

## **EAIR Special Interest Group: the Student Experience, Rome 2006.**

Uulkje de Jong and James Williams held the third pre-Forum meeting of the EAIR Special Interest Group: *the Student Experience* in Rome during the EAIR Forum at Luiss University. This event proved to be an excellent method of both bringing together newer and older members of EAIR and encouraging discussion of one of the key areas of interest of the Association.

Last year, the group discussed ways in which students can be included in the feedback loop more effectively. This year, it seemed logical to discuss the expectations of today's students and the ways in which higher education institutions address those expectations.

The first discussion aimed at identifying the expectations of students. The discussion focused on two main current issues: the impact of fees on students in many countries and an increasing desire for flexibility of study. The introduction of fees was thought to be potentially very significant in affecting student expectations of higher education. As a result of the introduction of fees in many higher education systems, several participants thought students would be increasingly critical of the 'service' that they receive and that they would be more interested in the 'return' or economic benefits of spending several years studying towards a degree. Participants argued that students are increasingly expecting to be flexible. There is an growing recognition that students come from diverse origins and have many different needs, both academic and social.

The second discussion focused on how higher education institutions can meet those expectations. Participants focused principally on two issues: the need for flexible study-patterns and the need for more integration of the students into their course, faculty and institution. Flexible study patterns are increasingly felt to be necessary in an environment in which students are more mobile. It was thought that because of the increasing diversity of students, much more needed to be done by institutions in order to integrate them into the sector. Participants provided several examples of how universities addressed these issues.

Next year at Innsbruck, we hope to organise a fourth discussion group on the student experience.'