



**The
National
Unions of
Students in
Europe**

**11th European
Student
Convention**

Report Package



March 2006

ESIB's Committee on Commodification of Education

ESIB - the National Unions of Students in Europe is the umbrella organisation of 45 national unions of students from 35 countries and through these members represent over 10 million students. The aim of ESIB is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at a European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow-Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.

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General Report

Written by the convention's general rapporteur Koen Geven.

A three-day meeting took place from 11 to 13 March in the university of Vienna. The meeting was attended by more than one hundred participants from various national student organisations in 35 European countries. The topic of the meeting was the effects of the Lisbon Strategy on the higher education systems of Europe. The meeting had four panel sessions and four different workshops. The main topics at the convention were student involvement, tuition fees and the social dimension.

The participants were given a warm welcome by the Austrian presidency, the chairs of the Austrian Union of Students (ÖH), the chair of ESIB and the general rapporteur. It was agreed that both the participants and ESIB had much to learn in this conference. Its general aim was to voice the opinions of the students of Europe to the organisations working on the drafting and implementation of the European Union's Lisbon Strategy.

The Lisbon Strategy was introduced by Jurgen Rienks, working in the European Commission. It was explained that the Lisbon Strategy has not been successful so far. However, the heads of state have given more importance to it in the field of education. This resulted in an increase of the aims and an even stronger reforms agenda for the higher education sector. Anton Dobart, working at the Austrian ministry of education, presented the priorities in the Austrian presidency and the Austrian Lisbon implementation plan. He lay special emphasis on the fact that striving for excellence must be balanced by investments in the social dimension of higher education. Patrick Franjou, working at the French ministry on foreign affairs, told us that France does not prioritise Lisbon reforms very highly, but is already one of the leading countries. France strongly opposes the commission's work on tuition fees and will not implement them. The participants showed their concern about the fact that the Open Method of Coordination, due to its undemocratic nature, might be harmful for public higher education. Also both the participants and the speakers showed their concern about the inclusiveness of our higher education systems. The participants asked the speakers to match investments in research and innovation with investments in the social dimension of higher education.

The second panel session discussed the issue of tuition fees, a highly relevant topic as it sweeps through Europe right at this moment. Carlo Salerno, a researcher at CHEPS, stressed the urgent need for the state to invest more in a higher education system, but in his opinion this should be backed up by tuition fees. ESIB presented a need for a new benchmark on the Gross Domestic Product expenditure on education to measure the public investments and move member states towards access. Also ESIB stressed that an inclusive higher education system is and should continue to be a central aim of the Lisbon Strategy and that tuition fees are an obstacle to that goal. It was argued by Lamija Tanovic that countries that do not have a strong infrastructure, like post war Bosnia Herzegovina should not charge fees to keep the already low inclusiveness of higher education as high as possible. She also addressed the urgent need for more investment in higher education infrastructure in Bosnia Herzegovina, such as a library in Sarajevo. The European University Association

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argued that tuition fees are not the only private contribution we should seek and that fees should always be met with a good support system. A lively debate followed where many diverse arguments for and against tuition fees were presented. Within the debate the participants made clear that they believed tuition fees are a bad way of implementing the Lisbon Strategy. ESIB's concern was expressed on EUA's view that tuition fees are one of the options improving the strong under funding of European universities, even when they are met with a strong student support system.

The third panel included representatives from the global teachers union, Education International, the European Employers Organisation UNICE, the European University Association EUA, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education EURASHE, the European School Student Organisation OBESSU and ESIB. All participants mentioned that within the Lisbon Strategy there is a need for stronger emphasis on the social objectives. Most organisations supported the aims of the Lisbon Strategy but had serious concerns about its implementation. A call was made by ESIB to include students and school students in the coordination bodies of the "Education and Training 2010" programme. All speakers, including the social partners, welcomed this call and have taken this message to their respective organisations.

Throughout the eleventh European Student Convention, the participants have been participating in five different workshops. In the first workshop on 'Financing of higher education' it was agreed that ESIB should stronger stress the need for increased public investment in higher education. Investments in higher education need to be matched with investments in students. Within the second workshop on the new mobility programmes, it was clear that the current European Union budget proposal poses serious threats to the future of the mobility programmes. Special emphasis was laid on the need for a more balanced approach between European Union and non European Union countries within the mobility programmes. The participants showed a strong concern on newly arising markets in the third workshop on quality assurance in a workshop on the European Union's work on this topic. There is a need for an objective information tool on quality assurance agencies, with full compliance to the European, Standards, Procedures and Guidelines, such as the European register. In a fourth workshop on the student's voice towards the Lisbon Strategy it was concluded that ESIB needs more resources in order to professionally work on this topic. ESIB work should strongly facilitate the work of members. Also, the need was expressed for a student strategy towards the European Union on the European, national and local levels.

After an original conference dinner the participants and speakers exchanged their different cultural heritage by singing songs from their history and current pop charts. Songs in more than twenty languages were heard during Sunday night.

The European Student Convention was concluded with a statement towards the European Union ministers of education, youth and culture. Again ESIB would like to thank our Austrian member ÖH for organising the Eleventh European Student Convention. Special thanks also go to the Austrian ministry of education, the office of the Austrian Chancellor, the Austrian chamber of workers, the Austrian

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chamber of employers, the mayor of Vienna, the Austrian national bank, BAWAG and ÖAD for making this event possible.

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Report on Workshop 1 - Financing of Higher Education

Facilitated by:

Maher Tekaya (EC 2006) and Erik Evans (CoCo).

The workshop started with an ice breaker and introduction to the topic. To ensure that all participants had a minimum of knowledge of what would be discussed, the Workshop-chair gave a brief introduction of the current European trends in financing of HE with special focus on the Lisbon agenda.

Since Jurgen Rienks was available for the workshop, he gave a brief informal presentation. The main issue here was not surprisingly the need for more funding to HE. He urged us as students to work towards our ministers for more public funding, but also stressed the need for a diversity of funding sources. He also urged us to look into how HEI's spend their funds and how and to whom HEI's are accountable.

The workshop then proceeded with all participants describing the funding system in their country or region by drawing arrows on an organisational chart with boxes representing the HEI, the public authorities, students and private corporations and explaining as they drew the arrows. This session revealed several fundamental differences in the HE financing systems across Europe. Participants tended to emphasise financing of the students in their presentations. Here are some of the most notable facts:

The Nordic countries represented by Norway and Finland where HEI's are mostly publicly funded but also with considerable corporate funding. In Finland, the government is closing down several HEI's due to a demographic lack of students. The most notable fact here was that all students receive loans and grants from the state that are quite generous compared to most other countries. The Dutch representative gave a presentation of the newly introduced voucher system in the Netherlands. It is also worth mentioning that public grants in the Netherlands are dependant on the income of the student's parents. The Bulgarian representative pointed out that they do have tuition fees that are hard for students to pay. There is currently a debate going on whether or not and in what way to introduce a loan system for students. There were some very limited opportunities for getting study grants for students with special needs or with high merit. In Poland, it is common to receive grants from the HEI, but these were smaller than what was charged in tuition fees. It was suggested that this caused unnecessary bureaucracy and that there was a potential for HEI's to spend their money more efficiently. In Spain, it is hard for students to manage without having saved up money in advance or being supported by their parents. Tuition fees made up approximately 10% of the funding of HEI's. In Estonia, most of the funding comes from the state. About half of all students pay tuition fees. Switzerland (not an EU-member) has reportedly achieved the goals in the Lisbon strategy already. Public officers supervise the spending of HEI's. In Austria, the number of students has increased after the introduction of tuition fees. This might be because of changes in the admission policies. Slovenia has grants for disadvantaged students, merit based grants and corporate grants based on

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future employment contracts. In Malta, 90% of the funding is public and 10% comes from the tuition fees from non-European students.

We went on to stage a debate between four stakeholders in HE – the public authorities, the students, the HEI's and the corporations. The debate was on how to increase private funding of HE without compromising the needs of the public, the HEI's and the students. This debate did unfortunately not reveal any information that isn't already well known in ESIB.

A participant quoted Petr Mateju from an earlier ESC that graduates could pay an extra tax to their HEI as an alternative to tuition fees. The participants dwelled a bit on this issue without reaching any conclusion other than that it was a very interesting idea. It was also asked that ESIB should look into the issue of *progressive taxation* as this has already been done by several member NUS'es.

Finally, the participants were divided into four groups and asked to brainstorm on alternate means of funding HEI's. Each group gave a presentation of their results and there was a discussion among all participants about every suggestion.

Sponsorships in HEI's such as advertisements on campus, in and on books and equipment, arranging of conferences and adoption of study rooms / auditoriums. This was seen as to have only a small potential for generating funds. There was also the concern that the bureaucracy such as

User-tailored programmes for private corporations to use for their employees was generally seen as a good way for HEI's to generate private funding and develop a more responsive attitude towards the labour market. There was, however some concern that this may lead to:

A fragmentation of academic culture into traditional critical vs. more career centred.
A relocation of infrastructure and human resources away from the traditional programmes.

HEI's competing for profitable corporate customers and lose focus on traditional students.

Corporate funded research at the HEI's was seen as a source of funding with great potential that public authorities should facilitate for instance through tax breaks. It could generate large generic funds as well as more specific funds for salaries, grants and equipment.

It was agreed that there were a lot of ethical considerations to this, however. Profit oriented corporations might compromise the academic freedom of the research being done. There was also the fear that the so-called soft sciences might be less prioritised should such this way of funding become more usual. Participants therefore saw the need for measures to be taken to ensure that all fields of science benefit from such funding. One of the strengths of this funding method was considered to be the fact that HEI's tend to have better equipped labs and more qualified personnel than private corporations. This is, however not the case everywhere. In many countries, the labs and equipment at HEI's holds a very low standard and is obsolete in comparison to what exists in the private sector. Participants thus saw the

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need for greater investment in such equipment as this is a prerequisite for such income.

Contract-based grants can be done in many different ways. As mentioned earlier, this is already quite common in some countries such as Slovenia. One must assume that such grants to a large extent would be merit based. Such grants were believed to strengthen the employability of students and graduates. It was believed that such grants would be accompanied by extensive information to students and thus might become a valuable addition to traditional career counselling. If and where such a practice takes place, it would be important to make sure that public funding of students would not be reduced equivalently.

Since such grants probably would bind the student/graduate to one employer for a considerable amount of time, participants saw the need for extensive information to be given to the students. Such information should also be given by the HEI or other independent institutions.

The concern was again raised that this might give a priority to the hard sciences. It may, however be accompanied by measures to ensure that it also benefits soft sciences. Such a measure could be a "tax" on the grants that could be directed into the less prioritised faculties. Participants were also concerned that this might lead to the HEI's might neglect other missions in fulfilling such contracts and that the non-market based study programmes would suffer from this. There was also a concern that corporations could speculate in the students' fear of their study loans. Further on, there was some scepticism to whether or not such grant schemes provide social mobility since they may be based on merits from secondary education where children of resourceful families tend to do better. The issue of brain-drain was also mentioned as students in countries with bad support schemes could become targets for international corporations. Finally, there was a concern that such schemes might facilitate academic dishonesty if it isn't done in a transparent way as there are great financial involved in who gets to offer such grants and under which circumstances.

As a conclusion to the workshop one could say that some new issues and perspectives were raised.

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Report on workshop 2 - Mobility programmes – The young ones

Facilitated by:

Christine Scholz (CoCo), Elena Gorschkow (SYL – Mobility Working Group) and Sime Visic (EC 2006).

The Workshop approached the issues of mobility through the existing mobility programmes within Europe such as Socrates, Tempus and CEEPUS. The discussion included elements in relation to accessibility of mobility, brain drain and the funding of student mobility.

As central areas to promote student mobility the participants identified finances, accommodation, language, visa, counselling, general motivation to go abroad, available information, possibility to take up higher education (equal access), matching programmes to enable mutual recognition, student status, proper administration and tutoring.

The essential stakeholders in solving these obstacles to mobility are the states and their governments, the national unions of students, local healthcare systems, housing institutions and higher education institutions.

The general idea of who should pay the mobility was agreed to be the receiving country.

The majority of the working group agreed that the mobility programmes should be administered on the national level. The reasons for this were given as diminishing bureaucracy as well as to ensure equal treatment and to diminish corruption. More bureaucracy is naturally more costly and therefore not desired by the participants. As means to tackle the brain drain issue for the different actors in the receiving and sending countries the group suggested following measures:

Student Unions in the home-country

- agreement with student unions from other countries to give financial support
- establishing career services and information about job vacancies for students
- social networks – alumni
- promoting students interests and improving the situation in the home-country
- promote the exchange programs
- exchange programs between student unions

Government in the home-country

- giving scholarship like SIU to students, who have to pay back, if they go abroad
- allow short internship periods abroad
- strengthen networks between HEI and do exchange in the networks
- maintaining contacts with mobile individuals (HEI, ministry of education, embassy in the host country)
- use knowledge of the mobile students / employers

Student Union in the host-country

- promoting the developmental idea of mobility periods abroad and inform about the opportunities in / to return to the home-country

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- promote the scholarship model of Norway, increase developmental aid scholarships for students from developing countries

Government in the host-country

- ease the regulations on visa and working permits for Non-EU countries
- taxes to the home-country from the employers taxes
- promote the remittance of money from individuals to the home-country

In discussions about the mobility fund, the group agreed on certain mixture of CEEPUS-idea and present mobility programmes and – grants. During the debate, although many agreed on equal treatment in the host country (which in some countries includes provision of student support „in-kind“), the majority valued additional provision by existing grant systems in mobility programmes as means to freedom of choice.

Recommendations

1. There should be one integrated mobility programme for both EU- and non-EU students. The programme should be based on the host country-principle, ie. they provide student support according to the national student support schemes. In addition to that mobility grants should be made available to all mobile students.
2. The problem of brain-drain needs to be tackled both by the sending AND receiving countries allowing for freedom of movement while at the same time ensuring possibilities for sustainable development of developing countries.
3. Student unions play an important role in dealing with the brain-drain in developing instruments and promoting them towards the governmental authorities and mobility centres.
4. Special attention should be paid to such questions as legal regulations concerning mobility and make up of existing mobility programmes, as well as ensure support for the individual.

Report on Workshop 3 - Quality Assurance – A European-Wide Market

Facilitated by:

Janja Komljenovic (EC 2006), Colin Tück (BPC) and Daithí Mac Síthig (BPC).

This report contains the substantive elements of the workshop. The working methods also included simulations, roleplays and other devices.

2. Introduction to QA and Europe

Colin gave a presentation giving an overview of the European aspects of quality assurance (QA). The notes in the first section are primarily key points, questions and contributions from participants responding to the presentation.

Open question – why should you do QA?

- To compare, especially to minimal standards
 - Why? To improve quality of process, ensure basic value of the diploma,
- To assure students who are in receipt of promotion of courses that they are of a standard.
- To build long-term strategy for the university through quality.
- To get more insight on how a system/society is built up. Differences between higher and non-higher education.
- As general aim – improve quality of HE. Ensure minimum standards for comparability – what is a bachelor/master degree, compare between institutions and countries. Accountability of higher education. The demands of society. Society (via the government) invests money in higher education – wants to see
 - what that money does.

What is the scope of quality assurance?

- Relevance for the job market.
- Indicators, such as how many students who begin get a diploma at the end (progression and completion rates).
- Quality of the personnel – how much supports do students receive?
- Quality of the courses (both the programme as well as the individual units). Looking at the curriculum.
- Access (by social status, prior education level, etc)
- Management and administration.
- Teaching and learning facilities, IT equipment.
- Decision-making (involvement etc)
- Same standards for public and private.
- It is important for students to a) fight to give their opinion and b) ensure that QA is a broad concept.

Internal v External QA

External is usually once every few years, while internal is ongoing/continuous. Can be understood as macro (common issues) v micro (specific indicators and

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questions). External opinions. Internal is typically within the community (professors, staff, students etc – dialogue within the HEI. One thing you could add is that internal focuses on QI, but external is possibly likely to be meeting a standard. This leads on to...

External evaluation v Accreditation.

EE is to focus on improvement, give external input to the HEI. Especially, you end up with a report/recommendations.

A is meeting predefined minimum criteria. Check if is fulfilled or not – normally have a yes/no decision.

Agency – what are the requirements of being such? What should they fulfil?

What are the criteria and standards?

- Input from the stakeholders (students should be involved, as should professors, employers, international experts, neutral people, government, trade unions
- Independent, neutral
- Qualified staff
- Transparency, results, criteria, procedures. Clear legal status.

[Many participants expressed sceptical about involvement of the government – using QA as a political instrument. However, they could be one stakeholder among many.

There can also be tensions between institutions, and possibilities of bias or not finding a fair assessor. One partial solution is within federal states, where participants from outside the local administrative unit (e.g. Land) can be brought in.

So why is QA important? The situation differs from country to country. External QA usually defined by law. Different types and models throughout Europe.

There are some national ones – e.g. institutions have to get formal national accreditation – also sectoral or prestige, applying for the 'label'.

In some countries, are formed by the stakeholders, in other countries it is just Government representatives, others just professors etc. One example is that you can have a national agency who sends teams to the universities (with some element of peer review). The best situation is that no one stakeholder has a majority within a national agency, so can't control the influence. Standalone legal status is often important too.

Bologna Process

This is a key issue/action line within the process. Leading up to Bergen, E4 (ENQA, ESIB, EUA, EURASHE) group prepared European standards and guidelines, which were adopted at that summit. Mandate given to this group (at Bergen) to prepare the European register for QA agencies. Market is a big issue. There is a very big regional (European) market and therefore there is pressure (from inside and outside) to regularise the situation.

3. Documents and Current Issues (general)

The Basics of E4

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Berlin Communiqué (September 2003), said that:

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005.

E4 = four organisations, all starting with E –

ESIB

EUA (European Universities Association; gathers all universities throughout Europe. President – rector of Vienna University, Georg Winkler, with a Board, elected, and a big secretariat

EURASHE (similar, for non-university HE)

ENQA (association of QA agencies).

Work 2003-2005 was on European standards; 2005-2007 (current) is Register work.

Do we need European standards?

Some pressure is necessary; institutions are afraid to take part because they do not know the results. However, the Bologna way of working is not to force countries – it is optional. We have these recommendations (standards and guidelines), with three fields:

- 1) Internal QA
- 2) External QA
- 3) Agencies

The main idea is to give basic information in the registers on those who do and don't comply with the register.

E4 group; meeting regularly to try and develop this until London 2007. Each of the participants has a different view, on the issue of agencies in particular:

- Take into account processes
- Official status
- Recognised by appropriate authorities
- Undertake external QA activities on a regular basis
- Resources, adequate and proportional, human and financial
- Mission statement (clear and transparent goals etc).
- Independent (autonomous responsibility, and conclusion cannot be influenced by 3rd parties).
- Criteria 'predefined and publicly available'.
- Publication of reports, including decisions/recommendation.
- Follow-up procedure
- Own accountability

We want to have agencies that comply with these standards. But they are not so strict.

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ESIB has been from the start having the view that this should be a neutral information tool, with only the complying agencies.

ENQA is the organisation that already includes some agencies. Do they want their members to comply? They are demanding that their agencies are included – EUA and ESIB are strongly opposed. EUA want reliable information – not just register complying. Possibility that EUA would not favour strong national agencies because of institutional concerns and independence.

Do universities favour QA? There are different concerns.

Should there only be agencies included that fully comply? This was a controversial issue.

ENQA – says that it is very difficult to get this correct.

EUA – have some points that are of more importance to them.

4. Documents and Current Issues 2 (E4 Working Group Report Aug 2005 and subsequent E4 meetings)

Things could not be worked out at the general meetings, so WG was set up to do so. Each of the E4 members nominated one person; they then proposed ideas. Target audience for register – HEIs and governments. Students need it for selection of degree programme. HEIs need it for student admission and transfer, partnerships, and to select agency. Cooperation between QA agencies – exchange ideas and solutions, assist in joint degree reviews, etc. Employers have a role in that they wish to be assured of qualifications etc.

An alternative (competitive) approach - students will enrol anyway in the better institution, regardless of quality. What do we think of that? Participants were critical of this; this allows institutions with good historical reputations to provide low quality, and it is against access to education.

Diploma mills are generally involved in giving qualifications that are of little merit – i.e. buy your diploma online. Accreditation mills are less well known but very serious; they often accredit the diploma mills as well as 'real' institutions. The abolition/prevention of this problem was discussed a lot in the working group meetings, and is still an issue of major concern.

It was envisaged that there would be four categories – whether compliant or not, whether European or just working in Europe. In addition, those not reviewed yet.

This raises questions:

- How can we measure the extent of compliance?
- Are the reviews organised nationally? If so, should ERC take up position on what is a good review model? This depends a lot on whether you agree with the idea or not.
- Agencies/national authorities claiming that they already do reviews.
- Will this register be a ranking instrument?

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'Could' include supra-national, student and HEI involvement – also possibility of standards on organisational and evaluation

ENQA's position is difficult – not all ENQA members comply with the standards. If you don't have a rejected category, it means you can't deal with mills problem, but you avoid some of the legal issues that cause concern.

Role of the 'Register Committee'. National reports as 'one criteria' for review of entry to register. E4 organisations plus others nominate persons, but not to be mandated by organisations. ENQA to act as secretariat.

Participants argued that this is wrong; secretariat has informal power and should not be one of the stakeholders.

Also has to formalise the ownership of the register, and have an independent appeals system. National reps – suggestions of BFUG involvement. BUT ... E4 meeting discussed having no governments involved, and favoured to this. 2 x reps per E4, 1 x social partners each (unions/employers), 1 x chair – total 11. Accountable to E4, reports to governments etc.

On the secretariat, it was concluded (by E4) that there was not enough work for a separate organisation. However, no agreement was reached. (ENQA v ESIB/EUA on whether it should be ENQA!). Budget of €76000 in first year (lower in subsequent, probably) – unclear on future funding.

Participants disputed whether there should be an admission fee for the register – it depends on whether you see the listing as a 'Golden Pages' that you should pay to be included in, or whether you favour 'no burden' and a strictly scientific approach.

The milestones timeline was seen by participants as very ambitious – decisions, legal status, etc by summer 2006 – first applications in winter 2007. Janja gave an updated on the proposal to hire independent consultant, to propose different register types, how is going to look, what are legal implications, etc. Prepare until June; then E4 decides. Unresolved areas include 'neutral or accreditation', 'inclusive or exclusive', and the idea of 'substantial compliance'.

5. Role play: QA as a market?

Four actors: US QA Agency, European QA Agency, Student Representatives, National Government

The students pointed out that HE were a public responsibility and cannot be regulated by market. Thus also QA had to be a public responsibility. Quality had to be discussed by all stakeholders, including students and could not be regulated by the market. The European Register was necessary to ensure basic principles in QA.

The US Agency rejected the students' statement and called upon Europeans to

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believe in the free market. The consumer should to choose the best agency. They reject the register as it would limit the free market and would be to restrictive.

The EU Agency supported the view of QA as a market. They rejected bureaucratic approaches like having only one agency per country. The government pointed out the principle of subsidiarity and that the European level had no competence to introduce a register. They agreed with the students that HE is a public service and so should be QA. They further pointed out that the QA market would be too small to really work. The register would facilitate a market, therefore they rejected it. Moreover people should believe in governments ability to assure quality.

The US Agency reaffirmed their opinion, that QA is a market. They do not insist on HE being a market. They therefore stressed that these are two different debates! On the other hand, the government feared that QA being a market could imply or at least facilitate HE becoming a market as well. The students want to reach transparency by a European Register and stressed that it should not facilitate a QA market in their opinion. In particular it shall not be a ranking instrument.

6. General Debate and Conclusions on QA as a market

Pro market / opportunities Contra market / risks

- HEIs should be able to choose the best agency for their needs
- Competition between agencies could raise the quality
- ESG secure a minimum standard for agencies on the market
- Market may get complicated
- Are different agencies comparable? Are difference a problem?
- Does a market really raise the quality?
- Decrease of quality due to competition
- Price issue: Who pays the bill?
- Risk of creating also competition between HEIs
- Will the market function properly?

(Transparency of quality)

- The following conclusion were drawn regarding the market issue:
- HE is a public service, therefore its QA is a public responsibility and cannot be completely privatised
- There are advantages if HEIs can choose between different agencies/providers of QA:
- Choosing the agency which best fits the need of the HEI, e.g. in terms of profile
- Thereby increase the quality
- The quality of an QA agency will have its implication only in the very long run
- Not enough transparency for an entirely free market

There is a need for strong and good regulations to prevent bad agencies/accreditation mills:

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- Ensure comparability of QA processes of different agencies
- Enforce minimum standards as laid down in the ESG
- The quality of an agency is too complex for the “user” (HEI) deciding on its own, therefore a transparency instrument (Register) is needed
- Enforce involvement of stakeholders and requirements on who controls agencies.
- We do not want competition of HEIs.
- There need to be a solution to prevent extraordinary prices for QA.

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Report on workshop 4 – The Students' Voice towards Lisbon

Facilitated by:

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Workshop overview

This workshop was the one to develop a strategy of student organisations towards the Lisbon strategy. To reach this aim, we first looked at the Open Method of Coordination, the steering tool of the EU in the Lisbon Strategy, to understand how the process works. As a second step we identified Opportunities and Threats of the Lisbon Strategy in the field of education. Finally, as a result of this analysis, we discussed concrete improvements for ESIB and the NUSs to improve our work towards Lisbon on three levels:

- internal coordination
- lobbying
- raising awareness and creating a debate among students

Understanding Lisbon

As part of the introduction into the workshop, the participants were asked to illustrate what the Lisbon Process means to them. Central elements of those illustrations were:

Positive impressions

- Lisbon as a step towards well functioning mobility in European Higher Education.
- Lisbon as a step towards making Europe more attractive to the rest of the world and make Europe better known.

Negative impressions

- We should be careful not to create a "fortress Europe".
- The strong focus on stronger relationships between industry and HE and the focus on tuition fees is negative. Students are fire fighters of this "Lisbon rocket" who need to fight the bad parts of the Process.
- Lisbon creates barriers to access to HE, because of for example tuition fees.
- All fields of research should benefit from the Process, not only the ones that are immediately producing economic profit.
- The Lisbon process is a theatre and the commission is trying to use the universities to reach economic goals within the process. The whole HE society is on the scene in the theatre, most of us being the puppets of the commission.
- Bureaucrats in the European commission want a federal Europe that many of us do not want.
- There are many countries around Europe that do not know anything about the LP – what is lacking is information and discussion.

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Neutral impressions

- Europe is a plant that needs to be protected; the Lisbon strategy is a defence from the world economy. But the defence can also hinder the sun, education, and then the plant dies.
- What is Lisbon?

The open method of coordination (OMC)

Before presenting the central elements of the OMC, the participants were asked what they know or think about the OMC:

- It's used on the basis of the subsidiarity principle.
- The OMC is soft law, based amongst other on good practices. There are no good practices, and therefore the dynamic of the method is not working.
- The EU Commission advises the EU member countries for their reform policies. But if something goes wrong the EU doesn't take their responsibility, but the guilty ones are the member states.
- The OMC denies the basic rules of politics: The European Parliament is not at all included in the decision making, but instead the Executive (EU Commission) defines where the road should lead.
- The OMC is used since EU by law doesn't have the competence for influencing education. So it's used by the EU to get into an area where they do not have any competence.

For a detailed description of the OMC see the convention reader "Higher Education within the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union".

We then looked more closely at the role of the different levels that are part of this Open Method of Coordination: the European level (commission), the national level (governments), and the institutional level (universities).

European level:

- The EU has no real power due to soft law.
- Formally there are "no sanctions", but in fact the EU can influence national education policy making through defining best practice, creating peer pressure and competition.
- The EU Commission sets the agenda for reform policies of the EU member countries by producing proposals/ recommendations national policies.
- To influence policy development, the EU funds special projects.
- The EU Commission has no responsibility. Blame the countries.
- The EU also has a strong influence on non-EU countries through helping non-EU countries in the implementation & following of EU policies.
- Division of EU influence fields:
 - o EU members
 - o Candidates/countries wanting to become candidates
 - o Other countries not wanting to become candidates

National level:

- Formally the national governments decide what happens in the field of education.

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- But there are limitations to this:
 1. The EU-15 decided the Lisbon Strategy, not the EU-25.
 2. Only a very limited group of people take the decisions: heads of state (EU council), technocrats (EU commission, national ministries)
 3. The very broad range of Lisbon creates confusion and the possibility for misimplementation.
 4. Peer pressure between the EU member states influences the policy making.
- National Action plans: The member states have the initiative and decision making power. The only sanction is bad reputation.
- Evaluation process: The states provide the data, the Commission interprets the data. Formally the interpretations are decided in the Council, but in fact the Commission works them out.
- Conclusion: The states have a lot of power, but this power is limited by the Commission initiatives, and the group dynamics in the EU council.
- Our role as students: States are powerful – so we need to influence them, both on the EU level, as well as on the national level (→ national action plans).

Institutional level:

- The institutions have problems with influencing the LP, which raises the question whether the stakeholders are taken into account in Lisbon, and whether the stakeholder model is applicable for the Lisbon Process.
- Also there are many conflicting interests within HEIs between students, professors, university administration and researchers.
- The HEIs are pretty slow in figuring out what to do, but need to speed up a lot. Otherwise the Commission and the national level will decide.
- HEIs are struggling with contradictions between their traditional role vs the role that is designed for them in the Lisbon process → identity crisis?
- Conclusion: HEIs are a bit lost in the Lisbon Process, starting from the central question of “What to influence in the Lisbon process as HEIs?”.

Opportunities and threats for higher education in the Lisbon Process

The participants were asked to discuss which opportunities and threats they see in the Lisbon process for higher education. The aim was to define concrete opportunities and threats, and also try to point out non-obvious things.

Opportunities	Threats
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<p>Business and education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - practice opportunities - funding (of equipment etc) - jobs - funding for research 	<p>Business and education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - neglecting basic and non-private research, social sciences - vicious cycle of research funding: the "better" ones get more money get better get more money... - national diversity gets lost - academic autonomy gets lost
<p>Social inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - plans for social diversity - equal financing in mobility - LLL creates opportunities for older people 	<p>Social inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating access barriers, for example through promoting tuition fees. - LLL sets older people in competition with younger people.
<p>Quality Assurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased opportunities for improvement - comparability of HEIs 	<p>Quality Assurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - definition of excellence and evaluation on the basis of business indicators - lack of involvement of students
<p>Transparency of political processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - student involvement could be strengthened - efficiency can be raised through better management 	<p>Transparency of political processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - huge impact of lobbying makes decision-making less transparent - no consideration of stakeholders on various levels of decision making
<p>Lisbon is a pressure tool for more getting more money into HE and improving the infrastructure</p>	<p>brain drain (internal: east → west; and external: south → north)</p>
<p>Lisbon puts education high on the agenda: we have to use it</p>	<p>European standardisation processes kill creative thinking</p>
<p>Lisbon could make the universities more connected to the outside world</p>	<p>involvement of outside stakeholders (business and industry) comes at the expense of students involvement and democracy</p>
<p>Lisbon encourages networking between universities</p>	

Our strategy towards Lisbon

Based on the analysis and discussions of the workshop so far, we rounded up the workshop by collecting and discussing concrete steps for ESIB and the NUSs to increase student involvement in Lisbon. Through role play discussions, group work and plenary discussions, we came to the following elements that should serve as a basis for strategy development of ESIB and NUSs. We clustered the elements into three priority areas for student organizations to work on:

- internal coordination
- lobbying

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- raising awareness and creating a debate among students

The tendency in the workshop on how to approach Lisbon was that it won't be possible to change the Lisbon agenda as a whole. So we have to – on the level of lobbying –develop concrete policy in the fields that we defined as opportunities, and to contest problematic developments in Lisbon, which we defined as threats. The fundamental critique towards the Lisbon Process should be on the agenda when raising awareness and debates on Lisbon among students.

Internal coordination

- ESIB should develop appropriate coordination tools for structured and active coordination. This improved coordination structure should
 - guarantee a constant overview and information flow between ESIB and the NUSs (e.g. online for a → in a way that they are used actively).
 - create good and updated contact lists of politicians, technocrats and media, that include information on those persons and on eventual meetings with them.
 - allow joint action of ESIB and NUSs (one strategy, divided tasks).
- We could have an ESIB working group as a possible structure to increase the ESIB internal coordination on Lisbon.
- ESIB should facilitate capacity building in the NUSs and lobbying strategies of NUSs towards national governments, for example through:
 - creating a toolbox, argumentation guidelines and info papers for NUSs.
 - doing trainings for NUSs.
- NUSs should build up internal structures that increase their activities on Lisbon and facilitate the information flow with ESIB and other NUSs.
 - "Lisbon guy/girl" in each NUS (a person in charge of Lisbon).
 - NUSs organize trainings and invite ESIB people to their countries.
- NUSs should follow the reforms and developments in their countries and collect concrete examples for the implementation of Lisbon in their HE-systems.
- ESIB and NUSs should apply for project funds to get money ("students get to know Lisbon").

Lobbying

- We need to influence all 3 levels that are involved in Lisbon policy making (EU, national, institutional).
- We also have to influence technocrats in ministries – one possibility is using our expertise and organizing trainings for people in the ministries.
- We also have to influence the public opinion (→ develop media strategies: central messages to put forward).
- A project-based approach could be useful to invent ideas ourselves and place them in political debates.
- We need to seek and build coalitions with other stakeholders, both on the European as well as on the national level.

Raising awareness and creating a debate among students

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- There is a huge lack of European discussion, we can use this vacuum to start this debate as students.
 - We have to be provoking and to the point clear, understandable.
 - What was left unclear is the question: Should we line out the strategy behind the reforms and call it a “Lisbon” problem, or should we rather focus solely on the effects that the students see in their every-day life?
 - We also need an internal debate on the issue of a “European” identity/ citizenship. What would be very useful is outcomes of the Board Meeting Seminar in Reims (November 2005). For this issue we also need more internal debate.
- NUSs have the primary responsibility, as they are closer to the students.
 - Depending on political culture, actual developments and state of discussion: Organize demonstrations, strikes, actions, collect signatures
- ESIB's job here is to coordinate the NUSs work, to facilitate their work and keep them updated on European developments.
- We can use the internet and multimedia (e.g. online-game on Lisbon), and more creative tools such as simulation events, pixie books, ...

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