

The European Students' Union



# STUDENT ADVANCEMENT OF GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY

## STUDENT VOICES ON THE MODERNISATION AGENDA



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme



## IMPRINT

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agenda

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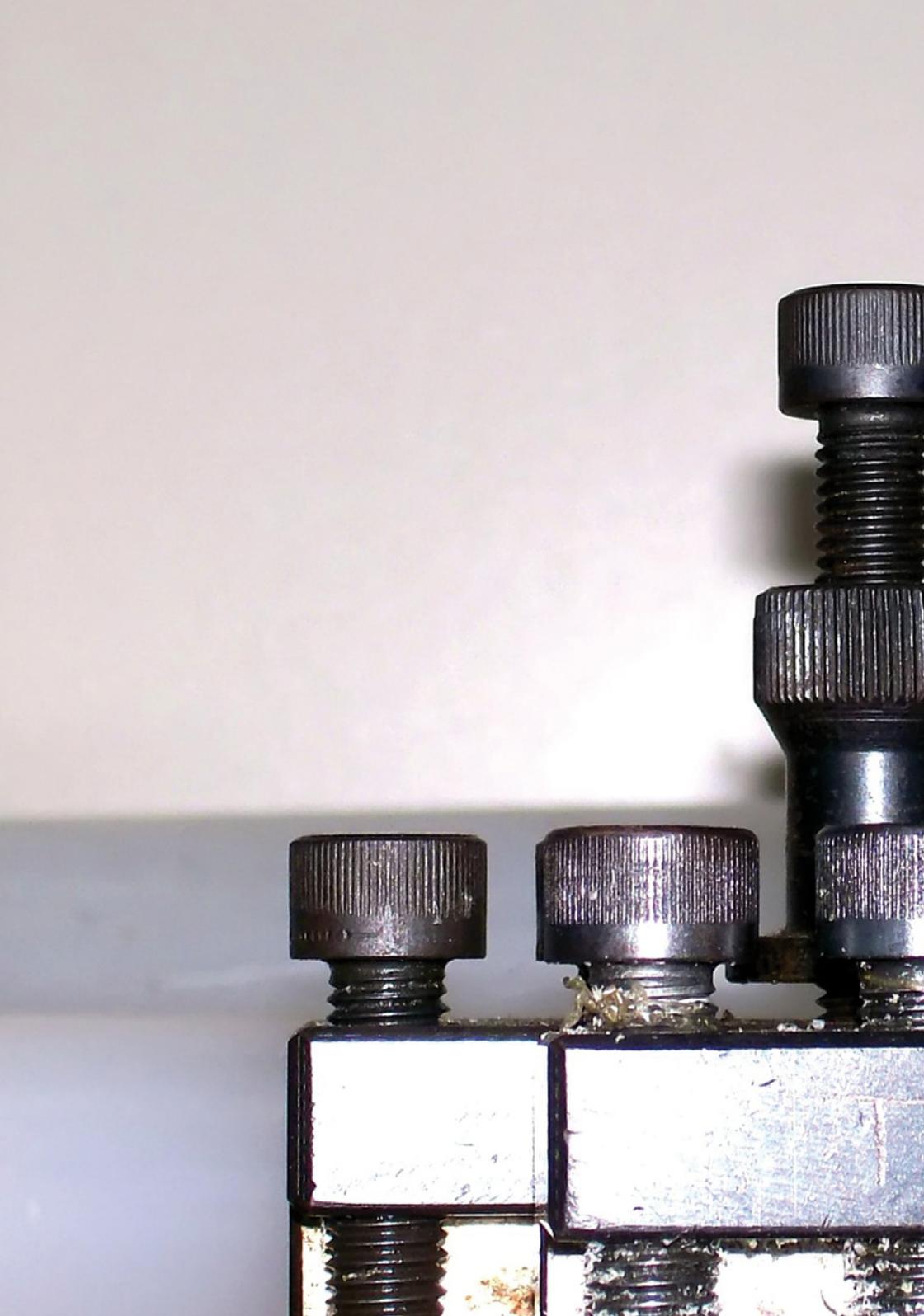
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# 1 FOREWORD

Since 2008, with the global financial and economic crisis, levels of unemployment around Europe are record high, and the numbers of unemployed young people are even higher. Because of that, employability of higher education graduates has been put on the agenda of governments in Europe, which in turn started to affect universities and the way we see and perceive education. There is not yet a clear definition of employability that the stakeholders would agree on, and in the public discourse the term is often used in a very simplified manner, as well as mostly understood in terms of employment rates and statistics. Due to this and to shed some more light on the matter, ESU has decided to look into the issue of employability more closely and that is the main aim of the SAGE—Student Advancement of Graduates' Employability project.



The second aim of the project was to gauge the influence and changes that different pan-European processes such as the Bologna process and the European Union integration have brought to the European higher education. ESU has been involved in the Bologna process since its beginning, and has a role of a consultative member in the Bologna Follow-Up Group. With the publication *Bologna With Student Eyes 2012*, which was also a part of this project, we have tried to analyse the progress that the Bologna process has made in the past years.

On the other hand, whether we like it or not, the European Union and especially the European Commission is increasingly influencing the higher education policy, not only in the 28 EU member states, but through different programmes (such as TEMPUS) also on the accession and neighbouring countries. Despite the subsidiarity nature of the higher education, the European Commission has managed to enter the higher education field and documents such as the Modernisation agenda are clearly showing the directions of perceiving education as an instrument of economy, to increase the GDP and the competitiveness of the countries. With the country specific recommendations for higher education the Commission has made even a step further and is now directly commenting on the member states higher education systems.

I would also like to sincerely thank to all the partners that have contributed to this project: SAMOK from Finland, CREUP from Spain, DSF from Denmark, HÖOK from Hungary, ILI from Germany and ANC from Romania.

I thank you for taking interest in our publication and hope you will get an interesting insight through our work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to be 'R' and 'P' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Rok Primozic,  
Chairperson of the European Students' Union 2013–14

## 2 INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that Europe has faced enormous changes in the past few years and is continuing to do so in relation to youth unemployment. Several initiatives of the European Union in higher education seek to combat this development in Europe. The Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) strategies both outline headline targets and benchmarks for higher education policy reform in Europe. To achieve the goals set out in the Europe 2020 strategy and ET2020, the European Commission launched in 2011 a Communication entitled “Supporting growth and jobs—an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems”, from now on referred to as the modernisation agenda. The modernisation agenda for higher education fixes five key priorities for higher education in the EU to support the main strategies.

Those five key priorities are:

- 1 Increasing the number of higher education graduates.
- 2 Improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning.
- 3 Promoting the mobility of students and staff and cross-border cooperation.
- 4 Strengthening the knowledge triangle linking education, research and innovation.
- 5 Creating effective governance and funding mechanisms for higher education.

The Modernisation Agenda, while containing several policy recommendations that the students through ESU have supported and pushed for, can sometimes be problematic in the way it is implemented. This publication seeks to shed light on how some of the national unions of students across Europe view different aspects of the Modernisation Agenda and its implementation. Those unions were invited to share their views in articles and interviews contained in this publication. These inputs have given us insight into further steps in this process. The experiences across the region are nearly as diverse as the student body itself. Despite this, there are many common themes. Among those, concerns about youth unemployment, the commodification of higher education and access to further studies are highlighted.

This publication is purposefully created to underline some of the issues that exist within and due to the modernisation agenda as well as the barriers to its success. While being critical in several aspects, it is meant to be an input to future policy and research to improve those issues. ESU is committed to many of the main messages of the Modernisation Agenda and has endeavoured to support them in several ways, including, but not limited to, the many projects that ESU has managed and have been funded by the European Commission. Those projects have supported a wide range of

policy-focused initiatives, including quality assurance, student-centred learning and equity in higher education.

### 3 WHAT IS COMMODIFICATION AND WHY IS IT A CONCERN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE?

One of the main concepts that will be a point of reference throughout this publication is the concept of commodification. As this is a concept that is not itself addressed all too often we have chosen to highlight and explain it before delving in to the perspectives of the national unions of students.

Commodification of higher education has been one of the main long-term concerns of the European Students' Union (ESU) and its members. It is also one of the major concerns raised in relation to the Modernisation Agenda, how it contributes to the view of higher education. The policies from the European Union undeniably reach a wide audience and it is important how policies are framed influence how they are implemented. How language is used to describe education and what priorities are focused on, highly influences what kind of policies end up getting implemented. One of the main points of concern that have been raised is how the many positive aspects of the Modernisation Agenda, such as the push for quality and access to higher education, become lost in translation due to the economic language of the strategy.

Commodification refers to a situation when education markets are established through the instrumentalisation of education and the changing perception of education as purely an economic factor rather than a tool for social development. It is when the perception of higher education changes from being a public good and public responsibility to a private and limited commodity. In this context, higher education is perceived as a knowledge industry, higher education institutions as service providers and students as consumers of education and human capital for the labour market. Despite the fact that the Bologna process declared higher education a public good and public responsibility in 2012, this has been far from reality even at the European level.

When education is defined as a factor for production, discussions of investment in education are based on an understanding that it is an investment in 'human capital'. This view fails to encompass the complexity of higher education. It is not only a resource for economic growth that must be profitable. Commodification also encourages an unhealthy competition between higher education institutions, where education is sold as a product in an effort to make a profit. This has not, and should never be, the purpose of tertiary education institutions, since this can have consequences for the quality of education and its role in society.

The scope of this limited perception is not wide enough to encompass the multifaceted benefits and contributions that higher education has for students and society. The European Students' Union is against the view of education as a commodity, the undemocratic and inequitable limitation of education by the market, and the instrumentalisation of research and teaching by private decision-makers to fit commercial interests.

A specific issue comes up regarding the Modernisation Agenda throughout our consultation and concerns its contribution to the implementation of tuition fees through the goal of cost-sharing. This is in addition to its focus on how higher education can contribute to economic growth and the students' future by developing their skills for the labour market. This in contrast to the goals inscribed in *ET2020* that also highlights equity, personal development and social cohesion.

## 4 INTERVIEWS

### 4.1 GERMANY

**In the European Commission's thematic report on Education and Training in Europe 2020, the fact that the *Länder* in Germany have been abolishing tuition fees has not been mentioned at all. Do you believe this abolishment will have a positive impact on access, participation and completion rates?**

Of course the absence of tuition fees would have a positive impact on access and participation. A lot of studies on the impact of tuition fees have been published in the past years when one of the *Länder* after the other abolished tuition fees. We had a high number of first year students recently due to many reasons. If the numbers of countries that abolished tuition fees recently is compared with those that did it a longer time ago, the number of beginners in the semester after the tuition fees were abolished is in comparison particularly high.

The completion rates are another issue altogether. Some of the *Länder* still have 'long-term-student'-fees. 57 per cent of the students in Germany work for a living. This is especially true for students from non-academic families. Out of this group, 72 per cent of the students have to work for a living. Due to this, students of this group tend to extend their time of study and are therefore a target group for 'long-term-student'-fees. Nevertheless, it has to be said that the time spent on work has decreased by one hour since the tuition fees were abolished.

**What further steps do you believe should be taken towards widening access to higher education in Germany?**

A major problem is that not everyone who have access to study get the admission to study as a consequence of a too low student capacity. What we need as a first step, are more study capacities to lower or eliminate the 'numerous clausus'. The admission to study 'respectable' programmes judged on previous grades, advantages students with an academic background and without disabilities.

Especially in Master's programmes, we need immediately recourses for more capacities. In three years, twice as many students will compete for the same number of Master's courses compared to this moment. Up to 36 thousand students will get no opportunity to study a Master's course. Already in these days, higher education

institutions invent absurd access regulations for their Master's programmes. Access to Master's programmes should be given to anyone with a Bachelor's degree or a comparable qualification.

**Would you say that there is a similar approach to the Modernisation Agenda goals across the *Länder* or are there different approaches? Do you think this is a problem, why or why not?**

The goals of the Modernisation Agenda are tackled both by the State and by the *Länder*, whilst only the *Länder* have the competencies to politically approach education. This is why, e.g., the implementation of the Bologna process requirements differs throughout the *Länder*. Additionally, there is the so-called *Schuldenbremse*, which is a newly-enforced constitutional element that prohibits both the State and *Länder* to take new loans and to spend more money than they get. This adds to the problem of the diverse financial situation across the *Länder*. Thus, also the quality of the education system keeps on diverging even further. In order to ensure a given standard in quality and to ensure social equity in access, the State should take substantial part in financing higher education and its policies.

**Germany suffers from a shortage of student housing. Do you think that this is an important obstacle for students' access to higher education? How does it impact access?**

Shortage of affordable housing, especially for students, is currently a major issue in political discussions on higher education in Germany. Thus, in most university cities throughout the country rent rates have risen by more than twenty per cent in a year. Higher living costs are an obstacle for potential students from financially underprivileged backgrounds that want to access higher education.

**Is it your assessment that the Modernisation Agenda goals contribute to commodifying higher education and how? Why or why not?**

The Modernisation Agenda focuses on economic growth and as such education is just a way to support economic growth. A shortage of public funds caused by the before mentioned *Schuldenbremse* leads to a debate on public expenses like education. The selling point for the personal outcome of education causes a further discussion about education fees. The Modernisation Agenda can be used to justify a further commodification in higher education in the political debate.

The goal of the agenda to get 75 per cent of the population employed and 40 per cent (of them) with a tertiary degree, abbreviates the debate on higher education itself to employability of graduates. Companies already compete at higher education institutions

for the best heads and try to make higher education more output oriented. Funding of higher education provided by companies has an influence on the study programmes and on the capacity of higher education institutions.

In sum, tertiary education in Germany is already measured in economic terms. Academic freedom and free high quality access to higher education thus can hardly be guaranteed.

**If you could ask your Member of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

- 1 It should be less difficult for international students to obtain a visa. Foreign students from outside the Schengen area are a great additional value for European students, higher education systems and societies. Students need have the permission to work and to move freely within the EU. What will you do about student visas?
- 2 Education is a human right. Nevertheless, various kinds of tuition fees are raised all over Europe. In many countries like Germany, the social background is the most important career factor. What will you do about this equity gap and how do you think, a fair/free education system can be built?
- 3 Student participation in Europe is manifold. The form of organisation in student representation is manifold too. Not every country is as easy as Germany to be active in the student movement and raise the voice of student issues. How can the European Parliament guarantee students' participation in decision making process?

## 4.2 ESTONIA

**Would you say that your education and training policies have been improved in relation to the educational targets set out in the Modernisation Agenda?**

Our education and training policies are improving due to implemented higher education reforms which have no real connection to the Modernisation Agenda, but their purpose is similar. The reforms were an electoral promise made by one of the coalition parties.

One of the aims of the Modernisation Agenda is to increase the number of highly educated people. From this academic year onwards, higher education in Estonia is free from tuition fees (in public universities). This is a result of the higher education re-

forms that aim to make higher education accessible to everyone who are able to study at higher education level. Another aim is to improve the quality of higher education. It can be assumed that the number of highly educated people will increase and the quality of higher education rise, but the actual results can only be seen after few years, because the new higher education system is still too fresh to evaluate the effectiveness of the system. Moreover, the system is not perfect and needs a lot of changes.

**In the country specific recommendations it was said that Estonia should pay particular attention improving the labour-market relevance of education and training systems. What is your opinion on this?**

There is a mismatch between the higher education system and the labour market. The needs of employers and expectations of graduates are in some cases conflicting. So the recommendation are correct and justified. Universities and employers need to cooperate more. Also, students have their part in improving this situation—awareness needs to be raised concerning the situation in the labour market. Unrealistic expectations are not helping to resolve this problem.

We have to agree with these recommendations. In Estonia there are certain specialties, which are very popular among students. For example, each year a large number of students begins their studies at the Faculty of Law while the demand in the labour market for lawyers is not particularly high. This same problem occurs in many other disciplines. In reality, we need teachers, medical staff, IT specialists and so on.

In order to satisfy the labour market as well as the State, there must be a scholarship system, which is a part of the higher education reform. One component of this scholarship system are scholarships for those students that study specialties, which are priorities for the State. This system is under development, so it is difficult to predict whether it achieves the desired result.

**Do you think that the EU could contribute more to the development of the Estonian education system and if so how?**

From this academic year, there was a new higher education system implemented in Estonia. In the light of the reform, we see that the EU could contribute more to the development of the Estonian education system financially.

**Estonia lacks alternative routes for non-traditional candidates to access higher education. Does this create a barrier to achieving the attainment goal set in the Modernisation Agenda or is this goal attained by other means?**

We have a system created especially as a part of Adult Education within higher education—the prior learning and work experience system (VÕTA). This system is being used by more and more students and therefore definitely proves the opposite of what the question implies.

However, there is still a long way to go in order to improve the access to higher education for disabled people. There are only few exceptions at some universities where improvements have been made, i.e. are physically accessible. But there is still a huge lack of study materials for disabled students all over Estonia—there is no system created for that and therefore depends on lecturers themselves.

If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education what would they be?

- 1 When will you start to deal with educational issues? So far, none of our EU parliamentarians have done it (no Estonian MEP has ever been a member of culture and education commission).
- 2 What kind of certain improvements can be seen with the implementation of The 'Erasmus Master Student Loan Guarantee' for Estonian students? How will you contribute in order to increase the number of outgoing Erasmus students in Estonia?
- 3 What certain action have you taken/will you take in order to improve the ECTS transfer system (there are still many problems especially for exchange students that they cannot easily transfer credits from one university to another and that is the main reason why students do not go abroad for exchange).

## 4.3 POLAND

**The Modernisation Agenda encourages more cooperation with businesses in the educational system. How does this relationship work in Poland and what should be done?**

At the present in Poland, we have a problem with the cooperation of higher education institutions with businesses. It results in issues with internships for students in the private sector and further with the employment of young alumni. Science programmes

seem to have less difficulties with that, however the general situation stays the same. When it comes to the research area—private companies try to involve universities in research programmes, but in the end they prefer to engage with single academics than the whole higher education institutions.

Here comes up the issue of investments, i.e. public-private partnership. Higher education institutions are afraid of starting up such cooperation, because it would require too much involvement from public higher education.

Currently in Poland, we have a problem with the cooperation of universities and the entire educational system with businesses. It creates a problem even when it comes to internships. Technical universities seem to do significantly better in this field, but it does not improve the overall evaluation of the situation. Companies are trying to engage in cooperation with higher education schools in the research field, but they prefer to hire particular researchers than to work on projects together with higher education institutions.

Difficulties also appears in public-private partnerships. Universities are reluctant towards them. So far there was only one investment of this kind made in our country—at the Jagiellonian University (student dorms).

Poland lacks legal regulations that would normalise relations between public universities and external parties investing within them, due to the fact that many universities are afraid to engage with businesses in their everyday life. This situation seems to be better at private universities, but it's still a margin in higher education in Poland. Poland realises the benefits of such cooperation, but there are also many fears concerning that, like excessive engagement of one, particular company in university's everyday life, for example in a degree programme.

**The country specific recommendations point out the low degree of lifelong learning in Poland, is something being done to counteract this and what should be done?**

Several programmes are being implemented to counteract this, but there is also a certain concern about their use. In Poland, the culture of life-long learning has not been elaborated yet. Educational institutions and non-governmental organisations are implementing more and more programmes though. Employers, universities, third-age universities etc.

**The recommendations also point out that there is a mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market needs. They connect this to the low employment among young people. Would you say this is the cause of youth?**

Young people have a serious problem finding jobs after receiving particular specialisations. It is rather a matter of the labour market being unprepared for such an amount of people with diplomas than the level of studies. On the other hand however, it is also a matter of a certain profile of skills and abilities that the learning outcomes lack. The labour market preferably wants practical knowledge, which is difficult to achieve for example in the case of humanities.

In Poland there is a gigantic problem concerning unemployment among alumni. It reaches 30 per cent. We are asking our politicians about solutions to this situation. We do not hear responsible voices of change, which could improve current situation though.

The labour market is saturated with graduates with specialisations among which there are no placements. Technical specialisations characterise in the smallest mark of unemployment, whereas humanistic-social specialisations rank high.

There is not a significant difference in the number of young and old people that are unemployed.

**Should the EU do more to support reform of higher education and if so what?**

The European Union should be regulating international matters in higher education. Definitely a positive aspect of its activity is today's Erasmus+ and it should be focusing on it even more, by widening cooperation among particular universities in Europe. Nowadays, competences of European Union bodies in this matter are quite large, but still they should even more emphasis on students' exchange and finally on researchers and staff exchange, as they should also have a chance to gain experience at other universities in Europe.

Other problems include the recognition of diplomas, learning agreements and as a result, transfer of ECTS points (after the Erasmus exchange programme has finished). We would also like to liquidate the apostle currently needed for foreign diplomas.

**If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

It would be the following matters:

- 1 How they picture the future of science and higher education in Europe? Should those issues be regulated on a pan-European level?
- 2 Will they support Erasmus, which is a hope for the development and acquainting educational standards in Europe? Are they supporters of equalising the educational chances of citizens of various countries in Europe?
- 3 In which direction should cooperation of science and business go? What solutions do they propose in this field?

## 4.4 MALTA

**Do you think that the European Union should get more involved in education policy?**

The EU should continue to play its important role in ensuring quality and standards across the board. Despite educational policy being the sole domain of each sovereign member state, the attainment of strategic goals, harmonisation of standards and the promotion of educational mobility should remain on top of the EU's agenda.

**Can education do something about the low employment rates in Malta, if so what?**

At this moment in time, Malta's unemployment rate is the 4th lowest out of all the EU Member States with around 6.4 per cent (October 2013). The heavy and continued investment in education and free and accessible higher education plays an important part in developing the employees needed for Malta's growing and dynamic economy.

**Has the Modernisation Agenda impacted higher education in Malta? What has been the biggest change?**

Malta's higher education system has been progressing in line with the Modernisation Agenda for a number of years. The lack of tuition fees for undergraduate courses at the University of Malta as well as the stipend grant given to all post-secondary students have ensured that the access to higher education remains unhindered, remaining as accessible as ever. The expansion of the MCAST (Malta College of Arts Science and

Technology) and the on-going expansion of the University of Malta have contributed to the growth in higher education graduates.

**Malta has generous student support systems, are these important for achieving the attainment goal set out in the Modernisation Agenda?**

Yes, the student support systems, such as the maintenance grant, the Smart Card system and the free undergraduate courses are the main reason for the attainment of the goals set out in the modernisation agenda.

**If you could ask your Member of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

- 1 Where do they see higher education in Europe going in the next ten to twenty years?
- 2 Should higher education one day fall under the competences of the EU, with one EU-wide policy for higher education?
- 3 What can the EU continue to do to fulfil the Modernisation Agenda and help keep the number of graduates growing?

## 4.5 IRELAND

**Would you say that having what is generally considered a good national access plan has helped Ireland reach closer to the access goal of the Modernisation Agenda?**

We do believe our access plan have facilitated Ireland in improving participation of underrepresented groups in education, particularly higher education. Having a national plan is very important to ensure that the whole system becomes more accessible rather than just certain institutions, disciplines, modes or levels of study. In Ireland, each institution has been following targets and goals under the access agenda along with national projects and programmes that are coordinated under the national plan. This local and collaborative approach among higher education institutions (particularly the staff in the access offices) and national policymakers is making our system as a whole more accessible.

We are coming to the end of the current plan's implementation period (December 2013) and are very busy drafting the new national plan. Again this is a very collaborative approach with student representatives, student support staff and policy makers

being involved and consulted. One of the main concerns for Ireland and the Modernisation Agenda is that reducing resources, both family and public, will have a negative impact on our access targets, particularly those groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This links into our high rates of unemployment and emigration.

**Do think that it is necessary to focus on underrepresented groups to be able to reach the attainment goals set in the Modernisation Agenda? Could you explain why?**

Yes, focusing on underrepresented groups is crucial in reaching attainment goals. Ireland is currently doing very well in terms of targets and our focus on underrepresented groups has played an important part in this. We have seen trends in the levels of study, modes of study and disciplines of study being broken for some underrepresented groups, but there is a long way to go. Traditionally, more professional programmes of study: such as, law, medicine, pharmacy etc. have been less accessible to students from poorer backgrounds, the travelling community and students with mobility and physical disabilities. The main barrier for these groups was (and still is) cultural. Our point based admissions system puts high points on these courses as they are very popular. This creates a bias towards students who had more opportunities at second level education and more support, which is often increased by family and community affluence rather than the academic ability of each student.

Our mature student community is growing steadily with many institutions reaching set targets. Our national intake of students over 23 years of age is about 15 per cent. This group is particularly important with regards to our high unemployment rates. Many mature students are 'upskilling' to get back into the workforce having lost their job in the economic recession.

One concern that the Union of Students' in Ireland has is that more families will slip into or underrepresented groups will be increasingly marginalised, due to increasing fees and college costs along with reduced student supports.

**What could the EU or Bologna process do to help support the inclusion underrepresented groups in higher education?**

Many of the groups we address in our access programme face barriers before third level education becomes a possibility so the Bologna process comes in at a stage that is too late for them. Emigration is having a very negative impact in Ireland, as is unemployment. We have recently been told, that the Irish Budget includes 14 million Euros for the Youth Guarantee investment. We hope this is just a starting point, as the problem of youth unemployment and graduate unemployment is increasing, though the statistics do not show the extent of the problem as emigration figures are not taken into

account. In helping and supporting Ireland to introduce a Youth Guarantee, the EU may impact third level access in a positive secondary way.

With such positive results for many of our targets, we need to focus on the inclusion of underrepresented groups in different areas of higher education. Opportunities to study abroad are not taken up by many students in Ireland outside of programmes where it is part of the course, i.e.: commerce and language courses. This, along with other opportunities such as work placements, internships, volunteering and research, should be just as accessible to underrepresented groups as they are to traditional students. As these groups experience many additional barriers, the EU and Bologna policies should reflect this.

**Do you think that the EU should take a bigger role in education policies and if so how or why not?**

The answer for Ireland is no. Though we see the EU play a very important role currently, we value the autonomy of our institutions although that position has been eroded over the years under national policies and funding models. The EU does need to play a role in allowing countries to share best practices and initiatives, taking the diversity of systems into account but ensuring that unhealthy policy convergence is avoided.

**If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

- 1 What do you see as the main barriers preventing more Irish students from studying abroad and what can be done to reduce those barriers?
- 2 With 14 million Euros allocated to the Irish Youth Guarantee how do you see the EU supporting this initiative and do you believe the allocated funding is adequate?
- 3 In Ireland, many access programmes exist for Irish students. Should they be extended to non-Irish students and non-EU students?

## 4.6 PORTUGAL

### **Would you say that the economic crisis and austerity measures hurt Portugal chances of reaching the goals set in the Modernisation Agenda?**

The economic crisis and austerity measures have been hurting Portugal chances of reaching the goals set in the Modernisation Agenda in various ways. Directly, the budget cuts towards higher education have been affecting the ability to hire teachers (the rectors are saying that if the government does not drop the budget cuts for salaries, the medical faculties may close next year) and to provide the conditions for teaching, such as lab materials or even basic materials like paper or pens for white boards. These budget cuts are similarly taking their toll in research, not only because of the lack of materials but also because of reduced number of research projects able to get funding, as well as research scholarships. This does affect the institutional ability to establish international research cooperation. Scholarships for international mobility programmes have also been reduced and fewer students are able to study or train abroad.

Indirectly, the economic situation in Portugal is affecting the number of graduates. Even though the number has been increasing in recent years, since 2011, due to the lack of economic possibilities and insufficient social support, the number of applicants for higher education has been falling dramatically. In 2010, there were 52,178 applicants in the first phase. In 2011, there were 46,899 applicants, and in 2012, there were 45,078. In 2013, there were 40,419 applicants in the first phase of applications. This means that there are roughly 12 thousand students less applying for higher education now than in 2010, which is going to result in fewer graduates. This tendency to have fewer students in higher education seems to be deepening, rather than to be reverting.

### **What can be done to improve the situation from the side of the EU?**

From the EU's standpoint, the only solution is to increase funding in higher education. In 2009, the Portuguese government announced it would increase the budget for scholarships. This happened indeed, but the state's expenditure due to scholarships was reduced. Instead, the funding was increased through European funds. This has also happened to the funding for research and higher education institutions. The weight of European funds within the higher education budget has been increasing and that seems to be the only way to increase the public expenditure in this area. Obviously, this does not stop the budget cuts, but the situation would be much worse if it was not for those funds. So, since the definition of goals such as the Modernisation Agenda or the Europe 2020 agenda does not seem to have an effect in terms of political options, especially during times of an economic crisis, the only way to avoid a country without the necessary means and qualification to improve its economy in the post-crisis

sis scenario, is to increase targeted funds from the EU. We believe the main concerns that need to be addressed are scholarships, mobility and research/higher education institutions operations.

**Are the targets set out on the Modernisation Agenda relevant for Portugal? Explain why or why not.**

We would not say that the targets set out on the Modernisation Agenda are not important for Portugal. Portugal pushes itself to be on the same level as any other European country in every European goal or statistic. This means that we are always trying to get closer to other EU countries. The Modernisation Agenda is not different, so it is taken seriously. However, there is a big difference between the relevance that is given to the EU's goals in the political speech and the political measures that are taken. This means that the actions taken are not coherent with the concerns that the government says it has. In terms of higher education, the views of the Ministry for Science and Education meet the Modernisation Agenda. It intends to increase the number of graduates, to improve the cooperation between higher education institutions and businesses, especially through research, to improve quality of higher education and to encourage higher education institutions to promote internationalisation strategies. But the budget cuts, particularly during the current economic situation, show that the de facto political measures directing us in the opposite way.

**Would you say that achieving the goals set out in the Modernisation Agenda work together with the Bologna process in Portugal? Please elaborate.**

They do coincide in some aspects. The goal to improve the quality of teaching and researchers' training, the need to provide knowledge and core transferable competences and the need to provide opportunities for studying and training abroad and boosting higher education performance, all of which are targets set out on the Modernisation Agenda, comply with the Bologna purposes of establishing a quality higher education system, defining European cooperation in quality assurance and enforcing a European Higher Education Area. Additionally, promoting cooperation in education, research and business, is a good strategy to enhance employability as well as to promote lifelong learning. Students' involvement in the management of higher education should also be promoted in order to create an effective governance. Theoretically, the attainment of the goals defined in the Modernisation Agenda bodes well with the Bologna process in Portugal. However, as explained earlier, the problem is that even though the agenda is an issue of political concern in Portugal, the political action does not meet these concerns.

**If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

- 1 What policies are being designed/are going to be designed in the future to diminish inequalities among higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area, balancing budgets and promoting a strong quality strategy rather than creating a false feeling of comparability between higher education institutions and degrees?
- 2 Can the mobility inside the European Higher Education Area be addressed by an EU fund rather than being financed by each country, since this situation creates different accessibility levels with regards to mobility experiences?
- 3 Will the EU develop policies so that higher education can truly become accessible to anyone within the European Higher Education Area?

## 4.7 ITALY

**Would you say that the economic crisis has affected your national ability to reach the attainment goals set in the Modernisation Agenda?**

Of course, the crisis affected Italy's ability to reach the goals of the Modernisation Agenda. Instead of implementing the system, Italy did massive cuts to the budget of public education, giving the impression it wanted to maintain quality, but only by "closing" the system.

**What do you think about what the European Union should be doing to support education in your country?**

To support education in Italy, the EU should be clearer about educational requirements and change the way in which they are asked for. In other words, when the EU gives directions to the member states about further development, measures to improve the educational system, bettering the quality of higher education and guaranteeing it to everybody, this should be the first point. Also, as we know that the decision to improve the educational level is political and the best excuse not to follow it is to say that there is not any money, what Europe should do is to exclude education -and everything related to it- from every austerity measure that could be asked. On the contrary, the EU should decide to support education in every country by financing it, maybe with a European fund that can be used only in this way.

**Massive cuts have been made to the Italian education system due to austerity demands. Do you think this is the right path or should education be a way out of the crisis?**

We believe that education is the only way out of crisis. What we think that education is the key to change the economic situation: we cannot get out of crisis if we do not build innovation and the only way is to defend and re-finance education and support students' rights.

**How should employability be included in the educational policy? Why? Do you think the Modernisation Agenda benefits this?**

Employability is not the first aim of education: if we consider universities only to be 'offices' to put people from school to jobs, we are walking on the wrong path. Of course, we need to reflect on the situation: we cannot have very specific specialisation courses if they have no employability, but the excuse of using employability -intended as the possibility to "translate" a degree in a specific career- to close the access to universities, stating that only a certain number of students can have access to universities because there can be only a certain number of jobs related to that area of knowledge, is wrong. Knowledge should be open to everybody.

**If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

- 1 When are we going to make the educational system public, open and free for everybody in every country of the EU? Does the European Union have the political intention to pursue this way?
- 2 Did the Bologna process reach the goals that were imagined when it all started? If not, what is the problem and what should be done?
- 3 When are we going to give same rights to all students in the whole European Union? Same rights, same possibilities and more international mobility—this can help to build the European Citizenship that we are all aiming for. When do we start?

## 4.8 AUSTRIA

### **Is it your assessment that the goals of the Modernisation Agenda contribute to the commodification of higher education and how? Why or why not?**

It is evident that the Modernisation Agenda aims to increase the focus of higher education programmes on labour market oriented skills. Thus, it is clear to us that the Modernisation Agenda is an initiative to further commodify higher education in the EU.

Extensive use of key words such as “boost higher education performance”, “requirements of the knowledge economy” or “global competition in the field of education” unmistakably imply that higher education is treated as nothing more than a means of enhancing economic growth and the global competitiveness of Europe.

Also, the demand for more effective funding and governance along with the ‘knowledge triangle’ seems to be calling for further privatization of higher education and a stronger voice for businesses, undoubtedly leading to an even stronger focus on economic interests in higher education. Another goal states that students should be equipped with knowledge and competences for high-skill occupations, depicting higher education institutions as highly specialised training- and knowledge-transfer-centres rather than institutions that promote self-determination and critical thinking. For that matter, it is clear to us that the Modernisation Agenda is defining education by means of economic growth and employability.

### **Why is it a problem that education becomes a commodity?**

In our view, free education is a human right as stated in the Charta. We strongly believe that education is a public good that is vital for a society built on democracy, equal opportunities and critical thinking.

Regarding education as a commodity implies subjecting it to a market and thus (partial) privatisation. Education gets more and more subordinated to short- and mid-term needs of the labour market, with negative effects on the diversity of study programmes and fields of research. Commodification of higher education also leads to more regimented study programmes for the sake of cost-efficiency, a practice that is restrictive to the personal freedom of students and causes social selection. Furthermore, commodification of higher education increases competition between higher education institutions, causing them to be socially selective as well.

In a meritocracy-based view, students are perceived as mere consumers or even the product of higher education and the beneficiaries are businesses which are supplied with highly skilled workforce.

But we are determined that education is not supposed to be a means of economic growth and success, but it should support people in becoming critical, reflective and independent individuals that benefit society as a whole.

**In the country specific recommendations that follow-up on Europe 2020, Austria is encouraged to improve the completion rates of students. Do you agree with this assessment and do you see changes in that direction?**

We do agree in the point that completion of studies and reducing drop-out rates is important and that Austria should work towards these goals. However, we rigidly object to higher education being regarded as ‘degree-factories’ that should produce the largest amount of academics possible at a most effective cost.

At the moment, we cannot see real changes. However, there have been measures taken to prevent long-term studying, but that only increases relative completion rates and does not affect the absolute number of academics at all. We are determined that in this regard, Austria is heading in the wrong direction. Admission tests and knock-out exams are not at all—and never will be—contributing to a more inclusive higher education system. They only prevent students from succeeding in their studies or even from entering higher education in the first place. Moreover, financial support for students still has age restrictions, putting unnecessary pressure on young students and acting as barriers for older students.

**Do you have any suggestion on how the EU could help Austria achieve the goals in the Modernisation Agenda?**

We would rather like to see the EU develop its strategies together with all stakeholders, including students’ representatives. Furthermore, we would prefer a strategy that is not solely focused on providing highly skilled workforce to the labour market and that is not based on meritocracy.

Having said that, the goal of enhancing participation in higher education and reducing drop-out rates might be drawn closer by encouraging Austria to commit to new teaching methods, such as student-centred learning, wide-reaching grant systems, comprehensive childcare and housing schemes and to cut back on rigidly structured study programmes, thus providing more flexibility for the individual inclinations and abilities of students.

**If you could ask your Members of the European Parliament three questions about higher education, what would they be?**

There are many questions we would like to ask ‘our’ parliamentarians, but solely asking questions without a real approach to solving the given problems is not enough.

- 1 Why don't you 'invest' more in independent higher education? The promotion of independent and free education, apprenticeship and research yields to emancipated people.
- 2 Why don't you listen to student representatives? The direct view and opinion that student representatives have could help forming a better, learning- and student-oriented education system in Europe.
- 3 Why are you still holding on to a labour market oriented approach to education? In our opinion, to train, drill and shape students according to the market's needs is the wrong way—a way that will ultimately destroy the means of free education and science.

## 5 ARTICLES

### 5.1 LOOKING AT MOBILITY AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION IN SWEDEN FOLLOWING THE MODERNISATION AGENDA

*By Erik Pedersen (SFS)*

**The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) is a national organisation with 47 member unions that all together represents about 290,000 out of 320,000 students in higher education in Sweden. SFS was established in 1921 and has ever since worked to improve the quality of education, students' conditions and student representation both locally and nationally.**

Since the introduction of Europe 2020 there have been annual follow-up reports published on the national progress according to national targets. Because the latest follow-up focused on how to overcome the financial crisis and reduce the high unemployment rates existing, the national recommendations paid attention to policy areas such as fiscal policy, household debts and how young people can be included in the labour market. The Council recommended in 2012, that Sweden would:

- 1 Keep its fiscal policy on a path that ensures that the medium-term objective continues to be met;
- 2 Take preventive action to deal with the macroeconomic risks associated with rising house prices and household indebtedness. A broad set of measures could be considered, such as reviews of the mortgage system, including the capital requirements of banks, rent regulation, property taxation and construction permits, and;
- 3 Monitor and improve the labour market participation of young people and other vulnerable groups.

These are of course valid and necessary steps to reduce the impact of the financial crisis in Sweden. But we see, both in Sweden and in the rest of the European Union, a lack of knowledge of how important higher education is as a way to stop, and come out of, the crisis. We need policy and decision makers to fully understand the benefits of a well-functioning higher education system. Across the EU, huge austerity measures have

affected higher education both in the number of students and quality of higher education. Those austerity measures are of course in direct conflict with the importance of higher education and well educated individuals. Wide-ranging austerity measures in higher education give a long term effect on the education level of individuals and the society at large with, amongst others, reduced competitiveness in the future. Due to the globalisation, the EU and its member states have to compete with an increased number of states and with a highly educated workforce. That is also one of the most important ways to come out of the financial crisis and reduce the risk for the EU to end up in another crisis situation in the future. That is why a high level of public financing of higher education must continue and in some cases be reinforced. All nations in the EU must change their policies and start to regard higher education as a valid way out of the financial crisis.

Although Sweden has not yet made the same cutbacks in higher education, SFS still sees several problems in relation to the higher education policy in Sweden. The inclusion of higher education in the national reform programme is inadequate. Higher education must be allowed a more central role for Sweden to meet the targets set in the Europe 2020 strategy. SFS missed the connection between education and research in the latest research bill that was presented in October 2012. This link cannot be missing for the best development of higher education. Education and research are tightly linked together and cannot be handled separately. A holistic view of higher education and research must therefore be introduced.

One of the key issues for the EU Member States in higher education stipulates that by 2020, 40 per cent of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies. Sweden has a national target that 40–45% of 30–34-year-olds should have completed third level education. The national data for Sweden for 2011 indicates that 47.5 per cent of 30–34-year-olds have attained higher education. At the beginning of December 2012 the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) released a report, showing that Sweden has the lowest graduation rate of all the Nordic countries. In 2006, the graduation rate in Sweden reached 41 per cent but in 2011 it had turned and was noted at only 37%. The graduation rate in Iceland was 60 per cent, in Denmark and Finland 50 per cent and in Norway the graduation rate was 42 per cent. This indicates that the other Nordic countries will have a larger proportion of individuals that have graduated than Sweden. It can of course have severe effects on Sweden's future competitiveness. It is also ominous to see a reduced graduation rate in Sweden although one target in the Modernisation Agenda is to increase the number of higher education graduates. The government has to take the appropriate measures that could increase the graduation rate in affect, but also so that the higher education system meets the demand from society, businesses and individuals. It becomes more and more important with regards to opportunities for lifelong learning and therefore it is impossible to dimension the higher education on upcoming youths alone.

At a time when higher education plays an important role for the society, it also gets more and more important for states and higher education institutions to work on widening access to higher education. For the higher education institutions to supply individuals to critical thinking and be better equipped to meet future obstacles the student population must reflect society at large. We can see that the number of youths that goes through to higher education is more common in families where the parents also have undergone higher education. It is important to work on widening access to broaden the perspectives and to get individuals that most likely would not go to higher education. This will enrich the society in the future. Higher education institutions today in Sweden do not have resources to work with widened access. This has led to a decline in projects that have the purpose to widen access to higher education. The projects that exist today are in place thanks to individual initiatives from institutions or municipalities in conjunction. This in connection to a reduced dimension of higher education and higher costs for students leads to a less heterogeneous student population. We stress the importance for the government to get in place incentives for institutions to work on widening access at both the institutional level to increase the diversity of Swedish students and the national level when it comes to incoming and outgoing students.

For the first time in a couple of years, the number of Swedish students going abroad has increased to 27,700 students in 2011/2012. But the number of foreign student coming to Sweden has decreased—much because of tuition fees for students outside EU/EEA. Although the number of Swedish students going abroad has increased, it is important to also increase the number of foreign students that come to Sweden for their studies. Internationalisation is vital for higher education but it also needs students to choose Sweden for their studies. A high level of internationalisation and foreign students that participate in Swedish higher education also results in improved quality of education. Foreign students studying in Sweden are a valuable asset to the Swedish society and higher education in Sweden. They force us to challenge our own thinking and way of life. This will lead to an improved quality of the higher education. It will also give an international perspective in education and create important links to Sweden that will have a long term positive impact on the Swedish economy and our international relationships.

During the fall of 2012, we have seen that the Erasmus programme has struggled due to the financing situation. The Erasmus grant is a prerequisite for some students to even think about studies in another country. Some sort of a grant system must be in place in the future to ensure the possibility for students from lower socio-economic background to go abroad. At the same time SFS, must stress that the European Loan Guarantee for Master Students will induce a negative development for widening access to higher education. We are well aware that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to take a loan but at the same time they are the ones that

are in most need of financial support to study abroad and in some cases even to enter higher education at all. For the EU to imply the importance of widening access but at the same time advocate the loan scheme contradict one another. Both the EU and the member states must take a clear stand to work towards a higher degree of widened access, which also gets more important with regards to the current financial crisis where specific groups with different socio-economic backgrounds can get affected.

For example, there is today a huge lack of student housing that causes problems for both Swedish students but of course also foreign students that comes to Sweden. Many students are referred to friends and other students in order to find some place to live during their studies. Therefore the number of student housing has to increase to meet the demand. The Swedish grant and loan system for Swedish students is also a problem. SFS publishes a yearly report that in 2012 showed that students in general lose 740 SEK (about 8 euros) per month due to a lower amount of grants and loans than their real costs per month.

In the upcoming national reform programme for Sweden, SFS would like to see a higher priority given to higher education and students' conditions to enter and participate in higher education. SFS would like to stress several areas of concern regarding Sweden's national targets and commitments to EU2020, but also the EU and other member states. EU and member states must realise what role higher education has in moving out of the financial crisis. Higher education must be dimensioned to meet the demands of several different interests that get more important as the EU competes with a highly educated workforce. The Swedish government has to work towards getting incentives in place for institutions to work on widening access to higher education so that the student population reflects the society at large. This also means that the national policy in Sweden has to change. In the end, this all comes back to widening access and the importance to work with conditions for students so that the student population is composed of students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

## 5.2 EUROPEAN AND FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES IN COMPARISON: TRACING THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MODERNISATION AGENDA IN FINLAND

By Mikko Vieltojärvi (*SAMOK*) and Jarmo Kallunki (*SYL*)

### ABSTRACT

Over the recent decades international education policies have increased in importance in higher education policy. The European Union is an example of an international organisation that has gained influence. Finland, in turn, has been labelled as a model pupil when it comes to taking account of international developments. On the other hand, international trends and initiatives are implemented in mediated forms, and hence the question arises: in what way the European recommendations influence the Finnish national education policy? We approach this question by focusing on higher education. We compare the European Union's Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education and the Finnish National Development Plan for Education and Research 2011-2016, and ask: in what way the Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education has influenced the Finnish higher education policy? Our findings confirm that national contexts shape the interpretation and implementation of international initiatives in various ways. Based on this, we formulate some recommendations for the EU level policy-makers.

### INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONAL AND FINNISH EDUCATION POLICY

Education has traditionally been considered as “the most national of activities”, but recent decades have shown that in the era of globalisation we cannot maintain this image anymore. On one hand, internationalisation both as a discourse and as a set of policy initiatives has been brought into the education policies of nation states more forcefully than before. On the other, different concrete forms of internationalisation have been implemented in the contents and structures of education at intensifying pace. These developments take effect on all levels of education, but especially in higher education (Rizvi & Lingard 2010, Dale & Robertson 2007, Ozga & Lingard 2007, Mundy 2007, Ball 2007).

Nation states nevertheless retain (most of) their power in controlling education, and thus, following Green (2006), we should talk about “partial internationalisation” rather than “full-scale globalisation”. Also, education is part of the wider national cultural and political contexts which influence and orient policy-making in education (e.g. Crossley et al. 2007). Thus, it follows that international trends and initiatives do not

land into a political vacuum. An important consequence of this is that international policy trends or initiatives are not implemented in a straightforward manner, but they undergo complex national negotiations and policy brokerings before approval and implementation. Their impact is therefore dependent on national political conditions and interests within it. Often international trends and initiatives get mixed up with national ones, resulting in hybridization of international and national elements (Maroy 2009, Ozga & Jones 2006). While certain convergence of policies occurs, path dependency of national policies, which supports the continuity and stability of policy-making, may prevent changes from taking place (Simola, Varjo & Rinne 2010). This opens up opportunities for research: why do particular trends or initiatives get approved and in what form?

An important medium of internationalisation are the international organisations, such as the EU, OECD, BFUG and the like. Since the 1990s, the impact of international organisations on education policies has increased significantly, and a substantial proportion of changes in education policies can be attributed to them. The international organisation that has most remarkably increased its influence in education policy is the European Union (Leuze et al. 2007). The EU has stepped up especially in higher education policy by gaining prominence in the Bologna process (Balzer & Rusconi 2007, Keeling 2006), even to an extent that arguably the agenda of the Bologna process and the EU's Lisbon strategy converge completely (Lehikoinen 2006). The EU's influence is restrained in the founding treaty by both the subsidiarity principle and the fact that the competence given to the Union in education is rather narrow. The main sources of power for the EU are the Open Method of Coordination, informational steering and funding. (Blomqvist, 2007).

Finland, a member state of the European Union, has traditionally been interested in international education policies. The OECD's recommendations are especially taken into account and put into use in Finland, in such extent that Finland has been labelled as a "model pupil" (Kallo 2009, Rinne et al. 2004). There are also indications that the European Union education policies and Finnish education policies go in concert (Naumanen & Rinne 2008). Regarding higher education, Finland has implemented the Bologna reforms mostly successfully (see e.g. Surssock & Smidt 2010, Teichler 2012) and, in the past, pushed for a stronger role for the EU in the process (Lehikoinen 2006). This invokes us to ask further questions in relation to recent developments: what kind of links and concurrences can we find between EU's higher education policies and Finnish higher education policies?

This article analyses the similarities between the European Union Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education (Council Conclusions on the Modernisation of Higher Education) and the Finnish Development Plan for Education and Research (Education and Research 2011–16. A development plan). Our research question is: in what

manner are the European level higher education policy initiatives embedded into Finnish national higher education policy?

## RESEARCH MATERIAL

Our primary research material consists of two policy papers: the European Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education and the Finnish Development Plan for Education and Research (Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2012:3). For the Modernisation Agenda we refer to the European Council's Conclusions (3128th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, Brussels, 28th and 29th November 2011). As a supportive material we will use Europe 2020 strategy, the European Commission's Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education and the Finnish Government Programme (See Appendix 1, p. 43 for details.).

The Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education is one form of an informational steering used by the EU. It is derived from the Europe 2020 strategy. The Europe 2020 strategy itself is concerned with the advancement of the economy of the European Union, paying special attention to eight flagship initiatives. The Europe 2020 strategy follows the Lisbon strategy and its aim is to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". The Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education is mentioned in the Europe 2020 strategy under the flagship initiative "Youth on the Move", and it follows-up on the Modernisation Agenda approved in 2006 (see COM (2006) 208 final).

The European Union does not have jurisdiction over education policy, which means that the European Council can only invite and encourage member states to follow the aims and initiatives of the Modernisation Agenda. The main targets of the Modernisation Agenda are to widen access to higher education and to improve the quality and relevance of higher education. The education, youth, culture and sports meeting of the European Council, adopted conclusions on the modernisation of higher education in November 2011. The European Council's conclusions are agreed upon by the ministers of education of the member states, so they can be seen more obligatory for the member states as compared to the Modernisation Agenda set by the European Commission.

The Finnish Development Plan for Education and Research is based on the Government Programme of the Finnish government. The Government Programme is an action plan negotiated and agreed upon by the parties represented in the Finnish government. It sets out the main functions of the government for its term in the office. Since the economic recession in the 1990s, the governmental programmes have had increased importance as wide-based governments have agreed on the policy-choices

in more detail than previously. After elections were held in spring 2011, a six party “rainbow” government was formed. The new government comprised of parties across the political spectrum: from Left Alliance to Coalition Party. Other parties involved in the Government are Social Democrats, the Greens, the Swedish People’s Party and Christian Democrats. The governmental negotiations were difficult, and it took historically a long time for the parties to agree on the Government Programme. Partly due to a lacking mutual ideological background, the Government Programme is even more comprehensive and detailed than before, composed of 79 pages, compared to e.g. a 56 page programme from 2003 to 2007.

The Government Programme of Jyrki Katainen’s government aims at making Finland the most competent nation in the world by 2020. This success is to be measured by various OECD comparisons and data on, for example, the share of people with a higher education degree and the decreasing number of early school-leavers. The implementation of the Government Programme’s objectives for education and research are described in the Development Plan for Education and Research, which is the main instructional government-approved document for the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding education policy.

The Development Plan for Education and Research covers all education from early childhood education to adult education. In addition, research conducted by higher education institutions is covered in the Development Plan. Particular development targets in the plan from 2011 to 2016 are to alleviate poverty, inequality and exclusion, to stabilise the public economy and to foster sustainable economic growth, employment and competitiveness. The development plan will be implemented within the scope determined in the government decision on spending limits. The implementation of the plan will be evaluated in 2015.

In this article, we the European Council’s Conclusions will be compared to Development Plan. Both documents were published at the end of 2011 but because the key contents of the European Council’s Conclusions were mainly known beforehand, the Finnish government has been able to use them during process of drafting the Development Plan. Thus, it is valid for us to make the inference that the Modernisation Agenda could have influenced the national development plan.

Henceforth, we will use the following abbreviations: Council Conclusions (cc) and Development Plan for Education and Research (dp).

## METHODS

According to Ball (1993), a policy is a complex phenomenon and in order to analyse a policy the researcher needs a whole arsenal of analytical devices, a “toolbox” if you will. This article has a much more simplistic view of certain policies and defines them to be specific policy initiatives and ideas put forward by defined actors, namely the European Council and the Finnish government. Thus, we are clearing out, for example, the discursive elements of policy-making (For more sophisticated definition of policy see also Rizvi & Lingard 2010, p. 4–8).

Simplifying a policy into a set of initiatives we can narrow down our methodological choices significantly. We will not use a discourse analysis or (methodical) hermeneutics usually used in policy analysis (Palonen 1988, Ball 1993). Instead, as a method, we will use content analysis (Silverman 2006, Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). While doing this, we acknowledge, that selecting initiatives, categorising them and analysing them is indeed an act that involves interpretation (Miles & Huberman 1988). Therefore our analysis can be regarded as partial and as only one possible interpretation, but according to Kari Palonen (1988) this is true of all policy research (see also: Varjo 2007).

We will take as our starting point selected initiatives put forward in the CC in which the European Council invites member states into action. In our analysis we will track down the initiatives put forward in the DP that deal with the same policy issues as the pre-selected initiatives in the CC. Note that there can be several initiatives in the DP corresponding one CC initiative. After collecting all these corresponding statements in the DP, we will compare the initiatives in CC and DP respectively, in order to find similarities in their content. This, we claim, can show how Finland has embedded the European level policies into its national policies.

## ANALYSIS

The CC has 18 initiatives in total, of which we selected three for our analysis. Our choices were based in part on our judgment of the political importance of the initiatives, and in part on their theoretical attractiveness as examples, when it comes to our theoretical understanding outlined in the introductory section of this article. Thus, from the CC, we selected the initiatives number 1, number 11 and number 18 for our analysis.

The first initiative set by the Council of the European Union for the member states in the CC is to:

- 1 Step up efforts to increase higher education attainment levels to achieve the Europe 2020 education headline target of 40 per cent of 30–34 year olds in the EU having completed tertiary or equivalent education, given the estimate that—by 2020—35 per cent of all jobs in the EU will require high-level qualifications.

When investigating the DP, one corresponding initiative was found. The first aim of the DP is:

- 2 Objectives regarding the level of education: The aims set for the education supply and other measures raising the level of education presented below are estimated to bring about the following results (Percentage of higher education graduates in 2020 on 30-year-olds 42%).

We can find a strong similarity between these two initiatives. Both the European Council and Finnish government are aiming to increase participation in higher education, even aiming at roughly the same number. The target set by the Europe 2020 strategy for higher education graduates is 40 per cent while Finland aims have 42 per cent of thirty year olds acquiring a higher education degree.

The similarity is explainable due to the fact that this initiative found in the CC is one of the main aims put forward in the Europe 2020 strategy, one of the so-called headline targets. This aim is thus pushed forward into member states' policies through several EU steering channels, and it was agreed upon by the member states and the EU as part of the national reform programmes linked to the EU2020 strategy (see: EU2020 -Strategy. Finland's National Programme). The exact target percentage has been negotiated between the national government and the EU, taking into account the current situation. Thus, the initiative had been agreed upon already previously, and the DP only consolidated this. Furthermore, the Finnish governmental programme's aim to make Finland the most competent nation by 2020, is in line with this CC initiative.

Accordingly, we can conclude that the European steering has influenced the national policy-making, but this influence goes further back in history, not just to the connection between the CC and DP. The CC initiative also represents one of the headline targets of the EU, therefore carrying a significant political importance. It is also noteworthy, that in this case the policy steering is taking place also through economic policy and the ministry of finance.

The second CC's initiative we took into our analysis was number eleven, according to which the Council invites member states to

*11. Stimulate the development of entrepreneurial, creative and innovation skills in all disciplines and in all cycles, and promote innovation in higher education through more interactive learning environments and a strengthened knowledge-transfer infrastructure.*

We found two entries from the DP that resemble these aims:

*25. Measures will be taken at all levels to increase education on the rights and duties of the citizen, the employee and the entrepreneur.*

and

*113. Measures will be taken to improve conditions for basic research in universities and for innovation and product development in polytechnics in particular. Universities and polytechnics will increase research cooperation which supports their own profiles.*

Unlike from the case of the initiatives number 1, we cannot find direct absorption of the initiative number 11 in the DP. But there is a certain resemblance between the DP initiatives and the CC initiative.

Especially the aim of promoting innovation in higher education is clearly considered important in the DP. It is noteworthy here, that while the Finnish higher education system is composed of research universities and polytechnics (also known as the universities of applied sciences)—the dual-model—, the measures for the improvement of innovation practices are set only for the polytechnic sector. The reason for this might be the clarification of the roles of different higher education sectors in the research infrastructure and in the innovation system in general. It is customary in Finnish higher education politics to consider research universities as responsible for basic research and the polytechnics responsible for regional development and innovation. Still, the role of the polytechnics in research and innovation system of Finland is still somewhat unclear after twenty years of history, and there is not clearly allocated funding for research, development and innovation operations of polytechnics. Currently, the polytechnic sector is going under a reform that will give them more autonomy and also state funding for actions in research, development and innovation. The university sector had its own reform in 2009 so there are no national pressures for major changes at this time.

The CC initiative on strengthening the knowledge-transfer infrastructure is quite similar with the DP initiative number 113 on increasing research and development cooperation between universities and polytechnics. The DP initiative emphasises the Finnish dual-model of the higher education system in that the research and development cooperation is designed to support the individual profiles of part-taking higher education institutions.

Another interesting point is aim number 25, according to which “measures will be taken at all levels to increase education on the rights and duties of the citizen, the employee and the entrepreneur.” This initiative does not state the need for development of entrepreneurial skills in as straightforward manner as in the CC. The initiative is made broader by including an aim to increase individual’s knowledge on working life in general. And what is more, it includes a dimension of citizenship, presented as a dimension of equal importance alongside the social statuses of employees and entrepreneurs. Our interpretation is that this DP initiative is maybe the most obvious example of the influence of the “rainbow” government that has six different parties without a common ideological background. The CC initiative is translated to national initiative by adding the citizenship and employee dimension, which in Finland are traditionally important to the left-wing parties. The DP initiative might have been more similar to CC initiative without the Left Alliance and Social Democrats in the government.

Thus, by comparing these initiatives we note that the CC initiative has not penetrated the national policy debate in its original form, but it has transformed. This transformation can be explained by three main arguments: First, the structure of the Finnish higher education system, namely the dual-model, directs the application of the CC initiative in the DP policy. Second, an explaining factor is the structure of the government, and the third, is the national policy environment, in which entrepreneur and employee are considered to be of equal importance as models of behaviour. Overall, therefore, the national policy context transforms the CC initiative, before some of its content is embedded into national policy.

The third initiative we chose from the CC is number 18, according to which the European Council invites member states to:

*18. Facilitate access to alternative sources of funding, including—where appropriate—by using public funds to leverage private and other public investment.*

Two entries can be found in the DP that resemble this initiative:

106. *With a view to securing the prerequisites of the structurally reformed higher education system:*

- ◉ *The Government is prepared to make discretionary financial investments in universities on the basis of the quality and impact of university operations.*
- ◉ *Preparations will be made for strengthening the prerequisites of the reformed polytechnics by means of financial investment with a view to the vitality, competitiveness and welfare of the regions.*
- ◉ *Private persons' donations to higher education institutions will continue to be deductible in taxation.*

and

117. *Polytechnics will create closer contacts between education, research development and innovation and the world of work and diversify their funding base by making more efficient use of funding allocated by the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (TEKES).*

We can find certain similarities between the CC initiatives and the DP initiatives. Alternative funding is interpreted here to mean other sources than direct core funding that the Ministry of Education allocates to higher education institutions. TEKES, even though being a public agency and under public finance, is considered to be an alternative source. The other external funding specified is the private persons' charity donations. TEKES funding may be interpreted here as concurrent with the CC initiative, as TEKES funding can be seen as leverage to increase private (corporate) funding.

The remarkable difference here is, that while the European Commission's communication specifically mentions tuition fees as an option for alternative funding sources, the CC (p. 6) states that "[p]ublic investment, supported by additional sources of funding, should remain the basis for sustainable higher education". This does not directly refer to tuition fees anymore, but it does allow one to interpret that fees can be an option. Also, the DP does not refer to any kind of tuition fees. It is noteworthy though that the DP does not deny tuition fees either, despite the fact that the Finnish Government Programme does. If we bear in mind, that the DP is the operationalisation of the Government Programme, we could infer that implicitly the DP turns down tuition fees.

The possible explanation of these differences is, that education is seen as a public good in Finland, which should be funded by the state. In general, tuition fees are seen unfair and harmful to the equality of the education system. Equality has been the core value of Finnish education system at least since the 1960s (e.g. Lampinen 2000), and despite the claims of its eroding relevance, it still stands strong (see e.g. the general part of the DP).

Thus, when comparing the CC initiative and the DP initiatives, we see that the CC initiative has been transformed into a form which has no traces of tuition fees. Even if the European Commission's original intention is not approved of, the CC initiative is still not neglected altogether either. We could say, thus, that the CC initiative has been interpreted to fit the national context and there has been a rejection of some aspects or interpretation possibilities of the CC initiative.

To sum up this analysis of those initiatives, it seems quite clear that implementation of the CC by Finnish government varies and is adjusted to a national context. In the first case we found strong similarity between the CC and the DP initiatives, which can be explained by the Finnish governmental programme on the one hand and the EU economic policy steering on the other. The first CC initiative is also easy to adopt because of a strong national consensus on the importance of higher education.

In the second case we could see that the CC initiative was not implemented in a straightforward manner, but on one hand it was interpreted according to the parties represented in the government, and on the other, the implementation was configured according to the structure of the Finnish higher education institution system (the dual-model). This was a clear example of effect of the national context.

In the third case, there has been a rejection of some aspects of the CC initiative. Once again, it has been implemented in a Finnish way according to national context and a long tradition for education as a public good with regards to bringing alternative funding sources without introducing tuition fees.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research question outlined in the introduction was: in what manner are the European level higher education policy initiatives embedded into Finnish national higher education policy? The broader question concerned why particular trends or initiatives do get approved and in what form?

We have seen that the EU policy initiatives and the national policy initiatives do have resemblances. We have also seen that the EU initiatives are not always accepted in a straightforward manner, but they undergo a national interpretation, through which the national context and political interests effect on what passes and what is turned down. Some factors that could be identified are: the structure of the education system, the principles present in the national policies, and the parties represented in the national government. Our findings thus confirm the importance of the national, institutional and political context.

On the other hand, we could recognise that the Europe 2020 headline target that was negotiated through the Ministry of Finance, has been implemented without national reformulation. This evokes us to ask whether the EU is strengthening its role in education policy through strengthening its influence in national economic policies. This is an especially crucial question nowadays when the strengthening European economic policy coordination is underway a possible solution to the financial crisis. The moral question here is whether EU is exceeding its mandate in education through economic policy. On theoretical level, this would be interesting in the sense that in international education policy research it has been noted that the roles of the ministries of finance have been increasing in national education policies. Our conclusion is that more research on this is needed, especially on the European level.

As a policy recommendation, we can suggest that the EU should ground its action in education policy according to its mandate granted in the founding treaty: facilitating cooperation and enhancing the European dimension in education. It should stop, for example, promoting tuition fees or cost-sharing, as funding of education is clearly a national mandate. The rationale for this recommendation is that it is futile for the EU to lobby for fees, as national governments hold fast to the national priorities, and respect the national contexts and principles. The EU should not do work deemed futile already in advance, as they should use their reducing resources to something productive, such as promoting mobility.

## NOTES

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## APPENDIX: RESEARCH MATERIAL

### 1 EUROPEAN DOCUMENTS

EU2020 strategy: Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Communication from the Commission. COM (2010) 2020. Brussels, 3/3/2010. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

Modernisation agenda: Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions. Supporting growth and jobs—an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems. COM (2011) 567 final. Brussels, 20/9/2011. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0567:FIN:EN:PDF>

Council Conclusions: Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education. 3128th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, Brussels, 28th and 29th November 2011. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf)

### 2 NATIONAL DOCUMENTS

The Government Programme: Programme of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's Government 22. June 2011. <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitus/hallitusohjelma/pdf/en334743.pdf>

The Development Plan: Education and Research 2011—2016. A development plan. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2012:3. <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okmo3.pdf>

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## 5.3 YOUTH GUARANTEE IN FINLAND—BACKGROUND, MEASURES AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

By *Suvi Eriksson (SYL)*, *Pauliina Savola (SAMOK)* and *Veli-Matti Taskila (SAMOK)*

### BACKGROUND

Young people are those who are most at risk at the European labour market and increasingly run the risk of being marginalised. The labour market crisis can have a negative effect for a large part of the entire generation of youth, damaging employment, productivity and social cohesion, both now and in the future across Europe.

*“The youth unemployment rate has reached more than 25 per cent in 13 Member States, with Greece and Spain experiencing rates of over 55 per cent and Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary and Slovakia with rates around or above 30 per cent. More than 30 per cent of unemployed people under 25 have been unemployed for more than 12 months—1.6 million in 2011, compared to 0.9 million in 2008. Overall employment rates for young people fell by almost five percentage points over the last four years — three times as much as for adults. The chances for a young unemployed person of finding a job are low: only 29.7 per cent of those aged 15–24 and unemployed in 2010 found a job in 2011, a fall of almost 10 per cent in three years.”*

(European Commission 5/12/2012)

According to the Finnish Labour Force Survey the average unemployment rate of 15 to 24-year-olds was 25 per cent of youth at a working age in 2009. There is, however, a considerable regional variation in youth unemployment, as the unemployment rate is the lowest in the Uusimaa region around the capital, Helsinki, and the highest in Northern Ostrobothnia area.

At the present in Finland, there are approximately 110,000 young people aged 20 to 29 who do not have a post-basic qualification<sup>1</sup>. One third of those who start their studies in vocational training quit prematurely. The lack of a secondary education qualification is the single most significant factor behind exclusion from the labour market and

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**1** Compulsory education in Finland starts in the year when children have their seventh birthday, unless the children need education due to special needs. The scope of the basic education syllabus is nine years. After completing basic education, a young person can continue studying or enter working life. At this point, a choice is usually made between general upper secondary school and vocational education and training, both which give general eligibility to further studies in higher education.

society. It is concerning that as many as 3.000 children are at risk of exclusion yearly, according to the Finnish Society for Social and Health (SOSTE).

*“The number of socially excluded young people without an upper secondary education qualification is approximately 40,000. Of these, the number of “lost ones” missing from the statistics is around 25,000. These young people form the so-called “hard core” of marginalised young people, because they do not participate in education or working life, and are not even registered as jobseekers.”*

(Final Report of the Youth Guarantee Working Group, 2012)

Welfare problems have a tendency to accumulate, and parents’ problems are closely connected to the future well-being and mental health problems of children. This is based on the outcome of a study which observed all 60,000 children born in Finland in 1987 (Academy of Finland: Responding to Public Health Challenges (SALVE)-programme, 2008). Children born that year grew up during a massive economic recession in the 1990s when many families faced unemployment and financial difficulties and some serious reductions were made to the preventative work done in the municipalities. It is very alarming that among those taking part in the study, 40 per cent have experienced mental health problems, and one in five received specialised psychiatric healthcare or medication for mental health problems before the age of 21.

## PREVIOUS POLICIES

The government is now actually proposing to improve the previous Youth Guarantee that has received lately such positive attention, even at the European level. The scope of these policies has been narrower than what is now proposed. The aim has been the same—to make young peoples’ transfer into education or working life faster, make their unemployment periods shorter and to prevent social exclusion with early intervention. One of the key elements is that all young unemployed get an employment plan in the first two weeks of unemployment and that the young are in active measures during the first three months. The guarantee includes all 25-year-olds who have registered as being unemployed.

There is also another policy that has been in place since the mid-90s in order to facilitate a faster transition of youth to the labour market or education. Unemployed persons between the ages of 18 and 24 have to apply for work or training offered by the employment office and they have to apply for suitable vocational training (at upper secondary vocational institutions or universities of applied sciences). Only after these conditions are met, they are eligible for Labour Market Subsidy also between labour market measures. This policy has received much criticism as only half of the higher education institutions (universities of applied sciences) have been among those insti-

tutions to which applying has been seen as giving the eligibility to receive the Labour Market Subsidy. It has been seen that those applying only in order to receive the subsidy have been steered into wrong study paths. Some have been also of the opinion that the young people that are forced to study are more prone to drop out.

As a part of the implementation of the Government Programme and the Youth Guarantee, the policy regarding the Labour Market Subsidy has been revised according to findings in a recent study conducted by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and the Ministry of Education and Culture. In practice this means that by applying to universities the applicants will also qualify to receive the Labour Market Subsidy. The policy changes were introduced into the legislation on 1 January 2013.

## YOUTH GUARANTEE

As a part of the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, the Member States have set their own national targets as according to the points addressed in the strategy. Finland's national targets are the raising of the employment rate of 20–64 year-olds to 78 per cent, maintaining R&D spending at a minimum of 4 per cent of GDP, reaching the climate and energy targets agreed in the EU, raising the proportion of 30–34 year-olds with tertiary-level education to 42 per cent, keeping the proportion of 18–24 year-old early school leavers below 8 per cent, and reducing the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

(Europe 2020-Strategy Finland's National Programme 2012)

The Youth Guarantee, while being an independent measure, attempts to address three of these goals: the employment rate, early school leavers and reducing the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Youth Guarantee is based on two documents, the Government Programme and the Development Plan for Education and Research.

The Government Programme is an action plan agreed on by the parties represented in the Finnish government and it sets out the main functions of the government for their four-year term in the office. Policy priorities in the field of education are outlined in the government's five-year Development Plan for Education and Research. The Development Plan for the period from 2011 to 2016 was adopted at the end of 2011.

These two policy papers spell out the Youth Guarantee as follows:

*“In order to combat youth unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion, each young person will be provided with a workplace or a place in education, rehabilitation or apprenticeship training. Outreach youth work will be promoted. Preventive substance abuse work as part of youth work will be supported. Workshop activities for young people will be further developed.”*

(Programme of the Finnish Government, 22 June 2011)

*“A social guarantee for young people will be implemented so that each young person under 25 and recently graduated people under 30 will be offered a job, on-the-job training, a study place, or a period in a workshop or rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed. The Government will launch a joint project between the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for the purpose of preparing and implementing the necessary measures for introduction of the social guarantee by 2013. A separate working group led by the three ministries will be set up for the project, along with representation from the working life parties, municipalities and other key actors.*

*Labour market and apprenticeship training for young people will be increased. New measures for enhancing the engagement of young people in working life by combining work and training will be investigated. Operating models of vocational education supporting the achievement of this goal and rapid employment will be promoted. The opportunities of SMEs to hire young people as apprentices will be improved. The outreach activity of youth work will be expanded to cover the whole country, and workshop activities for young people will be further developed.*

*Ground rules for the use of unpaid on-the-job training in employment services will be created in collaboration with labour organisations.”*

(Programme of the Finnish Government, 22 June 2011)

*62. One of the key criteria for the size and regional targeting of intakes will be the realisation of the educational guarantee as part of the social guarantee.*

*63. The principles in admission to initial vocational education and training will be revised to give priority to school-leavers and unqualified persons in admission to upper secondary education and training. The aim is that the revised admission principles will be adopted in 2013 at the same time with the adoption of the electronic application system.*

*Separate admission quotas will be approved for students changing educational institutions, and persons with qualifications will be primarily guided to education tracks geared to adults, such as competence-based qualifications.*

*64. The local authorities will monitor young people's placement and see to it that young people without study places will get the information, advice and guidance they need."*

(Development Plan for Education and Research 2011–16)

Demonstrably, these documents give quite detailed guidelines on how to implement the Youth Guarantee. There are subsidies for companies for hiring young people, additional guidance for those who have not landed a job or a study place, and there are new possibilities in combining work and study as well as modified admission criteria to upper secondary education and training.

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

The joint project based on the Government Programme was launched on 1 September 2011 with appointment of the working group. In the working group are represented all the relevant ministries, all the parties of the labour market, local and regional authorities, the Finnish Youth Cooperation—Allianssi, Finnish enterprises and the Social Insurance Institute of Finland. The working group has met several times over the course of its mandate and it also organised an expert seminar on the topic.

The report of the working group was published on 15 March 2012. The report included several propositions that are going to be introduced into legislation on 1 January 2013. The propositions include:

- more study places within vocational education;
- reforming student admissions;
- municipalities giving guidance for young people completing their basic education;
- more language training for young immigrants;
- an employment plan for every registered unemployed youth;
- developing the ways in which the employment offices offer guidance to young people;

- ◉ special support for young immigrants;
- ◉ more entrepreneurship for young people;
- ◉ alleviating changes for the obligation of application for education or training;
- ◉ and developing the cooperation between schools, municipalities and employment offices works better when trying to reach young people at grave risk of social exclusion.

In addition to these measures, the working group proposed a skills programme for young adults with no qualifications after basic education. This programme would include people under the age of thirty.

The working group will continue its work until the end of the term of the Finnish government. During the autumn of 2012, a Youth Guarantee Tour was organised with the aim at making it more widely known throughout the country. In addition, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour was planning to introduce new measures in the spring 2013 in order to improve apprenticeship training for young people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In general terms, the Youth Guarantee is a positive approach attempting to ensure that no one will fall through the systems of education and work. The Finnish Youth Guarantee has in fact set an example for European-wide measures proposed by the European Commission. The European Commission, among others, has stated that: “The comprehensive Youth Guarantee designed by Finland is a good example of this. A first evaluation recently published by Eurofound shows that 83,5 per cent of young job seekers received a successful intervention within three months of registering as unemployed in 2011. The Finnish youth guarantee notably accelerated the pace at which personalised plans were drawn up, and had resulted in a reduction in unemployment (leading either to employment or further training)” (European Commission Press Release, 5 December, 2012). The proposal published by the Commission on the 5 December, 2012, more or less echoes the Finnish model of the youth guarantee. The European Commission’s proposal urges all Member States to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 receive a quality job offer, education or internship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

While a role model for further actions Europe-wide, there are shortcomings and contradictions in the proposal. SAMOK and SYL are concerned about the fact that despite good intentions, the Finnish program is allocated only 60 million euro in the state budget. While a good start, it is already clear that the successful implementation of

this guarantee requires more funds, for example to expand the nationwide outreach work for the young people as well as families and other preventative work. This is a significant question to be addressed because of the accumulative nature of marginalisation and exclusion. At the moment, the 60 million euros are directed at reparative work rather than preventative measures which in SAMOK's and SYL's opinions should be more substantially addressed in the Youth Guarantee.

It is imperative that political initiatives are backed up with financial commitments. The government of Finland has on many occasions reiterated its commitment to preventative measures to prevent marginalisation and social exclusion of youth. At the same time, there are significant cuts in the higher education sector: the universities of applied sciences are facing about 150 million by the year 2015 and universities 75 million euro in cuts. For instance, universities of applied sciences are facing a cut of 2200 study places. It is to some extent a necessary measure, as there are definitely some degree programs from which the graduates are going straight to the unemployment office due to lack of jobs in that field. In addition to cuts in higher education, vocational education is facing severe cuts as well with at least 67 million euro cuts from vocational education and 21 million euro from apprenticeships. Furthermore, the Government plans on cutting 3000 study places in vocational institutions while at the same time intending to implement the youth guarantee. The Finnish government has attempted to justify this rationale with the statistic that the upcoming cohort will be about 8000 people smaller than that preceding it.

In addition, promises made in the parliamentary elections of 2011, are yet to be upheld. The student organisations, SAMOK and SYL, campaigned for the student grant system to be bound to the consumer price index like other social subsidies and the fulfilment of this promise has been pushed back to 2014 in the current Government Programme. The cost of this would have been approximately 17.6 million euros—in the grand scheme of things, a miniscule amount. Sufficient funding of studies as well as sufficient social and financial support for studies would be an essential indicator of the gravity of concern that the government gives to the youth and student issues.

Furthermore, while preparing the programme, the sole youth representative of the working group, set by the Ministry for Employment and Economy, was the umbrella organisation of youth organisations in Finland, the Youth Cooperation Allianssi. Considering that the target group is youth, the voice of the youth should have been taken into more consideration by more than just one representative—the rest of the working group members were representatives of ministries, trade unions and so forth. The work Allianssi put behind this representation is, however, laudable: it organised its own working group for the member unions, a wide array for organisations representing among others, politically non-aligned student organisations (such as SAMOK and SYL), youth work, political youth and student organisations and so forth.

The upcoming mid-term review of the Government Programme in February 2013 is yet another point of concern. Possibly facing massive cuts in all sectors, including, again education, and the will of the government in upholding its promises on the primacy of preventative measures, promotion of equality and youth will face yet another test.

As a conclusion, the youth guarantee, set to address issues equality and inclusion of youth in the society, still requires further financial commitments to make this proposal a sufficient reality.

## FURTHER READING AND SOURCES:

Government Programme:

*<http://valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitus/hallitusohjelma/pdf/en334743.pdf> (pp. 61–62, 78)*

Development Plan for Education and Research 2011–16: *<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okmo3.pdf?lang=fi>*

Europe 2020 -Strategy Finland's National Programme 2012:

*[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/nrp2012\\_finland\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/nrp2012_finland_en.pdf)*

Final Report of the Youth Guarantee Working Group:

*[http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/files/34921/Final\\_report.pdf](http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/files/34921/Final_report.pdf)*

Changes brought about by the Youth Guarantee as of 1 January 2013: *[http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/files/34864/Nuorisotakuun\\_tuomat\\_muutokset\\_1\\_enrev.pdf](http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/files/34864/Nuorisotakuun_tuomat_muutokset_1_enrev.pdf)*

European Commission Press Release from 5 December 2012:

*[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-12-1311\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-1311_en.htm)*

## 5.4 SLOVAKIA MEETS EU2020

*By Maros Korman (SRVS, ESU)*

In case you are wondering, how does a small country of 5.5 million people in the geographical heart of Europe deal with European requirements, this article might answer your questions.

### AFTER LISBON

Following the generally accepted failure of the so called Lisbon strategy, the EU Member States reached out for a new horizon with the European Commission. Is Europe 2020 a new start or is it a mere Lisbon redress? There are separate national targets and European targets in the strategy, to be achieved by mutual cooperation of the EU governance and its member states, touching all common fields, including education.

How did Slovakia cope with the EU's expectations in compliance with the Europe 2020 strategy? Well, let's take a look at European Commission's recommendations first.

### YOU'VE DONE WELL, BUT ...

In 2011, the European Commission's recommendations focused on the national budget, public finances and compliance with taxation. An important recommendation touched upon education, asking for a more rapid reform process, increased quality assurance of higher education and raising the importance of higher education in relation to the market's needs. Perhaps this was related to a very basic national quality assurance framework, comprising of the Accreditation Commission as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education and different private ranking systems. It is noteworthy, that until October 2013, every higher education institution in Slovakia had to maintain a carefully planned, tested and working internal quality assurance system. The regulation was a part of the New Year's education law amendment and keeps people wondering, what super-institution designs, drafts, tests do put in a reliable practice for an internal quality assurance system from scratch in nine months. Plagiarism, however, is not the topic of this article. Furthermore, the European Commission also pushed for stimulating individuals and employers attending and promoting participation in lifelong learning.

The Slovak government has updated its reform and stability program according to recommendations.

## WHAT WAS IT A YEAR AGO?

In 2012, the European Commission again reminded Slovakia about its high public finance deficit, the bad discipline of taxpayers and a low administrative capacity in relation to the social dimension. Again, the criticism pointed out the lacking quality assurance in higher education and the missing focus on learning outcomes. One of the recommendations directly charged the government on the creation of plan for a youth guarantee, especially concerning quality and importance in relation to the market. Other recommendations were concerned with the quality of public services, transparency in administration and weak social insurance.

As can be seen, it will definitely take more than a year to address the issues identified by the government and the European Commission. Another notable aspect is the strict labour market orientation of the recommendations, which is to be seen as a pattern. Education is seen as a way of improving Europe's economy. Yes, it is that. But it is also much more than that.

## WHAT IS THE STRATEGY?

The Slovak Prime Minister criticised the Lisbon strategy in 2011 stating that "Generalised goals that are difficult to measure, set by Europe, contribute to the decrease of trust towards the European project". It is hard not to agree with those words. The crucial question is, how are the Europe 2020 goals set? Are they concrete and measurable? Do they address weak points in sufficient detail?

The goals, set by the new strategy that are directly linked to education, are as follows:

### Employment

- 75 per cent of 20 to 64 year-olds to be employed
- Research and development/innovation
- 3 per cent of the EU's GDP (public and private combined) to be invested in research and development/innovation

### Education

- Reducing school drop-out rates below 10 per cent
- At least 40 per cent of 30 to 34-year-olds completing third level education

- These European targets have been subsequently translated into national targets, some of them of the same value, some of them different, adjusted to the national context.

## HOW DO WE MEET THE CRITERIA?

Education: Tertiary education attainment has risen by 1.6 per cent since Europe 2020 was implemented, totalling to 23.7 per cent in 2012. In order to meet the EU's target (which is the same as the national target in this case), Slovaks have to increase tertiary education attainment by 16.3 per cent in the next eight years. To assume whether this bold goal is even possible, let us turn back and get a glimpse at how this situation was eight years ago. In 2005, Slovakia had 14.3 per cent tertiary education attainment, which means that over the last eight years, they have managed to increase this factor by 9.4 per cent. Hoping for 16.3 per cent increase in the upcoming eight years means hoping for a miracle.

A low dropout rate from education is one of the strong points of the country. With 5.3 per cent children leaving school at an early age, Slovakia is far better off than the European average, 12.8 per cent, and should comply with the national target set to 6 per cent easily, even though last two years show an increase in undergrad dropouts.

Employment rate: Employment rate for the age group from 20 to 64 currently stands at 65.1 per cent. That means a 0.6 per cent increase since 2005. The question is, whether Slovakia reaches optimistic 72 per cent (national target) or even the European target of 75 per cent.

Research and development: Investment in research and development in Slovakia is far beyond the European standard. Current investment is 0.65 per cent GDP and the national target in eight years is 1 per cent GDP. It was 0.51 per cent in 2005 in comparison.

## WELL DONE?

The conclusions of whether Europe 2020 will be more successful than its predecessor are at this moment rather an issue of faith, than mere calculations. Still, as you can see, some goals are a bit bolder than seems reasonable. As we say in Slovakia, the European Commission is chopping high. Let us hope for the best together, just as you hopefully enjoyed this simple national assessment. In case you want to see how your country is doing, make sure you visit <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/>.

## 5.5 HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS: HOW IT DOES NOT CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASING THE NUMBER OF HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES

*By Marjolein Koster (Lsvb), Tim van den Brink (Lsvb) and Simone De Bruijn (Lsvb)*

Everywhere in the world, leaders say that education and innovation are the key to success, and the key to coming out of the economic crisis. A very strange thing in this respect is that almost no one of the leaders has the balls to put their words into deeds. In the Netherlands, the government somehow states that education is one of the most important aspects of its work and that it is investing in it. But once taking a closer look, the only trend that can be seen are budget cuts, more cuts and even more; especially in higher education.

### THE HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

First, the act of studying was really reserved for the highly talented and rich people in the Netherlands. This changed slowly with the introduction of more and higher grants and scholarships. Since 1986, there has been a system providing basic grants to every student and additional grants to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, which improved the accessibility of higher education enormously.

Unfortunately, this affected the budget for higher education and from the 1990s onwards, the Dutch government has constantly tried to search for new ways to structure the way these studies are financed. In the past years the monthly amount has decreased and more rules and restrictions changed the rights people had to get the grants. Currently there are many discussions taking place that focus on the abolishment of this basic grant.

### CHANGES AND CUTBACKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nowadays, the government has new plans regarding higher education. First of all, they want to discard all basic grants and transform them into a loan system. This is very worrisome, as it will make studying more expensive and in some cases unaffordable. In the current situation, students who live on their own receive 250 euros a month. Most of students also have jobs on the side and they borrow money from the state. The average debt of a Dutch student after a study period amounts to 15,000 euros. Should the government abolish the scholarships, one can expect that students will have to borrow 13,000 euros extra. The average debt of each student will then be almost 30.000 euros. It is important to realise that this number represents the average, so there will also be students who have to borrow more money.

The most worrisome thing in this development, is the extreme harm it does to the access to higher education. It can be a huge step to decide to go into higher education, especially for students with a low income background. The last indicators show that approximately 10,000 students will refrain from a study in higher education.

In addition to converting study grants into a loan system, the government also wants to reform the free public transport card for students. This has big consequences, as public transport is very expensive in the Netherlands. Public transport costs can run up to 200 euros a month. A direct consequence of this, is that students will more prone to choose a study near their home. This runs in counter to another policy of the government, namely that higher education institutions should make their own profiles. For example, a study in economics in Amsterdam will focus more on macroeconomics, while a study in economics in Rotterdam will focus more on microeconomics. A student should thus choose the study which fits him or her the most. By abolishing the free public transport card, students will look less at these important differences, but more at reducing their study costs and so choose for the study closest to their home.

## HIGH EFFICIENCY AND SELECTION

Not only do the cutbacks in higher education directly affect students, but other measures will also indirectly have a negative impact on students. The Dutch government is more and more focussed on high efficiency. This means that every student should get his or her degree as fast as possible. An example of this, is introducing and increasing the 'binding study advice'. In the worst case, a student should get 60 ECTS in one year. Otherwise, the student will be sent away from his study. This means it will be more difficult for students to work on additional skills, do an internship or go abroad for a while, because these extracurricular activities do not fit the curriculum. The result of this will be that all the same graduates that do not have a specific profile, skills or competences, will not be ready for the labour market.

The Dutch government wants also to introduce another selection criteria. This means that the higher education institution will have a last say if students can be admitted, with a firm yes or no. This is worrisome, because students should have their own say in deciding whether they are motivated by saying yes or no, not the institution.

In the Netherlands, children take a test at the age of twelve. On the basis of this test, it is decided whether you go to pre-university (of applied sciences) secondary education. Once you go there, you have the right paper to go to every study within higher education you want (there are some exceptions like medicines, honours programs and university colleges). It is thus wrong to change this system, and to ask for an additional selection criteria from students, because students are already selected at the age of twelve. Students who did pre-university (of applied sciences) secondary education

should have the right to choose what they want. These are individuals who know what they want themselves and higher education institutions should not make this decision for them.

## LIFELONG LEARNING

In the current situation, each student, independent of his or her age, can follow one Bachelor's and one Master's programme for the legal tuition fee. Should the student be interested in a second Bachelor's or Master's programme, he or she would have to pay the institution fee, which can be up to 32,000 euros for a Master's programme. This frustrates the lifelong learning aspirations of people that already have a degree.

Until recently most study programs had two options, a fulltime program or a part-time programme. The introduction of the long study fine, which had an extra impact on part-time students because they were expected to study as fast as fulltime students, has changed this. The long study fine meant that students had to pay a fine of 3,000 euros after studying one year longer than the normal duration of the study. This fine has been abolished but the impact has been great on part-time studies. Now there is a decrease in the amount of part-time programmes available and the number of part-time students in public education has fallen dramatically.

These circumstances result in a very bad situation for lifelong learners and this will be compounded by likely reforms in the part-time system. These reforms will encourage privatisation of part-time education because institutions will no longer be funded for part-time education. Instead the part-time learner will get a small grant to pay for his or her education, but this grant will only be made available when a student studies within a certain field. For example, the government has assigned certain top sectors as creative industry, life technology, etc. Only studies in these fields will be eligible for a grant.

All these developments frustrate lifelong learning ambitions. The Lsvb is fighting for the reduction of the tuition fees for second degrees and is developing a plan to save public funded part-time education. But as long as the government's plans are not really clear it is hard for us to decide a focus. The Modernisation Agenda would help us to put pressure on our government in this respect.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EU

The European Union has a limited role in higher education, as national governments want to keep education policies close to themselves. However, it is very important that the EU realises that budget cuts in higher education are on the rise everywhere in Europe. This is worrisome, as youth unemployment is increasing every single month.

Programmes like Erasmus+ can contribute to providing more opportunities for students to gain additional skills. However, as students thereafter are not able to make use of programmes like Erasmus+, due to the fact that it does not fit into curricula, there will be a serious problem.

## CONCLUSION

We are highly concerned about all the changes that are planned by the Dutch government. We do not want to see access to higher education narrow down, which means we would go back in time where studies are restricted for the rich and extremely talented. Investment in higher education is an investment in society and it is important that everybody has the opportunity to develop themselves.

## 5.6 THE SPANISH CASE: OVER- AND UNDER QUALIFICATION

*By Inés Sánchez Giner (CREUP) and Rosa Arroyo (CREUP)*

With historical unemployment rates, various governments have taken measures that do not seem to have the expected outcomes. The Spanish problem of unemployment, especially among those who are younger than 25, along with cases of over-qualification and under-qualification of the youth will be presented in this paper. Finally, the option of vocational training is analysed as one of the key factors to enhance employability.

There are more than five million people unemployed, reaching rates over 55 per cent in the case of those under the age of 25. Following several labour market reforms, the problem has not been solved as those reforms were focused on the creation of temporary employment opportunities instead implementing a real change to the productive model.

Currently there is a double challenge in Spain. Firstly, a productive and stable employment must be created quickly, avoiding this way the volatility of our unemployment rate. Secondly, in order to achieve this purpose, there must be a change in the pattern of growth of the Spanish economy, as many experts and politicians have claimed for years.

The achievement of both aims relies on a labour market reform that assures an efficient job seeking, proper salary negotiations, as well as a correct programme for incentive measures. In order to facilitate a quick and lasting reduction of the unemployment rate, the economy needs to be based on productivity and suitable labour reforms. The disjunctive that the political debate presents is between a change of the growth model and a labour reform, resulting usually in a temporal and circumstantial labour reform. However, a change in the growth model does not make the labour market reform unnecessary. Both are important in order to enhance productivity and a permanent decrease of the unemployment rate.

The main causes of the sharp increase in job destruction in the past years are as well known as the accelerated growth during 1994 and 2007 which led to an unsustainable situation. The specialisation in activities with low productivity and the availability of low skilled workers can largely explain this pattern in an economy where growth has been encouraged by very low interest rates.

Nevertheless, the failures in the legal framework have been a decisive factor in the huge adjustment that the Spanish labour market is currently suffering from. The low investment in active employment policies, the inefficient design of passive policies,

and most especially, the extraordinary proportion of temporary jobs, are some of the examples of this malfunction. In order to bring this situation to a lasting end, a productive employment creation is necessary with a quick and stable pattern, avoiding the extraordinary volatility of the unemployment rate.

The engine of growth of the past years has shrunk. For this reason, the Spanish economy has to look for the development of alternatives, based on activities with a high added value that requires an intensive use of skilled labour. Even supposing that these changes can take effect immediately with the correct incentives, these measures can guarantee the moderation of the fluctuations of unemployment, as happens in the euro zone countries, but it does not guarantee by any means the quick creation of employment so needed by the Spanish economy.

One of the biggest problems of the Spanish economy has already been presented as the high rate of youth unemployment. This problem is leading to an over-qualification and has been intensified by the under-qualification of workers in the labour market, creating large mismatches.

## OVER-QUALIFICATION AND UNDER-QUALIFICATION OF THE YOUTH

There are several studies that point out the mismatches between the education system and the labour market. This situation, maintained over decades with different intensities, is especially critical among young people. At the present time, with an economic crisis and a high youth unemployment rate, this mismatch attracts special interest as it points to a clear inefficiency in the education system. With its current configuration and structure, it is not able to satisfy the demand of the Spanish productive system.

There are several problems pointed out by different studies. The first of these refers to the fact that the increase in formation has been clearly skewed towards university education, creating a mismatch between the offer and demand based on the social background, impacting the youth unemployment. According to data from Eurostat, the number of university graduates between 25 and 34 year old, was 39.2 per cent in 2010, being the highest average in the EU.

Secondly, the increase of human capital in Spain has been insufficient to achieve a convergence with the countries of the EU, especially among youth with secondary education. As a matter of fact, in 2010, the 38.8 per cent of the Spanish population between 20 and 24 years old only possessed primary education versus 23.4 per cent in EU15 countries, being one of the last positions in relative importance of secondary studies (40 per cent of Spanish youth under 25 years of age have secondary education versus 61.1 per cent average in the EU15 countries, mainly resulting from vocational training). The data from Eurostat confirms the relative shortage of vocational training graduates in

Spain, in comparison with those countries that have adopted a dual training system, as Germany or the Netherlands.

This data determines that the polarisation among young people in Spain has resulted in an obvious mismatch between the demand and supply of a skilled workforce. This situation has led to a rise in underemployment or over-qualification and to a fall in skilled wages. According to several studies, the percentage of graduates in jobs that require a lower degree than the one they possess has amounted to more than 30 per cent since the beginning of the 90s, being the highest percentage in the EU27 countries and ten percentage points more than the EU15. This difference is even wider in the youngest cohorts. In 2007, the percentage of over-qualified workers was more than 40 per cent among youth from the age of 25 to 29 in Spain. On the other hand, the OECD (2010) has determined that underemployment among youth with secondary education is lower than in other countries with higher rates of vocational training in developed countries. Nevertheless, Spain is at the forefront of youth employed with secondary education of second stage with elementary employment or not qualified, with a 17 per cent in 2007.

Furthermore, the excess of graduates and over-qualification has a negative effect on people's chances to keep a long term job and, thus, a negative effect on the unemployment rate. Moreover, advancing technology has increased the demand for skilled workers and reduced the one for non-qualified workers. This also implies that skilled workers are employed in traditional positions of non-qualified workers, because of excess or due to a rise in the hiring standards of the companies. Combined with the extraordinary rise in temporary employment among youth during the last decade OECD (2010), we can assume that those factors have worsened the economic situation of this cohort, sharpening their economic dependence, as has been documented in several reports.

The last data published by Eurostat (2011) is also relevant to show the impact of the incidence of over-qualification and the existing mismatch between the education and the labour market in Spain. In 2008, 29 per cent of the Spaniards were over-qualified for their current job, as the average ratio for the EU27 countries was 19 per cent for both, men and women. This ratio is higher among immigrants living in Spain (57 per cent for men and 59 per cent for women).

This data discloses the need to think about the current dysfunctional paths set in the Spanish educational system to enhance the entrance of the youth to the labour market. This fact, along with the deficiencies of the labour market, choosing segmentation and flexibility, show the ineffectiveness of the educational and employment policies developed to promote employability of this cohort in Spain.

In order to palliate these mismatches that affect all the European countries, and especially Spain, the European Commission has set an agenda of recommendations for the period from 2012 to 2020 to improve youth employability and a better adequacy between education and employment, based on the following principles:

- 1 Reduce the labour market segmentation and the education paths, supporting the educational and labour transitions.
- 2 Intensify the capacity of the European Union to foresee better the needs in qualifications and try to adjust better the needs between the labour market and the education received by the youth.
- 3 Adapt the qualification of young workers to job offers and capitalise the potential of the European job market.
- 4 Promote geographical mobility across all the EU, encouraging graduates and vocational trainees through internships in foreign companies (Leonardo) and the educational mobility (Erasmus) supporting and subsidising the learning of foreign languages.

Ultimately, the European Commission proposed itself in 2011 to develop new indicators about current educational situation of the youth in all the European countries in order to enhance their employability. The ultimate goal is to encourage a new approach to the employment demand of this collective and to enhance the transition to the labour market. Another goal is to propose a recommendation to the European Council to reduce the early school leaving and to create a High Level Panel of Experts to study the improvement of the qualifications and competences of the youth to enter to the labour market.

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT

For years, the vocational training of unemployed people and the lifelong learning /innovation courses for people that are already employed has been managed by different institutions. This has led to a disperse system, which has made it difficult to provide a continuous training. A change in the system was necessary in order to tackle different problems: the need to progress towards the integration of the different education offers, the improvement of education quality and its evaluation, enable the recognition of the qualifications accreditation and the acquired competences through training and permanent learning.

Generally, among the positive achievements over the last years, it should be reiterated the importance of the integration process of the previous subsystems of vocational and permanent training and the recent recognition of professional experience. Also, other highlights are: the personal implication of teaching staff, progressive flexibilization of the offer and the relationship between the subsystems, the incorporation of the professional competences perspective and the creation of a catalogue of competences.

Some of the most critical elements are: the persistence of the lack of social recognition towards vocational training, the resistances to the full integration of the different subsystems; the need of a better fit between the educational offer and the labour market; making the educational system more flexible, simplifying the procurement of formal titles and certificates and the hiring of teachers and experts; a simplification of processes and a greater attention to quality, especially in training of employment; the enhancement of general educational achievement in general, that prevents access to the continuation of post-obligatory studies; and the lack of an effective professional guidance.

More specifically, the reality of vocational training addressed to employed workers has some aspects that should be mentioned. Firstly, participation of workers and companies in training activities is insufficient, despite progress achieved. As a matter of a fact, the business culture in Spain sees continuous training more as a cost than as an investment, although it has positive effects with regards to competitiveness.

Furthermore, there are other weaknesses to point out, such as, the relatively low participation of some collectives, such as older and low skilled persons; the general and transversal character of the training activities, which generates a low offer in specific competences linked to the National System of Competences; and the shortcomings in quality and training evaluation. Moreover, the lack of incentives in formation –that focuses on the individual appreciation of the capitalisation of the formation effort– has been pointed out in different areas. It also affects family reconciliation, especially among women, when these activities take place out of business hours.

Concerning training focused mainly on unemployed people, the first relevant point to be made is that the economic investment and budget is lower in Spain than the average of the EU—despite the considerable progress, which has been already made. This fact reveals that it is necessary to strengthen financial resources to rise the formation offer, and it should be considered in the debates about activation of unemployed that usually are focused on the penalty to workers who are beneficiary of unemployment benefits who do not want to participate in formation activities.

Another important aspect concerns the current management model, based on territorial decentralisation of public services and the generalised outsourcing to a multitude of collaborating entities, making it difficult to have a coherent policy. In addition, a good information system is currently lacking as well as a good professional guidance that can match formations and employment offers.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the design of the contents of the formation offers do not correspond, in general terms, with the characteristics of the demands of the productive system, neither with a projection of future needs. This fact points out the necessity for a change in the productive model.

## 6 OVERALL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As this publication is not a research publication, it is difficult to give clear policy recommendations based on its contents. However, it can give insight into areas that should be looked into in more detail, common concerns and highlight success stories that should be built upon.

- ◉ Support for national access plans

National access plans are highlighted as one of the main success factors in achieving the attainment goals set out in the Europe 2020 strategy and subsequently the ET2020 strategic framework and the Modernisation Agenda. ESU calls on the European Union to support countries financially that wish to design such access plans and within the Bologna process design a methodology supporting the creating and implementation of national access plans.

- ◉ Analyse the ‘mismatch’

One of the areas highlighted by various national unions of students, as well as the European Commission, is the mismatch between the expectation of students and the labour market. This is an issue that has been hotly debated, with many stakeholders, including ESU, arguing that it is too difficult to predict what the labour market needs from higher education. To be able to address these issues, it must be analysed more in-depth if the labour market can give a clear input to the higher education institutions on how it sees the mismatch. Responsibilities for actions with regards to the mismatch should also be clearly outlined in national policy.

- ◉ Cohesive message

An issue of major concern involves the conflicting messages being sent from different policy levels and areas in the European Union’s structures. This is a special concern for those countries that have faced the worst effects of austerity measures that are perhaps in most need for investments in education, as a way out of the crisis. It is imperative that the input from the European Union is clear and cohesive to these countries in terms of education. This is to a certain extent also a concern with regards to the Europe 2020 strategy versus ET2020 and the Modernisation Agenda. While they may have the same timeline, it can be difficult for countries to understand what the main priorities are as they are a bit different in each one.

- Measured economic focus

One of the major concerns raised by the students contributing to this publication and by the European Students Union, since the launch of the Lisbon strategy, is the extensive focus placed on the economic role of higher education and the lack of support for the public good and responsibility for education. This can also be seen through the lack of support for the ET2020 with regards to promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. This strategic objective requires additional attention to complement the focus on skills' development.

- Support the public role of higher education

In the Bologna process, the support for education as a public responsibility has been confirmed several times, most recently in the Bucharest communiqué from 2012. This should also be reflected in future communications from the European Union. Currently, the focus with regards to the financing of higher education in Europe is on efficiency and cost-sharing. We fear that the focus in the coming years will be on the implementation of tuition fees instead of our common interest in supporting higher education.

- Stakeholders' involvement

There are several policy areas at the European level that can be called successful, such as developments in quality assurance and teaching and learning. We believe that stakeholders' involvement is a factor in that success. Stakeholders' involvement is equally important at the European level as it is to the national and institutional level, perhaps even more. As the recommendations, strategies and policies from the European level are not prescriptive, they require a broad support to be successful. Involving stakeholders, including students, in an integrated way from the beginning does raise the chance of success and the quality of the policies themselves.



