

rial intervention, the creation of the e-university, widely hyped as a farsighted initiative, collapsed under a mountain of debt some four years later.

CONCLUSION

There is, of course, another side to the story. Internationally, the higher education system is highly successful: international student numbers have risen by more than a third since 1997, and the United Kingdom remains in spite of competition the second most popular destination after the United States for international students; in research, the United Kingdom's share of world citations also places it second only to the United States; Cambridge, Oxford, and Imperial College are to be found in the top 10 in world-ranking systems; within Europe, the United Kingdom collaborates more than any other country with China. Perhaps more significant, the newly introduced national Student Satisfaction Survey shows UK students to be overwhelmingly satisfied with the education they are receiving. How far this performance reflects historic or inherent strengths, rather than any actions by government in the last 10 to 15 years, is hard to assess, but it is certainly true that within European higher education the United Kingdom is now seen as a sometimes uncomfortable trendsetter. Perhaps the most striking feature of any account of UK government policy toward higher education is the extent it represents a continuation and extension of policies initiated by its predecessor government's last decade. While there are danger signs in unwise ministerial interventionism, as a consequence of its size, its cost, and its economic importance higher education has become a legitimate object of public policy in a way that was barely conceivable two decades ago. Inevitably there is disappointment with a government that seemed to promise so much, but perhaps higher education should congratulate itself that the results have been no worse. ■

European Students in the Bologna Process

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The task of establishing a European higher education area, the so-called Bologna process, has led to massive systemic changes in European higher education and has also dramatically altered the dynamics of European higher education poli-

cymaking and, especially, the role and influence of various interest organizations. The student constituency across Europe has been widely supportive of the process and vocal in demanding Bologna reforms to be implemented at their respective higher education institutions. One of the student organizations in Europe has played a particularly visible role in the Bologna process. ESIB (the National Unions of Students in Europe), which has been renamed ESU (European Students' Union [www.esib.org]), has taken active part in the Bologna process, ensuring that student interests were reflected in its policies. At the same time, ESU used the process to upgrade its visibility and role in European higher education policymaking in general.

THE EUROPEAN STUDENT CONSTITUENCY AND THE EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

The student constituency active on the European level can be categorized in three main groups of student organizations: *discipline-based* (e.g., AIESEC [Association of Economics and Business students] and ELSA [European Law Students Association]); *political and religious* (e.g., EDS [European Democrat Students] and JECI-MIEC [International Young Catholic Students-International Movement of Catholic Students]); and *interdisciplinary organizations* (e.g., Erasmus Student Network [network of students taking part in Erasmus

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Program exchanges), AEGEE [Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe, which promotes European cooperation among students], and ESU). Most of these student organizations are members of the European Youth Forum (www.youthforum.org), the European platform of national youth councils and European nongovernmental youth organizations, and a prominent player in European youth policymaking.

Only ESU represents democratic and independent student organizations that are elected as the national platforms in their countries. Since its creation in 1982, ESU massively expanded its membership and today acts on behalf of 45 National Unions of Students from 34 countries, representing over 10 million students in Europe. ESU's main decision-making body is the board, which consists of representatives of national unions and meets twice yearly to decide on all policy and internal issues. While ESU has links to representatives of other student organizations, there is no formal channel of cooperation.

STUDENTS' INTERESTS IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

While students were not formally included in drafting of the

Bologna Declaration, this situation changed soon after with strong pressure from ESIB and support from some education ministers committed to student participation in European higher education policymaking. During the French presidency of the EU in 2000, the then French education minister, Jack Lang, promised that the policies of ESIB would be presented to the European Education Ministers' Summit and that ESIB representatives will be formally included in the Bologna process. The Swedish government, subsequently taking up the EU presidency, followed up on this promise and included the ESIB delegation to the 2001 Bologna Ministerial Follow-Up Summit in Prague. ESIB's declaration on Bologna issues was presented among the official documents of the Prague summit. The declaration included ESIB policies on issues such as mobility, access to higher education, student welfare, recognition of qualifications, and quality-assurance building on areas covered by the Bologna Declaration.

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ESIB entered the Bologna process at time when other student organizations were largely unaware of the Bologna Declaration and its implications for the higher education sector in Europe. Awareness was at the time also low among academics, administrators, and individual students. ESIB's contribution to the process was twofold. As the representative organization of students in Europe it sought to upload its policies reflecting student interests into the process. ESIB also coordinated information campaigns, so-called Bologna student days, to provide students with information about the Bologna Declaration so that they could pressure institutions and national governments to take up the reforms.

In a series of policy papers and declarations on issues raised by the Bologna process, ESIB highlighted in particular that the Bologna Declaration failed to address the social implications of the process for students. ESIB reminded ministers that it is the ultimate responsibility of the state to finance higher education and thus ensure equal access and diversity of quality programs. ESIB asked the ministers that the Bologna process should not endorse increases in tuition fees and instead should discuss ways to widen the access to education and respect the principle of education as a public good. ESIB also asked for a system of credits based on workload, a common European framework of criteria for accreditation, and a compatible system of degrees. Alongside the basic principle of free access, a two-tier degree system should guarantee free and equal access to all students. Academic, social, economic, and political obstacles to mobility should be removed, and relevant information should be provided to contribute to the mobility of students, teaching staff,

and researchers. ESIB's final message was that students should be considered full partners in higher education governance at all levels, including the Bologna process itself.

In their communiqués following the Bologna Declaration, the ministers incorporated many of ESIB's messages—most notably that higher education should be considered a public good and public responsibility as well as that students are full members of the higher education community. The issue of student participation in the Bologna process was resolved by including ESIB representatives (together with the European University Association and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) in the general structure. Other student organizations, especially the discipline based, subsequently began to participate in the implementation of the Bologna recommendations in cooperation with discipline-based European academic associations and individual higher education institutions. At the same time, ESU remains a formal and active partner in the follow-up structure of the Bologna process.

CONCLUSION

Recognition of ESIB by the Council of EU education ministers was historic as ESIB never before managed to present opinions directly to the ministers, except through the European Commission, with whom it has had a consulting role. With involvement in the Bologna process, ESIB transformed from a "sleeping giant" to a major player in European higher education politics. The recognition of ESIB as the "representative voice of students in Europe" within the Bologna process also had an impact on ESIB's internal structures. Given that issues discussed on the European level coincided with those on the

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national and institutional level, national and local unions of students became ever more committed to and involved in ESIB work. This also led to the further professionalization of ESIB in terms of establishing expert committees to deal with specific Bologna issues. The Bologna process has thus unexpectedly also created circumstances that led to cooperation among the student unions and strengthened their resolve to empower ESIB to represent them on the European level. ■