

Summary & Conclusions

Bologna Follow-Up Seminar “Students’ Participation in Governance in Higher Education” Oslo, Norway – 12/14 of June 2003

1 – Summary

In the Prague Ministerial Summit student involvement was singled out as one of the important topics for the future discussions within the Bologna Process and the call for a follow-up seminar on the topic was eagerly taken by the Norwegian Ministry. This is the reason why more than 100 representatives from the Ministries, institutions, European organisations and students’ organisations gathered between the 12th and the 14th of June 2003 in Oslo in a seminar hosted by the Norwegian Royal Ministry for Education and Research and where ESIB, the Norwegian national unions of students (NSU and STL) and the Council of Europe were valuable co-organisers.

The seminar main theme was the role of students’ participation in both national and international processes of governance in higher education. There was a focus, from various perspectives on how legislation may include and regulate student’s participation in governance of higher education institutions and on the students’ participation in the academic life. The Seminar consisted in a series of panel interventions, case studies presentations and 4 workshops.

A survey about students’ participation was carried and later on used as the fundamental background information for the success of this seminar. The report was commissioned from the Council of Europe by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The survey focused on the issue of students’ participation in the *governance* of higher education. The survey shows that there is a wide and positive attitude towards increased student influence in higher education governance.

During the first two days of this seminar, students, institutions and ministries had the opportunity to present their national practices concerning student participation. This was an effective way to means test the previously known results of the survey on students’ participation.

The participants were generally critical of the fact that some levels of decision making are still not fully available to them and that sometimes the formal involvement is not a guarantee of actual participation as equal partners.

The workshops discussed the role of students being partners or Consumers; the impact of internationalisation on students’ participation, the degree of involvement of students in Higher Education governance and how can they be motivated to participation and also the support of the international community for student participation

2 – Seminar conclusions

1 - Further involvement of students is needed at all levels of decision making, this involvement should not only be legally permitted but effectively encouraged by providing the means necessary for active participation both in the formal and informal approaches.

2 - This encouragement could include mechanisms of recognition and certification of the experience and of the competences and skills acquired by being a student representative. It should also require effective involvement of other stakeholders in the motivation for students to become students' representatives and even for simply participate in elections and on the decision making process

3 - Further involvement brings further responsibilities and demands. Mechanisms of assuring accountability, transparency and the flow on information to other students should be prioritized.

4 - An ethical obligation of handing over the knowledge acquired while a student representative should exist independently of who is going to be the next legitimate student representative.

5 - Usually the higher the level of representation the higher the demand level also is. Students' Organizations should be supported on obtaining the financial, logistical and human resources necessary for creating a situation of equality on participation. Informed and motivated students are many times the driving force behind beneficial reforms instead of being the grain of sand in the clock work.

6 - Definitely universities that assure student participation and student organisations that organise this participation must be seen as schools of citizenship and agents of development of society not only at the local level but also within an international responsibility of solidarity and co-operation. With an effective work on this level it will be society that will emulate the Higher Educations Institutions environment and not the other way around. Having this in mind students cannot be considered simply consumers or clients.

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