



Report of the Secretary General on the year ending 30 September 2015.

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The words 'engaged', 'reflective', 'transitional', 'global', 'growth', 'commitment' and 'challenges' come to the fore when reflecting on the previous twelve months.

The Observatory has **engaged** with a wider range of stakeholders. In part this has been through its participation in international events, such as the Global Meeting of Agencies in Montreal and the European Higher Education Area Ministerial Meeting in Yerevan. It has also engaged through specific involvement with the Countries of: **Belarus**, whose admission to the EHEA was approved in May, where the Observatory collaborated with the Campaign for a Democratic Belarus to provide a workshop; and **Fyrom**, at whose invitation the MCO jointly organised a workshop in June. Ministerial involvement in both events confirmed the importance and relevance of fundamental values and also the commitment of these countries to understand aspects of how values are operationalised in a range of countries. There was also specific engagement in **Sweden**, which was the first Country to host the Observatory's annual conference, (in Uppsala), last year. The increasing number of institutions requesting the MCO's involvement in significant events in the next 3 years has led to the need for criteria to be drawn up as a basis for making decisions on a fair and consistent basis as the resources available to the Observatory require it to be selective.

With a relatively new President of the Council and the election of a new Secretary General in September 2014, the current year has been one of **reflection** on how the Observatory operates and whether this should be modified to adapt to changes in the higher education sector in countries across the world. The manifestations of this includes the development of a revised strategic plan, which the Council is to consider tomorrow; the review of admissions criteria to take account of diversity of practices in different cultures, the enlargement of capacity to undertake monitoring activities and a review of the efficacy of the Observatory's website, to which improvements have been made during the year.

A consequence of this is that the Observatory is adopting a **transitional** mode of operation. It is conscious that its history has been relatively Eurocentric and increased globalisation and internationalisation make it desirable to operate in a more truly **global** way. It has previously focused on HE institutions and their component internal elements whereas the different developing relationships with Ministries and other national bodies have given it pause to enquire as to the extent to which these should also be included in its activities.



The Observatory has experienced **growth** in a number of respects. The number of **signatories**, which stood at 776 from 81 Countries 12 months ago, could rise to over 800 at the conclusion of the signing ceremony on Friday. It is not impossible that the number could exceed 1000 if the proposed strategic plan is implemented in full. The number of experienced people who can be called upon to undertake reviews has increased from 12 to 20 as a consequence of a recruitment and selection process and a development workshop held earlier this week. The number of participants at workshops organised or co-organised by the Observatory has exceeded 650 in the past year. The Council has been represented at events attended in total by more than 2000 people.

This progress and these outcomes would not have been achieved without the significant **commitment** of many people. The members of the MCO Council have contributed fully, both within meetings and increasingly between meetings on projects and workshops. The new members of the monitoring group have already demonstrated their commitment by voluntarily engaging with the MCO in the preparation of the workshop and the delivery of this conference. The experience of both groups of people is invaluable. The University of Bologna continues to support the Observatory in various ways for which all signatories and those who participate with the MCO are grateful. All of those who have volunteered to speak at this conference and at the MCO's various workshops have or will have played a valuable role in enabling the Observatory to fulfil its remit. The support of those in kindred bodies has enabled the Observatory to be well advised and well connected in many countries. Finally, the Observatory would not function without the experience and dedication of its Administrator, for whose work we are all grateful.

Lastly, the **challenges** facing the Observatory are enormous. As the world operates in a more global way and as society changes more quickly, as the roles of Universities become more important and fundamental values become more relevant as a compass to steer by, the Observatory needs to become more effective at enabling universities to respond and to function well. The voluntary human resources available to the Observatory are increasing nicely but these need to be matched by significant growth in financial resources. Under the current regulations, these can come only from donations. It is pleasing that there has been an increase in the level of donations this year, but not to the extent necessary for the Observatory to expand its work significantly.

On accepting the appointment of Secretary General the Observatory was described to me as 'a small boat, with a very large sail'. That small boat is strong in many respects and the proposed plans will strengthen it further. The winds blowing into the large sail are however stronger and to continue to navigate the journey ahead the Observatory will need the strong support of all its signatories and those wanting to commit their organisations to the fundamental values which give that boat stability.

May I conclude by thanking you for participating in this conference and looking forward to you being with us and supporting the Observatory on the journey ahead.