

“Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”

Salzburg, February 03-05, 2005

“Strengthening the Doctoral Phase – A Trade Union Statement”

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- (1) Looking at the age-structure of the academic staff in German higher education and research institutions, GEW – the German Trade Union in the educational sector – is critical of the lack of a longer lasting personal development policy. The academic institutions will not be able to fill the positions of teachers and researchers, who are retiring from their academic workplaces in the next years for retirement. A longer lasting personnel management has also a chance to reduce the gender gap.
- (2) Reading the papers of the Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process, especially the communication “Researchers in the European Research Area”, a growing gap of research qualified graduates is predictable – not only in higher education and research institutions but also in the research and development centres of companies and public administration. The European Commission is speaking of about 700,000 additional researchers who are needed. They are not on the way.
- (3) The European Knowledge Society only will have a chance, when an immediate and sustainable change can be achieved. A greater number of younger scientists has to find academic workplaces and working conditions which are attractive enough to hold them in universities, to motivate them to stay, with their ideas and innovative potential, in Europe.
- (4) The policy of the Berlin Communiqué, to interpret the Ph.D. phase as the 3rd cycle of higher education, is not attractive. The universities are expecting high quality from creative younger scientists, and they are offering the prolongation of the students status. On the basis of insufficient stipends, without adequate rights in academic self-government, without attractive career perspectives, the younger scientists don't feel welcomed or accepted. In some cases they are criticizing being misused as “cheap labour”. Without a quick change of approach the higher education institutions will lose their competitiveness. When you are expecting high quality in the results of research work, you also have to offer a high quality of a motivating working environment for this work. In Germany the research institutions outside higher education are offering better working conditions, the universities are losing their advantage, or “proprium”, Peter Gaethgens spoke about.

- (5) Saying this I'm not arguing against mobility. Academic work is international, therefore transnational and multinational international cooperation is a sine qua non for scientific and technological progress. But it makes only limited sense, when the European countries are investing a lot of money – not enough, but a lot – in Bachelor and Master education, while other countries are buying out the best of the European graduates to earn the “academic surplus” in and for their universities and companies. If we don't want to have this brain-drain we also should rethink our own brain-gain policy towards other countries for example in Central and Eastern Europe.
- (6) Twenty months ago the European Commission published its communication “Researchers in the European Research Area”. That is a clear analytical paper with concrete recommendations for the improvement of the working conditions and career perspectives of younger scientists. It is time to draw practical conclusions for a timely and adequately funded implementation of these ideas.
- (7) We see differences, in parts contradictions, between the Berlin Communiqué and the EC Communication on “Researchers in the European Research Areas”. Although we respect the distinguished aims and tasks of the European Union and the wider Bologna Community, I want to repeat the trade union demand, to connect the more or less separate processes of building an “European Area of Higher Education” and establishing a “European Research Area”. If Europe is to become competitive a more coherent policy is necessary. Respecting national identities and diversities the trade unions want to have one “European Area of Higher Education and Research”. Otherwise the Lisbon strategy will fail.
- (8) Younger scientists will play a key role in the future development of the higher education and research. Everybody is emphasises this. The verbal consensus is there. But what about the concrete situation? With Education international and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), my organization has initiated comparative studies on the working conditions of the academic staff, especially of younger scientists.
The report “The international Attractiveness of the Academic Workplace in Europe”, edited by Jürgen Enders and Egbert de Weert from CHEPS in the Netherlands, shows how many obstacles for mobility are still existing. Some are speaking of “Euro mobstacles”, obstacles for mobility in Europe. Until now a single European labour market for higher education and research staff is only a vision.
An other report “Promovieren in Europa”, written by Antonia Kupfer and Johannes Moes, analyses huge differences looking to the national policies for the Ph.D.-phase. Our conclusion: we need better statistics, transparent and comparable descriptions of working conditions and attracting career perspectives. We have to develop a European policy for younger scientists. The “European Research Charter” and the “Code of conduct for the recruitment of researchers” have been welcomed by the European trade unions and associations.
- (9) We think it is time to put these issues on the agenda of the Bologna process. The “European Area of Higher Education and Research” will be achievable only when these aspects of social cohesion will be included. The process of the Europeanization of higher education and Research needs active, convinced supporters. Therefore you also have to raise their issues and to find new ways of achieving their participation. Participation is for us a pre-condition for innovation and necessary structural changes.

- (10) We have studied the Scandinavian model of organizing the Ph.D.-phase. The Norwegian model is a challenging alternative to the concept of the Berlin Communiqué. The Ph.D.-phase is not the 3rd phase of studies but the 1. phase of academic work. Younger scientists should do their research work independently; on the base of a contract with the department or the higher education institution. The contract should clearly describe the expectations of both sides. Younger scientists should work as members of the academic staff, with adequate rights in the self-government and they should be paid like other higher education graduate employees. They should be required to teach and the extent should be regulated by the contract. Teaching is good for the younger researchers, not only when they want to become professors. Their teaching is good also for the higher education institutions, because they are getting new opportunities for project-oriented teaching and learning in smaller groups, which is one of the pre-conditions for the improvement of the quality of teaching.
- (11) In demanding this, we are not arguing against doctoral programmes. On the contrary: we think that structured programmes qualify the younger researchers professionally and go hand in hand with the work on the dissertation. But the structuring should not lead to an over regulated curriculum. To guarantee this it is necessary to involve the younger researchers directly in the planning of the curricular content. Doing this it is important to avoid personal dependencies. In a transparent process “good practice” should become visible, a benchmarking process can support the efforts to improve the work of younger researchers in their own interest as well as in the interest of a social Europe.