits.

For, as the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup> have argued:

“

***history has proven that violations of academic freedom and university autonomy have always resulted in intellectual relapse, and consequently in social and economic stagnation.”***

ETUCE supports a renewed commitment to these fundamental values in all European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries. However, we believe that a number of these values, particularly academic freedom, are being undermined across the EHEA. Below we highlight the reasons for these developments and call for a stronger commitment from governments and institutions to protect academic freedom and collegial governance.

### Institutional autonomy

Institutional autonomy remains one of the fundamental principles underpinning the European higher education system. In the words of the Magna Charta Universitatum<sup>2</sup>:

“

***The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of***

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2006) Academic freedom and institutional autonomy, Assembly debate on 30 June 2006, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 June 2006 (23rd Sitting).

<sup>2</sup> The Magna Charta Universitatum (1988).

***societies...To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power"***

Institutional autonomy is also closely bound up with the principle of intellectual freedom and is a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the rights of academic staff. However, while there is a strong link between institutional autonomy and individual autonomy, we shouldn't conflate the two principles. In fact, there remains the possibility of a highly autonomous higher education institution with a low level of protection for academic freedom.

Moreover, ETUCE is concerned that institutional autonomy is being used as a tool to undermine academic freedom. For example, there is a growing tendency to introduce market-based policies such as tuition fees, fixed-term academic contracts, or appointing business representatives onto university governing bodies, on grounds of greater 'institutional autonomy'. While these policies may strengthen 'financial', 'staffing' or 'organisational' autonomy, they also weaken protections for academic autonomy and therefore should be resisted<sup>3</sup>.

We, therefore, call on university rectors to ensure that – in line with the 1997 UNESCO recommendation<sup>4</sup> :

//

***Autonomy should not be used by higher education institutions as a pretext to limit the rights of higher-education teaching personnel."***

### Academic freedom and academic responsibility

One of the purposes of higher education is to serve the public interest through extending knowledge and understanding and fostering critical thinking and expression in staff and students, and then in society more widely. Academic freedom is essential to achieving these ends and therefore to the development of a civilised democracy.

<sup>3</sup> European University Association (2017) University Autonomy in Europe, EUA.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (1997) Recommendation on the status of higher education teaching personnel.

Given its importance, ETUCE is very concerned about the erosion of academic freedom across the EHEA. The most serious assault is in Turkey, where thousands of academic and administrative personnel have been targeted for dismissal from their posts. In addition to the mass firings of university staff, fifteen private universities have been closed and hundreds of academics and students detained in the crackdown by the Turkish authorities. More recently, criminal charges have commenced against hundreds of academics for signing a petition calling for peace negotiations in South Eastern Turkey<sup>5</sup>.

There has also been a major assault on institutional autonomy and academic freedom by an EU member state, most notably with the attempt by the Hungarian government to try to shut down the operations of the Central European University in Budapest. The European Commission has recently referred the Hungarian government's Higher Education Law to the European Court of Justice, partly on the grounds that it violates the right of academic freedom and the right to education under the charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, ETUCE believes that academic freedom across the EHEA has been undermined by the marketisation of higher education, via the greater use of performance-based funding, the corporatisation of university governance and further requirements to seek private sector sources of income. For example, an increasingly selective and economic research funding model has put pressure on academics to research in a narrower range of applied and technically-oriented disciplines and project areas, while the growing commercialisation of research can restrict the timely dissemination of findings into the public domain. As Professor Nelly Stromquist has argued<sup>7</sup> :

“

***A collateral effect of this is that important disciplines, particularly the social sciences and the humanities/arts, are receiving less attention. It is feared that the slow marginalization of fields that promote self-reflection and critique of contemporary existence is not conducive to the development of social and cohesive society.”***

<sup>5</sup> For a summary, see Scholars at Risk (2018) 'Two years since Peace Petition, attacks on higher education sector continue', 15 January.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission', Commission refers Hungary to the European Court of Justice of the EU over the Higher Education Law', press release, 7 December 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Stromquist, N. P (2017) Twenty Years later; International efforts to protect the rights of higher education teaching personnel remains insufficient, Education International October, p.10.

A weakening of protections for academic freedom has occurred in a range of different European countries, including in Western and Northern Europe. For example, an EU-funded study identifies countries such as Hungary, Estonia, United Kingdom (UK), Malta and Denmark as having the weakest legislative and constitutional protections for academic freedom within the EU<sup>8</sup>.

**Table 1:** "Bottom-Up" Analysis: Summary Table of Results

Nation	Total	Academic Freedom in Legislation	Institutional Autonomy in Legislation	Self-Governance in Legislation	Job Security	Constitution & International Agreements
Croatia	69.0	20.0	13.0	14.0	4.5	17.5
Spain	66.5	15.0	8.5	12.0	11.0	20.0
Bulgaria	65.5	15.0	9.0	14.5	9.5	17.5
Germany	64.5	17.5	9.25	12.25	8.0	17.5
Austria	63.5	20.0	12.0	9.0	5.0	17.5
France	63.0	20.0	7.0	6.5	15.5	14.0
Portugal	61.0	10.0	9.0	11.5	10.5	20.0
Slovakia	60.5	20.0	8.5	12.5	1.5	18.0
Latvia	60.0	20.0	10.0	10.5	3.0	16.5
Lithuania	59.5	20.0	11.0	6.0	5.0	17.5
Italy	57.5	10.0	9.0	8.0	11.5	19.0
Greece	55.5	5.0	4.5	10.5	20.0	15.5
Finland	55.0	15.0	15.0	3.0	3.0	19.0
Poland	54.5	10.0	9.5	12.5	5.0	17.5
Romania	53.5	15.0	8.0	12.5	5.5	12.5
Cyprus	53.0	10.0	8.0	12.5	10.0	12.5
Ireland	52.5	15.0	12.5	3.0	10.5	11.5
Slovenia	52.5	5.0	8.5	11.0	10.5	17.5
Czech Republic	51.5	15.0	8.0	11.0	2.0	15.5

<sup>8</sup> Karran, T, Beiter, K. and Appiagyei-Atua, K. (2017) 'Measuring academic freedom in Europe: a criterion referenced approach', Policy Reviews in Higher Education, Volume 1, 2017 - Issue 2, pp. 209-239.

Nation	Total	Academic Freedom in Legislation	Institutional Autonomy in Legislation	Self-Governance in Legislation	Job Security	Constitution & International Agreements
Belgium	49.25	10.0	8.5	7.5	9.25	14.0
Luxemburg	47.5	15.0	9.0	6.0	3.5	14.0
Netherlands	44.0	10.0	9.0	5.5	3.5	12.5
Sweden	39.5	5.0	6.5	3.0	8.5	16.5
Denmark	38.5	5.0	9.0	6.5	5.5	12.5
Hungary	36.0	5.0	2.5	9.0	8.0	11.5
Malta	36.0	0.0	10.5	6.0	8.5	11.0
U.K.	35.0	5.0	13.5	0.0	5.5	11.0
Estonia	34.0	0.0	10.5	4.5	1.5	17.5
Mean (St Dev)	52.8 (10.5)	11.9 (6.3)	9.3 (2.6)	8.6 (3.9)	7.3 (4.3)	15.6 (2.9)

Source: Karran and Mallinson (2017) 2017 Academic freedom in the UK: legal and normative protection in a comparative context. Report for the University and College Union, p. 28.

This study has recently been extended to include an analysis of de facto protection in the UK compared to the rest of the EU. The report found that *“the low level of de jure protection for academic freedom in the UK is mirrored by an equally poor (if not worse) level of de facto protection”*<sup>9</sup>.

ETUCE is also concerned about the weakening of the main supportive elements of academic freedom, notably collegial governance and employment protection. For example, an ETUCE survey in 2016 found that the academic staff representation on university governing bodies has been reduced in many European countries<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, the 2017 Eurydice report on academic staff found *“reduced employment opportunities in academia and an increasing proportion of staff in externally funded positions”* in several European countries<sup>11</sup>.

9 Karran, T. & Mallinson, L. (2017) Academic freedom in the UK: legal and normative protection in a comparative context. Report for the University and College Union, p. 1.

10 ETUCE (2016) Social Dialogue and Collegial Governance in Higher Education and Research: Report on the ETUCE Survey 2016.

11 Eurydice (2017) Modernisation of higher education: Academic staff 2017.



## Why are these issues important?

Because reducing self-governance and job security makes it harder for academics to question received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy.

ETUCE also recognises that the right to freedom to teach and research carries with it special duties and responsibilities, such as ensuring that academic activities are conducted according to ethical and professional standards. Higher education institutions and academics should also, where appropriate, respond to contemporary problems facing society, such as climate change and sustainable development. We believe that a forward-looking approach requires a greater emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement by universities – both in terms of the curriculum and in institutional links with the wider community.

## Next steps

The 1997 UNESCO recommendation remains the most important international instrument in delineating the necessary parameters for academic freedom. The recommendation stresses the importance of the freedom to teach and freedom to research 'without any interference'. ETUCE believes that this should include the professional right not to use standardised teaching material and instead to choose methods that seek to develop students' intellectual capacities and their critical thinking and creativity.

Another key strength of the UNESCO document is its strong language on the links between academic freedom and 'self-governance and collegiality'. For example, in order to ensure collegiality, it says higher education teaching personnel should have "the right to elect a majority of representatives to academic bodies within the higher education institution". In addition, the UNESCO recommendation places job security at the heart of academic freedom and argues that tenure "should be safeguarded as far as possible".

## Recommendations for the future

Institutional autonomy, academic freedom and collegial governance are key elements in ensuring a quality higher education system. Thus, governments and higher education institutions across the EHEA must ensure the full implementation of the 1997 UNESCO recommendation on the status of higher education teaching personnel.

### 3. Increased public investment in higher education and research

In the Bologna Process, the Ministers recognise a joint vision of a European Higher education Area (EHEA) based on a public responsibility for, and strong public funding of, higher education, and commit to make higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy<sup>12</sup>.

ETUCE asserts the acknowledgement of higher education as an essential part of the public service with broad societal goals, which demand governmental and official action. This is essential if the long-term role of higher education and research is to be achieved in the respect of the generation and transmission of knowledge and culture and to widen access and lifelong learning.

While private resources have become a significant part of higher education and research financing, ETUCE would argue strongly for the public character of higher education to be sustained. ETUCE is concerned that global trends towards commercialisation and marketisation threaten to compromise quality and equity. Higher education and research must be publicly funded and administered, and accessible to all qualified students irrespective of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

Below we highlight the reasons why increased public investment is crucial to obtain the goals and further implementation of the EHEA.

<sup>12</sup> Yerevan Communiqué, EHEA ministerial conference 2015

## Growing demands for higher education, research and innovation

In a rapidly changing knowledge society with constantly evolving labour market needs, demand for education is growing. Recent projections by the European Commission show that in the years up to 2025, about half of the jobs will require high-level qualifications and 65 % of children entering primary school will be working in occupations that do not yet exist<sup>13</sup>.

Widespread digitalisation will bring about significant changes in the skills-sets needed from the labour force. Therefore, it is necessary to allocate funding to modernise infrastructure and equipment and to enhance digital capacities within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, unemployment rates, increased levels of political conflict and new immigration patterns, make it more crucial than ever to promote social cohesion. For all citizens to prosper and thrive in culturally diversified societies and increasingly competitive and knowledge-based economies, governments will have to keep up levels of investment in higher education, research and innovation.

The global financial and Eurozone crises hit the higher education institutions hard. ETUCE's surveys show that cuts in national public budgets throughout Europe have resulted in negative consequences for quality in the education sector, including public higher education and research<sup>14</sup>. The impact of increased funding due to austerity has also been confirmed in a more recent EI study, which states that the reduction of funding has had multiple consequences<sup>15</sup>. Evidence from EUA and OECD<sup>16</sup> indicates that higher education institutions in some countries show signs of financial recovery. In others, the sector still faces either actual budget cuts or a scenario in which the enrolment of students continues to outpace the growth in expenditure. All in all, the situation across EHEA varies and there are several examples of countries experiencing increases as well as and decreases in public spending<sup>17</sup>.

The EUA argues that universities need consistent investment to be put on a sustainable footing and made globally competitive. ETUCE argue that sustained funding over the next years is important to start reversing the entrenched impact of under-investment and even more if the system is to meet the increased need

13 A renewed EU agenda for higher education, EU Commission 2017

14 ETUCE: Education and Training Policy in the European Semester - Public Investment, Public Policy, Social Dialogue and Privatisation Patterns across Europe (2017)

15 Stromquist, N. P. (2017) Twenty Years later: International efforts to protect the rights of higher education teaching personnel remains insufficient, Education International, October.

16 Education at a glance, OECD 2017.

17 Eurydice publication: National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education 2017/18

for graduates and higher-level skills resulting from new economic and societal challenges<sup>18</sup>.

EAG 2017 shows that even though public expenditure on primary to tertiary institutions has clearly been rising, it did not keep up with the increase in GDP between 2010 and 2014 on average across OECD countries. This has led to a decrease of 2% in public expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP over the same period. Similarly, in half of OECD countries, the share of public spending on primary to tertiary education in total government spending declined between 2010 and 2014.

## Funding for equity and equality

There is an increased acceptance among governments that higher education is underfunded, albeit without sufficient public pressure to demand significant increases in expenditure. The economic crisis put pressure on state budgets and higher education increasingly has to compete with policy areas such as health care for public resources. As a result, higher education institutions have had to seek other sources for funding. EAG 2017 shows increased private expenditure in tertiary education institutions. In 2014 private resources funded 30 % of total expenditure on average across OECD countries, most of which were coming from private households in the form of rising tuition fees<sup>19</sup>.

OECD data on completion rates by socio-economic factors also shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be more at risk of dropping out due to financial constraints. To place greater financial burdens on students will most likely have a negative effect on access. Thus, increased tuition fees should not compensate for reduced public funding. Rather, governments must improve access for all by providing proper student support in terms of maintenance grants.

ETUCE is concerned that insufficient funding of higher education will result in increased inequality and further marginalisation of young people, and that governments lack the courage to prioritise substantial investment in higher education. Thus, more efforts should be put into arguing for proper funding of education as an investment which has long-term benefits for both individuals and societies.

<sup>18</sup> Research Europe Issue No. 466: Universities show signs of financial recovery (Ben Upton, 11 January 2018)  
<sup>19</sup> Educational opportunity for all, OECD December 2017

## Public funding to prevent negative effects of marketisation and privatisation

ETUCE is concerned that increased marketisation and calls for short-term labour market relevance will have negative effects on the quality of higher education and research. The scope of higher education and research institutions should not be limited to the immediate needs and interests of employers: instead, we insist on a broader mission for universities and other higher education institutions. Moreover, funding should be provided within a framework established by public authorities and have an appropriate balance between general and targeted funding.

The nature of knowledge creation requires a certain amount of uncertainty and risk-taking. New knowledge should be driven by curiosity rather than short-term demands, performance indicators and private interests. Governments must promote funding that allows risk-taking and academic freedom, as well as research and education across all disciplines.

As a result, ETUCE opposes the recommendation by the European Commission to increase the share of performance-based funding of higher education and research institutions<sup>20</sup>. Combined with a demand for enhanced cooperation between business and higher education and research institutions, this policy risks enhancing the commercialisation and privatisation of higher education and research, and therefore poses a threat to institutional autonomy, academic freedom, collegial governance and staff working conditions. These same trends also have negative consequences for the implementation of the Bologna process, since it may create inequitable funding for higher education institutions and inequality amongst students.

## Next steps

Democratic societies need free and independent higher education and research institutions. Governments must facilitate and encourage higher education and research institutions to maintain and develop their key role in society, which is generating and disseminating knowledge and developing and sharing their independent analysis and critiques on all issues without fear of repression or

---

<sup>20</sup> A renewed EU agenda for higher education, EU Commission 2017.

ensorship, or the distortions that might arise from the pressures generated by market values. ETUCE urge ministers to commit to increased public funding to retain and enhance equality and quality for all students, as well as autonomy and academic freedom for higher education and research institutions .

In order to tackle challenges of access and participation in higher education, governments have agreed to develop and implement National Access Plans within the framework of the Bologna Process. So far many of these remain unrealised<sup>21</sup>. To create an equitable lifelong learning system, a two-fold perspective on equity involving both access and completion, must be made an explicit priority.

Thus, ETUCE calls upon ministers to implement the commitments they have already made and proactively contribute to the realisation of equitable student access and completion in the Bologna area. This may involve an open and targeted admission policy and subsidy to underrepresented groups as well as targeted teaching and strengthened information, advice and guidance within the education system.

Finally, ETUCE calls upon ministers to view further commitments in the Bologna-process in light of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development. Ministers must pay particular attention to goal no 4<sup>22</sup> :

“

***Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all” and “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”.***

---

21 ETUCE views on the “A New Skills Agenda for Europe” of the European Commission”, ETUCE February 2016.

22 <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

## Recommendations for the future

Higher education is not a commodity and should not be for sale. ETUCE urges the Bologna ministers and national decision makers to restrain from further marketisation of the higher education sector and from performance-based funding models.

Sustainable public funding is crucial to achieving access to quality higher education for all and to sustain and develop the historic role of higher education and research institutions . Life-long learning, research and innovation is essential in meeting upcoming economic and societal challenges and to ensure the future prosperity and health of European citizens.

To implement the common goals of the EHEA and fulfill commitments made in the Bologna process and the SDG 2030, governments across the EHEA must view investment in higher education and research in a long-term perspective and increase public spending.

## 4. A supportive working environment for staff in higher education and research

ETUCE reiterates the importance of a supportive working environment for academic staff in the context of the Bologna Process.

The key role of staff in higher education and their working conditions has been set out in publications by the European Commission including the Modernisation agenda for higher education<sup>23</sup> , which states that:

“

***the reform and modernisation of Europe’s higher education depends on the competence and motivation of teachers and researchers.”***

---

<sup>23</sup> A renewed EU agenda for higher education, EU Commission 2017

The modernisation agenda of the Commission acknowledges that *‘teaching and research staffing has often not kept pace with expanding student numbers which puts pressure on already strained capacities.’*



***The European Commission calls for ‘better working conditions including transparent and fair recruitment procedures, better initial and continuing professional development, and better recognition and reward of teaching and research excellence.’***

The Commission also highlights *“the need for institutional autonomy, thus supporting higher education institutions to attract and retain the best teaching and research staff.”*<sup>24</sup>

## **Precarious employment**

The necessity to create and maintain such an environment was outlined in a 2015 study authored by Marie Clarke on behalf of Education International in nine countries entitled *“Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education.”*<sup>25</sup> This 2015 study focused on a range of key issues that impact on the working environment of academics including the difficulties in having a supportive environment where there is a high percentage of academic staff who do not have permanent contracts.

Almost half (48%) of the respondents in this study did not have permanent contracts and a third (33%) were on fixed-term contracts. The study also found that the initial experience of academic life of those who did not have permanent jobs was poor because they were not be able to plan for the future and had to move from one higher education institution to another in order to find work.

In addition, the study found that staff were of the view that their working conditions had deteriorated because they were under pressure to teach more students, there was a lack of administrative support, they regularly took work home which impacted negatively on family life and they did not have enough time for research<sup>25</sup>.

The 2017 Eurydice report on academic staff also confirmed that job security is

---

<sup>24</sup> A renewed EU agenda for higher education, EU Commission 2017

<sup>25</sup> Marie Clarke: Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education, 2015

not the norm in the academic world, with many academics employed on fixed term contracts. Contractual stability is often defined by career stage with junior academics commonly facing more uncertain employment conditions compared to their senior counterparts.

Precarious employment conditions also appear to be increasing. Recent trends reported by several countries point to reduced employment opportunities in academia and an increasing proportion of staff in externally funded positions. Patterns of part-time employment also vary considerably across Europe. While it is non-existent or rare in some countries, in other countries between 60% and 80 % of all academic staff work on a part-time basis. However, some countries have recently implemented regulatory changes with the objective of facilitating access to indefinite contracts, which is a welcome development<sup>26</sup>.

In most European countries, there is a mixture of fixed-term and indefinite contracts (permanent) for academic staff. While the majority of professor and other senior academic have indefinite contracts, there is increasing competition for these positions, with an overall reduction in employment opportunities in the higher education sector. The highest proportion of indefinite contracts (80 % or more) is reported in many countries, while at the other end of the scale there are some countries with 30% fewer academics with an indefinite contract<sup>27</sup>.

Academics employed outside the main career path for academics often have temporary employment contracts. Newly created academic staff categories are often likely to be affected by precarious employment conditions, and in many systems staff are employed on fixed-term contracts outside a recognised career path<sup>28</sup>.

The difficult position that part-time and fixed term academics find themselves in is also highlighted in a recent 2017 study<sup>29</sup> on behalf of Education International which found that:

---

26 Marie Clarke: Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education, 2015

27 Marie Clarke: Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education, 2015

28 Marie Clarke: Creating a Supportive Working Environment in European Higher Education, 2015

29 Stromquist, N. P. (2017) Twenty Years later: International efforts to protect the rights of higher education teaching personnel remains insufficient, Education International, October, pp. 16-17

“

***The problems associated with part-time or temporary employment are multiple: employment benefits are seriously curtailed- no sick leave, no medical insurance, no pension plans, very limited professional development, and scant opportunity for promotion... Frequently, also they have no access to an office, or to facilities such as copying machines. An even more serious aspect of their work is that they do not participate in the collegial governance of the institution...”***

In addition, the strategies introduced by higher education institutions to deal with the huge increase in student numbers impact on the workload of staff such as: “...splitting classes, modularizing courses... running parallel programs, providing open and distant learning, and developing institutional income generation ...in some departments, faculty have a teaching load of 18 hours per week...”<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the increasing divide between academics and senior managers and the division between teaching and research is a major problem. There is a tendency to demand significantly more teaching from junior and middle-ranking staff, and less teaching from the most experienced senior academics. This cultural reality undermines teaching, as good performance and career progression in academia is rewarded by reducing the teaching load – thus often providing more time for research. It is rare for strong research performance to be rewarded by a reduction in research workload to allow for more teaching. Teaching, therefore lacks parity of esteem with research. This fragmentation has been confirmed by recent research<sup>31</sup> where it states that:

“

***The university is experiencing two major fractures damaging to its traditional character: one of them is the split between teaching and research, the other the growing distance between teachers and administrators”.***

---

<sup>30</sup> Stromquist, N. P. (2017) Twenty Years later: International efforts to protect the rights of higher education teaching personnel remains insufficient, Education International, October, pp. 16-17

<sup>31</sup> Stromquist (2017)

## Gender equity in higher education

A supportive environment for academics is one in which men and women can attain indefinite (permanent) positions in their early careers and have equal opportunities particularly the opportunity to attain senior positions in their higher education institutions. This has proved not to be the case as the 2017 Eurydice report has confirmed.

While the share of female academic staff is increasing, **women remain under-represented** in most countries.

Women are particularly underrepresented in higher ranking academic positions. With regards to the number of women reaching the rank of professor, in some countries women represent **fewer than 20 % of professors**.

The path for women to the higher ranks of academia is hindered by obstacles that general legislation on equal opportunities has been unable to overcome. This has added importance when you take into consideration that in many countries employment legislation for academic staff grants more job security to senior ranks in the profession. This aspect is important when taking into consideration the fact that there is often more job security for senior categories in the profession. Women are therefore likely to be underrepresented in prestigious and influential academic positions, and more exposed to precarious employment conditions<sup>32</sup>.

## Recommendations for the future

1. It is essential that a halt is put to the proliferation of part-time and fixed term contracts in the sector and that such part-time and fixed term contracts are converted into full time indefinite (permanent) positions; in order to move towards a more stable profession that will encourage young people to consider academic life as an attractive profession.
2. Provide adequate support to reduce the workload of academics, including a reduction in class contact time and the provision of administrative support, so that academics can achieve a better work-life balance.
3. Teaching and research are an integral part of the life and work of academics. There should be parity of esteem between teaching and research and they

<sup>32</sup> Eurydice Brief, pp.7- 8

should not be split or decoupled into separate roles.

4. Introduce initiatives and measures to work towards significantly increasing the percentage of women holding senior posts in higher education institutions.

## 5. Quality education, student centred learning and the recognition of teaching

One of the major consequences of the massification of higher education is an increasingly diverse student population and one in which the backgrounds and expectations of the students are more varied than ever before.

As a result, greater demands are placed on teachers in higher education to meet a more complex set of student expectations.

Teachers need to be properly equipped with up-to-date pedagogical skills, knowledge and methods, high levels of ICT skills and in many cases also language skills when they are asked to teach students from different cultural backgrounds to their own.

It is a fact at all levels of education that the quality of education is developed in the classroom (no matter whether they are on a campus or online) in a process between well-prepared and qualified teachers and engaged and participative students. High learning outcomes are dependent on sufficient preparation for classes and engagement by students. Students can't be reduced to passive receivers of information if the goal of the education process is to enhance their creativity, critical thinking and intellectual capacity, along with the goal of learning their concrete subject of study.

Higher education must prepare future generations with skills and knowledge for a labour market and jobs that don't yet exist. Thus, it is a disadvantage to both the students and the future development of our societies if higher education is reduced to an easily measurable, one-size-fits-all system based on standardised learning outcomes and short-term employability.

## Student centred learning

Studies have shown that the quality of education is far higher in a student-centred approach to teaching. Basically, student centred learning means that the teachers need to have the freedom (and time) to use their professional judgement on how a certain group of students, with their specific and different backgrounds and expectations, are best engaged in working with and understanding their subject. Unfortunately, there is a strong tendency – not only in the EHEA but globally – which is promoting the use of standardised curricula and testing. Of course, there are several explanations for this phenomenon, but two of the most important are firstly, a wish to reduce educational costs and secondly, the growing marketisation of education, where private for-profit providers are trying to develop a market for their learning systems and products.

The consequence of both trends is a growing standardisation of higher education and less involvement of students in the learning process and therefore reduced educational quality and relevance.

In a common project about the necessary shift of paradigm to student centred learning by the European Students Union (ESU) and EI in 2010, student-centred learning (SCL) was defined this way:

*"Student-Centred Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking."*

Academic staff are supportive of a shift in the educational paradigm in line with this definition. The main problem is that everyone in European higher education seems to agree that student centred learning is the way forward, but few serious initiatives have been taken to implement it. On the contrary, we see many countries (as mentioned above) where governments are following a path of standardisation, reduced study-time, and increased economic pressure on students resulting from increased tuition fees.

At the same time, higher education teachers and the quality of teaching is put under serious pressure by reduced funding, shrinking time for preparing classes, de-coupling of education and research and undermining of the professional assessments of academic staff in relation to their work in general and in particular with respect to developing the quality of education.

A genuine implementation of student centred learning will eliminate (or reduce) the disadvantages of recent higher education reforms in Europe. In the words of the SCL-toolkit<sup>27</sup>, the implementation of SCL will result in the following positive developments:

**“Quality Enhancement:** *Any increase in the quality of both working conditions and the student academic experience is to be welcomed by both teachers’ and students’ unions.*

**The Status of the Teaching Profession:** *Given the trend in institutions to focus on research, the status of the teaching profession can only be improved with the adoption of the student-centred learning approach. Student-centred learning takes into account innovation and allows teachers to develop their courses in the way they wish, whilst allowing students the flexibility to develop in their own ways.*

**Increased Representation in Governance Structures:** *Given that student-centred learning in and of itself requires a higher level of cooperation between all institutional levels, it pre-supposes that the hierarchy within higher education institutions is rather flat. Student-centred learning therefore favours a more collaborative approach within institutions, allowing for more representation of both students and staff within the relevant governance structures.”*

## Quality Assurance and the status of teaching

In a **policy paper on quality assurance in higher education**, passed at an ETUCE conference in 2014, this approach was confirmed in several key areas, including:

*“Principles of student centred learning will enhance the quality of the students’ experiences and thus facilitate the achievement of the desired learning outcomes. A prerequisite of student centred learning is that academics have the necessary academic*

<sup>27</sup> SCL-TOOLKIT, p.9 <https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/100814-SCL.pdf>

*freedom to adjust the curriculum and pedagogical methods in order to meet the needs of the students in the classroom.*

*QA must be part of a process which supports and improves higher education and academic work and the continuing development of a quality culture at institutional level. Time for preparing classes, for self-assessment and teamwork must be taken into account as a basis for quality education."*<sup>35</sup>

This was followed up at the ETUCE conference in 2016 where a "**Resolution on Enhancing the Status and Recognition of Teaching in Higher Education**" was adopted. In this statement, the European teacher's trade unions took note of the:

*- fast growing demand for time-consuming and unnecessary documentation in the quality assurance process;*

*- pressure from national governments and university rectors to separate teaching from research and to 'unbundle' and disaggregate traditional academic roles;*

*- fact that university promotion procedures, particularly for senior academic jobs, are still largely based on research outputs and the ability to attract external funding;*

*- growing number of academics employed on fixed-term and casualised contracts;*

*- negative consequences for equality, including for women academics who often do large amounts of teaching in higher education and who are disproportionately employed on fixed-term and 'teaching-only' contracts<sup>36</sup>.*

*- In line with the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of higher-education teaching personnel, the following recommendations were proposed to governments and higher education institutions to improve the situation:*

*- to ensure that educators are employed on decent, secure contracts;*

*- to introduce equality issues and the mainstreaming of equality measures in the framework of higher education policies, social dialogue and collective bargaining;*

<sup>35</sup> ETUCE Policy Paper on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2014

<sup>36</sup> ETUCE Resolution Enhancing the Status and Recognition of Teaching in Higher Education, 2016

- to increase investment in activities that support the teaching function;
- to provide academics with high quality pedagogical training and continuous professional development that focuses directly on their academic practice and makes it possible for them to implement the principles of the scholarship of teaching and learning;
- to support research-led teaching and the principles of the teaching-research nexus in general as the best way to ensure the delivery of up-to-date knowledge and socially relevant education;
- to recognise teaching as a legitimate career progression route and ensure a better balance between teaching and research in academic staff progression and promotion decisions.

## **Recommendations for the future**

Quality education is created in collaboration between teachers, education support personnel and students in the education process. Thus, governments and institutions must introduce reforms that respect the following basic requirements:

1. Educators in higher education must be best equipped with pedagogical tools and methods to meet the requirements of human and digital developments in existing and future societies;
2. The connections between teaching, scholarship and research are vital elements in ensuring the quality and relevance of higher education and must be protected and further enhanced;
3. The professional career of academics must include better institutional recognition of the teaching component and not only a reward structure based on attracting external funding and publishing research outputs;
4. Secure the proper implementation of the key messages of the EUA, January 2018 position paper on Learning and Teaching in Europe's higher education and research institutions – including among others: *Institutional autonomy and sustainable funding are essential for the development of L&T activities.*

## 6. Conclusions and the future development of EHEA

As highlighted above, international standards for higher education are set out in the 1997 UNESCO recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel.

The recommendation include standards for basic values in higher education (including academic freedom and institutional autonomy) as well as requirements for tenure (or its functional equivalent), collegial governance and fair pay in order to promote these values and to maintain academia as an attractive profession for future generations and thus setting the necessary parameters for further development of the quality of higher education and research.

A stronger focus in EHEA on implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is crucial to the future relevance and success of EHEA as a serious partner in the global work for improving access to high quality higher education worldwide.

A successful implementation of the SDGs combined with reforms in compliance with the 1997 UNESCO recommendation will only be possible on the basis of a proper and more equal implementation of the essential elements of EHEA. This should include all Bologna goals such as structural reforms but also fundamental values as academic freedom, collegial governance as well as the social dimension and the development of a more supportive environment for academic staff.

ETUCE agrees that substantial differences in levels of implementation among participating countries undermines the entire notion of a coherent European Higher Education Area. On the other hand, there are limits to demanding reforms in a voluntary process, where principles of subsidiarity and respect for self-determination in participating countries are central values.

ETUCE can support a proposal to establish a cyclical procedure of peer review and evaluation, giving support to countries, which are struggling to implement EHEA values and structures. The remaining question is what kind of actions (if any) should be taken towards countries who for different reasons can't (or won't) follow European standards of higher education.

We cannot support a procedure, which includes a demand for non-implementation countries to be expelled from the EHEA against their will, although a less serious



form of intervention could be acceptable. This could involve the creation of a specific part of the EHEA web-site where countries are named for failing to meet the requirements revealed during cyclic evaluations (for example, respect for the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), protections for academic freedom and so on).

If such a process is overseen by a new working group such as the proposed Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG), it is essential to establish a number of conditions such as:

- The guiding principle of cyclic procedure should be supportive rather than sanctioning, but must nevertheless remain binding (for example by publically naming and agreeing to establish a roadmap for the purpose of solving the problems within a certain timeframe);
- ESU and EI/ETUCE must be involved in the process as the legitimate representatives of students and staff affected by the cyclic procedure.

Only higher education reforms that comply with international standards and are combined with strong public responsibility for both the funding and structure of higher education, including support for staff and students, will lead to further positive developments in the EHEA and to ensuring quality higher education in Europe.



EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION  
COMITE SYNDICAL EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION

5, bd du Roi Albert II - 9<sup>ème</sup>  
B-1210 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel. +32-(0)2 224 06 91 / 92  
[secretariat@csee-etu.org](mailto:secretariat@csee-etu.org)  
[www.csee-etu.org](http://www.csee-etu.org)



EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL  
INTERNACIONALE DE L'EDUCACION  
INTERNACIONAL DE LA EDUCACIÓN

5, bd du Roi Albert II  
1210 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel. +32-(0)2 224 06 11  
[headoffice@ei-ie.org](mailto:headoffice@ei-ie.org)  
[www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org)