

RESOLUTION

Campaigning for a better future for higher education and research

Adopted by the ETUCE Conference, the Regional Conference of
Education International, on 5-6 July 2021

Further to and consistent with the Resolutions adopted by the 8th EI Congress in Bangkok in 2019 and the Resolutions adopted by the ETUCE Conference in 2020, this ETUCE Conference,

Acknowledges that:

1. Over the past decade there has been a reduction in core public funding for higher education and research in many European countries, with negative consequences for quality and equity. Core public funding has often been replaced by competitive and market-oriented mechanisms such as metrics and performance-based funding which, in turn, have increased short-termism in all activities and undermined basic and curiosity-driven research and all areas of research that do not have immediate application;
2. Overreliance on short-term numerical targets is also a threat to the quality of higher education and research. All high-quality activities in higher education and research require a long-term commitment by governments, universities and other Higher Education Institutions and funding bodies to correspond with the deep commitment that higher education and research personnel show towards their work. Instead, a fixation on metrics and performance-based funding have fuelled the growth in precarious employment;
3. There has been huge pressure on HEI's and universities to provide more labour-market oriented programmes and to link publicly-funded research more closely with business interests. In addition, universities have been given new tasks such as to arrange/provide continuous learning;
4. Quasi-market policies, governance and organisational models - often naïvely borrowed from the private sector without understanding their negative impact on the quality of higher education and research - have also undermined protections for academic freedom and collegial governance;



5. In the long-term, only academic freedom, collegial governance, tenure and the quest for continuous advancement supported by sustainable long-term funding will help higher education and research bring wider benefits for society and humanity;
6. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy have also been under direct assault as a result of repressive state policies of authoritarian governments and growing anti-democratic forces in a number of European countries;
7. Over the past decade there has been a steady erosion of meaningful collective bargaining and social dialogue mechanisms in higher education and research which has contributed to declining salaries and increased workloads, pay inequalities and job insecurity;
8. Collegial governance, high quality working conditions as well as initial training and continuous professional development are crucial to ensuring quality research, teaching and effective educational outcomes for students, and respect for these is enshrined in the [Rome Communiqué](#) (2020) adopted by the Bologna Process countries – European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
9. Diverse populations of academics, staff and researchers, as well as adequate structural public funding for high-quality initial training and continuous professional development for academics and other staff are essential to guarantee the social dimension of higher education and research – as it is stated in the Rome Communiqué, [Annex II on "Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA"](#);
10. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the organisation, funding and equal access to higher education and research in Europe as well as on academic freedom and the intellectual property rights of academics and researchers. In many ways, the pandemic has strengthened a number of existing trends that we have observed for some time and is also leading to additional pressures on staff and students;
11. Some of the additional pressures on higher education and research staff arising out of COVID19 include:
 - a. The rapid shift to 'emergency remote teaching' and an increasing requirement to develop online and blended learning on a longer-term basis for a larger student population, with significant consequences for pedagogy, working conditions, privacy and the role of commercial education technology companies in higher education;
 - b. The adoption of an 'emergency approach' to governance and organisation in higher education and research that is limiting and further weakening democratic and collegial governance;
 - c. Changes to upper secondary and university examination and assessment procedures which have affected both student admissions and progression;
 - d. Disruptions to research and doctoral programmes resulting in serious consequences for early career researchers on short-term contracts and scholarships if they are not able to conduct/complete their research work according to a planned schedule;
 - e. A growing division, often caused by ways of financing, between research and education, visible in the growing amount of positions for either teaching or research, substituting staff functions that combine teaching and research, thus threatening the quality of both education and research;
 - f. Academics with young children (men and women, mainly early-career academics with precarious contracts), suffer more than others of lost academic career opportunities, because of caring and home schooling responsibilities, with the highest negative consequences for women academics;



- g. Women academics being forced to take disproportionate amounts of caring (including taking care of their scientific community, i.e. their colleagues and students) and home schooling responsibilities, to the detriment of their own scientific activities and careers;
 - h. Restrictions on international mobility opportunities for students, teachers, researchers and other staff in Europe arising out of the pandemic;
 - i. Increased financial uncertainties facing higher education institutions as a result of drop-out of students and a decline in the numbers of international students, the ongoing volatility of metrics and performance-based funding and concerns about future budget cuts.
12. The COVID-19 crisis has also led to a deterioration in working conditions, including massively increased workloads due to online and blended learning and job losses for fixed-term and casualised staff. These developments have had a disproportionate effect on particular groups of staff, such as women and ethnic minorities, and the pandemic has also had a detrimental impact on the mental health and well-being of staff and students. We are concerned that many of the changes caused by the reaction to COVID-19 will be permanent;
13. In addition, the past year has highlighted the essential role of higher education and research staff in ensuring the continuity of university study during a global pandemic and the critical role played by researchers and scientists in all fields, including the humanities and social sciences, in responding to the health emergency. The pandemic has also illustrated the importance of Open Educational Resources (OER), Open Access and Open Science to higher education and research systems in Europe. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has reaffirmed the importance of education trade unions in prioritising health and safety at work;
14. In response to the crisis, there is a need to develop an agenda for more sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic higher education and research systems in Europe. Education trade unions should play a key role in shaping the future of higher education and research policies and strategies in Europe.

The Conference, therefore, calls on ETUCE and member organisations:

- 15. To challenge cuts to higher education and research budgets and/or attempts by governments to fund a narrower range of disciplines and research projects as their response to the economic crisis;
- 16. To campaign for sustainable public investment in broad-based systems of higher education and research as one of the ways to ensure an equitable and long-term recovery from the current health, climatic, ecological, economic and social crisis;
- 17. To reassert the importance of higher education and research as a public good and an essential contributor to culture, society, sustainable development and democracy as well as to the economy;
- 18. To insist on the separation of funding from the function of evaluating quality in higher education and research and to promote the increased use of collegial forms of assessment;
- 19. To advocate for long-termism in the governance of higher education and research and greater protection and promotion of academic freedom as essential for quality teaching and research, and to call on governments of the Bologna Process

(EHEA) to respect the commitment to uphold “institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education” as outlined in the [Rome Communiqué](#) (2020);

20. To campaign to strengthen democratic institutions, collegial governance and social dialogue as part of the strategy to safeguard academic freedom;
21. To call on governments to ensure that the “right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning” - as enshrined in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (2017) - is guaranteed for higher education and research staff, as well as for students;
22. To engage in key debates on the future of digitalisation and automation in higher education and to demand that working conditions, infrastructure, staffing levels, intellectual property rights, privacy, public funding and public responsibility for and of higher education are not undermined as a result of these developments;
23. To call for properly resourced and funded agreements in relation to online learning and for these to be negotiated and agreed with the higher education teacher unions;
24. To intervene in key policy debates on labour market-oriented qualifications such as micro-credentials and, in doing so, to advocate for core fundamental values and the importance of autonomous institutions promoting knowledge, research, democratic citizenship - free from commercial pressures and immediate short-term needs;
25. To push for sustainable and equitable funding for research, including the allocation of sufficient funding to institutions of higher education for research purposes with no strings attached, and for proper investment in research in the arts, humanities and social sciences;
26. To campaign for sustainable Open Education Resources (OER), Open Access and Open Science policies in higher education and research, including the development of publicly-funded platforms for the open publication of OERs and research, while respecting the copyright of academic staff and their freedom to choose publication methods according to their own preferences;
27. To fight for meaningful collective bargaining and social dialogue mechanisms in higher education and research, including the need to ensure greater protection of workloads and improved health and safety at work;
28. To request a better balance between research and teaching in academic careers and to push for equality audits to ensure that the effects of the pandemic and lockdowns do not disadvantage particular groups of staff. This could include some form of additional support for staff with care duties (children, relatives in need of care) because of restrictions and closures of schools, kindergartens, nurseries and care facilities;
29. To campaign to improve the attractiveness and professionalism of research and academic careers, including the demand for ‘permanent jobs for permanent tasks’ in teaching and research, and in the short-term to push for the contracts of fixed-term staff and doctoral candidates to be extended in order to compensate for the impact of the crisis;
30. To advocate for high-quality international cooperation programmes and reciprocal mobility schemes for staff and students in Europe.