

Reader for  
the 27th European  
Students'  
Convention and  
SAGE Final  
Conference

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# Parliament's

The purpose of your initiative, which is to bring together national representatives of students from all over Europe to debate and exchange views on European policy developments related to higher education and youth and on the

2014 European elections, is very much appreciated.

The European Parliament strongly believes that the quality and relevance of higher education are a core condition for taking full



# greetings

advantage of Europe's intellectual capital. Higher education is a public good that fosters culture, diversity, democratic values and personal development, and prepares students to become active citizens who will support European cohesion. In its resolution of 11 September 2012, Parliament called on universities to widen access to learning and modernise their curricula to address new challenges, in order to improve the competences of the European population and promote the acquisition by students of knowledge and skills to facilitate their entry into the labour market.

Furthermore, our institution welcomes and supports educational projects that encourage younger generations to become actively involved in European policies and boost their interest in and enthusiasm for Europe, particularly in the run-up to the 2014 European elections.

Given the clear European dimension of your project, it is with great pleasure that I grant the European Parliament's high patronage I to this initiative.

May I take this opportunity to wish you every success with what should be an excellent event.

Yours sincerely,

*Martin Schulz,*  
*President of the European Parliament*



# Words from European

I think all will agree that education is the best preparation for life. Indeed, a higher education degree today brings improved chances of success in what has become a very competitive labour market. This is why European political leaders agreed, through the Europe 2020 strategy, to set a target that at least 40% of 30-34 year olds gain higher education qualifications. The European Commission's Agenda for the Modernisation of Higher Education builds on this quantitative target by focusing also on the quality and relevance of higher education, and the importance of helping graduates to develop the skills and values they need to be articulate and engaged citizens of Europe.

Of course, there is no silver bullet or simple answer which is equally valid across all countries. For

example, in some, engineering is among the most employable degrees, yet in others it is one of the least employable. And even if, overall, higher education graduates are far less likely to be unemployed than their peers with only secondary education, this does not lessen the plight that too many of our graduates face in trying to find good jobs when they leave university.

The new programme Erasmus+, with a strengthened budget of €14.7b, will help in closing the gap between the world of education and the world of work through the support of structured partnerships such as the knowledge alliances or the sector skills alliances. Projects such as ESU's SAGE study, and the European Commission's recently published study on 'Graduate Employability: what makes the difference',

# the Commissioner

can also help to give us better insights into how students and graduates can act to improve their chances of good quality employment and what their governments and higher education institutions can do to assist.

I am delighted therefore that ESU has chosen the themes of graduate employability, students' participation in European policy discussions and the upcoming European

Parliament elections for your Convention. It is crucial that we have a strong student voice, with clear messages rooted in evidence from the direct experience of students to shape and evaluate your higher education.

*Androulla Vassiliou  
European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth*



# Welcome to

Being a student in Europe (or anywhere in the world, for that matter) is not exactly great at the moment - the tuition fees are rising, student support is decreasing and once you finish your studies, you are very likely to find yourself among the millions of unemployed people. If you do find a job, it is very likely that it will be an internship, possibly an unpaid one, and if you are a bit more lucky, you can get a limited-time contract.

Due to the high levels of youth unemployment, the word employability has entered the European vocabulary and is now probably the most used term in the documents of the European

Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU, OECD etc. In ESU, we noticed that the majority of the solutions and policies that were proposed were much too simplified and short-term; therefore we decided that it is time to have a closer look and shed some light on what should be done instead.

I will not spoil the surprise, for the full report you will have to read the publications that we have prepared in our SAGE project. However, I can say that we now more firmly than ever believe that higher education is a human right and that it has to be a public good and public responsibility. Our views are very critical toward understanding higher education as a mean to produce graduates for the labour market, which seems to be a policy not only of the EU institutions and government, but also the narrative that has gotten into the discussion of some youth organisations. ESU's role is to



# Brussels

keep reminding everybody that higher education has multiple purposes, that we are not getting a better society unless higher education will inspire people to critical thinking, enable personal development, contribute to building responsible and active citizens and contribute to many other benefits that cannot be quantified and cannot be included in the usual economic analysis.

As the elections to the European Parliament are coming closer, we are also using the opportunity of having around 100 student representatives in Brussels to raise the issues that are bothering students and to make sure that Europe is listening. With the untransparent, sometimes close to undemocratic, decision-making processes, the European Union is losing its popularity in most of the EU countries and the decision of the Council of the EU have contributed to the rise of far-right extremism in many countries, to the level

that it might have a significant influence in the next European Parliament. As students, we have the responsibility to make sure that this does not happen and that we use our influence to stop these developments.

Now is the time when the candidates for the parliamentarians will have to show, if they have heard the people sing or if they are only running because there is a comfortable job in Brussels. We sincerely hope that they have realised that it is time to change and we will follow their programs to make sure that education will remain public and free. As we are saying in our campaign: people need to vote for education!

I wish us all a good conference and that our voice will be heard.

*Rok Primožič*  
*ESU Chairperson 2013-2014*

# The 27th Students'

The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 47 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 39 countries. The NUSes are open to all students in their respective country regardless of political persuasion, religion, ethnic or cultural origin, sexual orientation or social standing. Our members are also student-run, autonomous, representative and operate according to democratic principles. Through its members, ESU represents over 11 million higher education students in Europe. ESU is an international non-profit NGO registered in Belgium.

## **Mission, vision and values**

ESU's mission is to represent, defend and strengthen students' educational, democratic and po-

litical and social rights. ESU will work for sustainable, accessible and high quality higher education in Europe.

### *Vision*

Equal educational and social opportunities in an open and democratic Europe where students shape a sustainable future.

### *Values*

ESU is diverse, democratic and open-minded.

- We represent all students in Europe, understanding the diversity of the students. ESU is inclusive and strives for solidarity within the students' movement.

- We are independent. ESU's structures facilitate the accountability of the elected representa-

# European Convention

tives, works with respect towards all members and their different opinions and functions transparently.

- We are unconventional and open for new thoughts. We, as experts of higher education, bring in courageous and smart ideas through a fresh and spontaneous, but professional attitude.

## **What ESU does**

The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.

## **Working together**

ESU works to bring together,

resource, train and inform national student representatives on policy developments in higher education at the European level. Since decisions concerning higher education are increasingly taken at the European level, ESU's role as the only European-wide student platform is similarly growing. ESU's work centres on supporting its members through organising seminars, training, campaigns and conferences relevant to students, conducting European-wide research, partnership projects and campaigns, providing information services and producing a variety of publications for students, policy-makers and higher education professionals.

## **What is a European Students' Convention?**

The European Students' Conven-

tion (ESC) is a biannual event organised by ESU where students' representatives from the national unions of students of 39 different European countries, other stakeholders, experts and policy-makers have the opportunity to meet and discuss about the recent and future developments of higher education. Previous conventions have showed that they are an important and relevant contribution to higher education policies in Europe and a great meeting point for exchanging points of view

between students, policy-makers and other stakeholders.

ESU usually organises the ESC in the country which is holding the EU Presidency at that point of time, in order to create synergies with the country presidency's priorities on education. However, in this case, due to the upcoming European Parliament elections, ESU will organise it in Brussels, with the aim of facilitating the discussion with the EU institutions and key players.



Participants in the 26th European Students' Convention, held in Kaunas, Lithuania, 2013.

## 27th European Students' Convention

The ESC27 aims to discuss the effects of European higher education reforms, and especially on the graduates' employability, with European higher education students, other stakeholders, experts, policy-makers and relevant key players.

The main strategic documents and policies set by the European Union for the development of higher education in the next years, such as the EU 2020 Strategy and the "Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training" (ET 2020) will be the background documents for the discussions. Moreover, other EU initiatives in the field of education will be discussed, such as Erasmus+, EASQ, the modernisation agenda for European higher education -COM(2011)567-, etc.; as well as the visa

directive for third-country students which is now being discussed among European policy-makers -2013/0081(COD)-.

Results of ESU's research activities will be presented at ESC27 and workshops organised to discuss the findings and conclusions of the studies, as well as the trends in graduate employability in Europe. ESU will also present policy recommendations on the issue. Other topics to be discussed at the ESC will cover the Visa Directive, Modernisation Agenda and the introduction of Erasmus+. Three publications (main outcomes of the SAGE project), *Employability With Student Eyes*, *SAGE Handbook* and the *EU2020 Student Review* will be launched at the ESC.

The debate will help to reinforce the contribution of higher education and advanced vocational education to the process of innovation. The ESC27 aims at this specific objective by empowering students to contribute to shifting higher education to an increased level of accountability and connectivity with society, in a fashion that does not reduce academic freedom, but that ensures the value of studies for students. This will,



in the long run, contribute to a higher level of innovation within institutions, particularly in economically-linked areas that bring an added value to the economy as well.

Additionally, the event aims at stressing the importance of higher education within the crisis and the role it can play in leading the way out of the crisis, both on social and economic terms. Academic staff, students, governments and other stakeholders in the field of higher education will address the main challenges.

As the event will have a strong

focus on the upcoming European Parliament elections, representatives from the different political groups will be invited to stress their thoughts and policies about students and educational issues. We hope that this event will contribute to the empowerment of a debate on education in the political programmes and campaigns for the EP elections 2014.

### **Participation at ESC 27**

Students and in particular student representatives of national and local unions are the main target group of this event. More than one hundred student repre-

sentatives from over 39 countries, of which 27 are EU Member States, are expected to participate in this convention.

These students are part of national Bologna Follow Up Groups as well as working groups dealing with the Lisbon Strategy. Indirectly, they represent a large number of European higher education students for whom employability after their university degree is of tremendous importance,



Participants exchange views and ideas.

especially during the current economic turmoil. The students were involved in the research and the production of the publication activities that are related to the project and will also play a great role in the final discussions on the outcomes.

A second target group is the leadership and academics at higher education institutions who are working on the topic of employability, higher education institutions' associations as well as other policy-makers responsible for higher education at all levels. Moreover, European umbrella organisations of multinationals, national companies, industries and small and medium sized enterprises (such as BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME and EUROCHAMBRES) are also part of the target group.

The participants will be able to:

- o Gain a basic understanding and develop critical thinking on the up-to-date implementation of austerity measures and their impact on the society.
- o Make a link between the EU-level policies and their impact on the policy making on national

level.

- o Understand the impact the crisis has had on youth, students and the society at large.
- o Develop critical thinking on the concept of smart employability and importance of the student-centred learning for the further employability development.
- o Learn best practices on influencing the different levels of work on enhancing graduates' employability from national unions' of students.

#### *Key players and speakers*

ESU, in the line of our strong collaboration with several institutions and partners, will invite Members of the European Parliament, representatives from the European Commission, Permanent Representations, BFUG, Council of Europe, OECD, UNESCO and stakeholder organisations (EUA, EURASHE, ENQA, BUSINESSEUROPE) and any other interested groups to participate in the convention.

It is our pleasure to welcome you at the convention and hope that you will enjoy the event.

# The agenda

Participants are encouraged to meet Permanent Representations towards the European Union, Members of the European Parliament, and EU officials of their countries.

European Commission staff directory: [http://ec.europa.eu/staffdir/plsql/gsys\\_page.display\\_index?pLang=EN](http://ec.europa.eu/staffdir/plsql/gsys_page.display_index?pLang=EN)

Other EU institutions (Who is who): <http://europa.eu/whoiswho/public/>

Moreover, participants are also encouraged to visit the Parliamentarium, the European Parliament's Visitors' Centre (Willy Brandt Building, European Parliament Solidarność 1980 Esplanade; Place du Luxembourg 1050 Brussels). Dynamic, interactive multimedia displays guide visitors through the journey of European integration and the impact this has on our everyday lives. The Centre is in all 24 official EU languages and admission is free.

<b>18 March 2014</b>	<b>Arrival day</b>
16:00 - 19:30	<b>Registration of the participants at the hotels</b>
	Volunteers will be at the lobby of the hotels for the registration of the participants at their arrival. Participants arriving later will be able to register at the venue of the first day.
20:00 - 21:30	<b>Cultural evening</b> <i>(Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel - Campus Stormstraat, 1000 Brussels)</i>
	Participants are invited to bring some drinks and/or food/snacks from their own countries and share it with the rest of the participants. The aims are getting to know each other and the different cultures within ESU.

<b>19 March 2014</b>	<b>Students' views on employability</b>
	<i>The Norway House / Norwegian Mission to the EU Rue Archimede 17, 1000 Brussels</i>
09:00 – 09:30	Registration
09:30 – 10:00	<b>Opening words</b>
	Opening of the ESC 27 and presentation of the agenda and main aims and objectives of the event.
10:00 – 10:30	<b>SAGE project presentation: Employability state of play in the EU vs. EHEA</b>
	Introduction to the SAGE project and its rationale, as well as highlighting why it is important looking into how the EU employment policies affect the EHEA employability policies.
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 11:45	<b>Presentations of the main outcomes of the SAGE project of ESU</b>
11:45 – 13:00	<b>SAGE policy recommendations on employability &amp; panel discussion</b>
	Presentation and panel discussion regarding the SAGE policy recommendations focusing on how they could be relevant for the current policy debates.
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:30	<b>Looking into the Youth Guarantee and internships</b>
	Introduction to the Youth Guarantee and how it is supposed to help countries raise youth employment levels; discussion about the current trend regarding internships and what can be done to stop the unpaid ones.
15:30 - 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 - 16:45	<b>Students' views on the Modernisation Agenda</b>
	Contributing authors from the Sage publication on the Modernisation Agenda share their views.
16:45 - 17:00	<b>The social dimension of employability and education</b>
	Underrepresented students share their views on employability and education.
17:00 - 17:45	<b>Wrap-up and conclusions</b>
18:00 - 19:30	<b>Education friends reception (stakeholders and policymakers)</b>

<b>20 March 2014</b>	<b>Students' participation in European policy discussions</b>
	<i>Room JDE 62 (6th floor, Jacques Delors Building) European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Rue Belliard 99, 1040 Brussels</i>
08:45 - 09:15	<b>Opening words</b>
	Welcome by the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) of the EESC and ESU Vice-Chairperson. Brief introduction to the aims and objectives of the day.
09:45 - 11:00	<b>EU policies supporting a paradigm shift in Learning and Teaching</b>
	Analysis of the recommendations for improving quality in teaching and learning from the EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education and of the QA Progress Report from the European Commission. Followed by a debate on how the access to information can influence the access to education, opportunities a threats for access to higher education.
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 - 12:30	<b>Permeability between VET &amp; HE and its links with employability</b>
	Interactive discussion on the concept of permeability of Vocational Education and Training sector and Higher Education: creating synergies of the existing tool and the rationale behind the European Area of Skills and Qualifications.
12:30 - 13:00	<b>Update on the situation in Ukraine</b>
	Representatives from Ukrainian Association of Student Self-government (UASS), ESU's full-member NUS from Ukraine, will debrief the participants at the ESC27 about the situation in Ukraine and the actions carried out by the Ukrainian students.
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch (in Atrium)
14:00 - 15:00	<b>Persecuted students</b>
	Interactive discussion aiming at presenting concretely the reality of persecuted students and the choices they are confronted with in order to continue their higher education. The discussion will explain why persecuted students are more vulnerable than any other persecuted persons. It will then focus on student-led solutions for these persecuted students and the necessary global solidarity needed among students to help them with freedom of expression and students' rights.



15:00 - 15:30	<b>Employability approach in ESU policies (internal debate)</b>
	Debate on how to reflect the outcomes of the SAGE project regarding employability on ESU policy documents.
15:30 - 16:00	Coffee Break
16:00 - 17:30	<b>Parallel workshops (internal debate)</b>
•	<b>Discussion on the Future of the Bologna Process (at the EESC)</b> Intro to the current state of the Bologna Process, its goals and governance structures and debate on the its viability and its future.
•	<b>Effective lobbying strategies</b> (room A3H-1 at the EP) max 40 ppl. Interactive session on how to do an effective and ethical lobby strategy.
18:00	<b>Symbolic action at Agora Simone Veil – European Parliament</b>
	In support of Ukrainian students: Let Ukraine decide its own fate!
20:30	Dinner -full-members only-
	(Boston Steak House, Place Charles Rogier 6, 1020 Brussels)

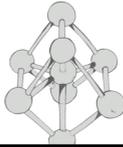


The European Parliament plays a large role in the students' convention this time.

<b>21 March 2014</b>	<b>European Parliament elections 2014. Because it matters: Vote for education!</b>
	<i>Room A1G-2 (Altiero Spinelli Building) European Parliament Rue Wiertz 60, 1047 Brussels</i>
08:45 – 09:15	Registrations and security check
09:30 - 09:45	<b>Opening words</b>
	Welcome by Mrs. Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, MEP and chair of the youth intergroup, and the ESU Vice-Chairperson. Brief introduction to the aims and objectives of the day.
09:45 – 10:30	<b>Decision-making in the European Union and the role of the Parliament</b>
	Introduction to the European Parliament, competences, composition and how it works.
10:30 – 11:15	<b>European Parliament Elections 2014</b>
	Update on the ESU campaign for the European Parliament elections 2014: Vote for education! and debate on forward steps. Concrete example about campaigning from Denmark
11:15 – 11:45	Coffee Break
11:45 – 12:45	<b>(Some) EU initiatives on education: Erasmus+ &amp; students' visa directive</b>
	Introduction to the Erasmus+ programme and the new directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research and studies; followed by a discussion on the role of horizontal and vertical mobility.
12:45 – 13:00	<b>Conclusions of the 27th ESC and closing words</b>
	Presentation of the main conclusions of the 27th European Students' Convention and closing of the event.
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch & departure of participants

# Practicalities

## Explore



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Brussels is densely populated and it is easy to get around either on foot or with public transport:

[www.stib.be](http://www.stib.be)



## Enjoy

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Brussels has a great variety of restaurants, bars, cafés and interesting places and events to see:

[www.visitbrussels.be](http://www.visitbrussels.be)

## Communicate



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Don't forget to interact online and tell the world about ESC27!

#ESC27

#ESU\_SAGE

#VoteForEducation

# The EU in

Currently there are 28 Member States of the European Union (EU), with Croatia joining in 2013. But the idea for the EU emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. The first steps were to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent and so more likely to avoid conflict. The result was the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1958, and initially increasing economic cooperation between six countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

One of the main goals of the European Union and its predecessor has been to create and preserve a single market area in Europe. What started as a purely economic cooperation was gradually transformed into a political international organisation, covering a diverse range of policy areas from development aid to foreign policy. This was reflected in the decision

to change the organisation's name from the EEC to the European Union in 1993.

The so-called EU treaties are fundamental documents in the EU decision-making and law-making processes.

## **Law-making**

There are 3 main institutions involved in EU legislation:

The European Parliament, which represents the EU's citizens and is directly elected by them;

The Council of the European Union, which represents the governments of the individual member countries. The Presidency of the Council is shared by the Member States on a rotating basis. Greece does currently hold the Presidency to the European Council.

The European Commission, which represents the interests of the Union as a whole.

# brief

Together, these three institutions produce through the “Ordinary Legislative Procedure” (ex “co-decision”) the policies and laws that apply throughout the EU. In principle, the Commission pro-

poses new laws, and the Parliament and Council adopt them. The Commission and the member countries then implement them, and the Commission ensures that the laws are properly applied.

## European elections in May 2014

Elections to the European Parliament will be held in all member states of the European Union from 22 to 25 May 2014. This will be the eighth time elections to the European Parliament will be held, with the first direct elections being in 1979.

These elections will be held in the light of the harsh austerity measures that have been implemented in Europe over the past years, where students in particular have been much affected because higher education institutions have had to introduce difficult budget cuts leading to the closure of university departments in some cases. Young people have also had to face an extremely high level of youth unemployment, or up to 50 per cents in countries like Spain.

For this reason, the European Students’ Union has been encouraging students to take part in this year’s elections. Only by voting can students affect decisions or policies or make their voices heard. Students have agreed on a common manifesto of ten points for these elections that they want European policy-makers to work for in terms of higher education. Candidates for the European elections have been urged to pledge to this manifesto by going to the campaign’s website and signing a declaration of support. For more information about the campaign, go to [www.voteforeducation.eu](http://www.voteforeducation.eu)

You can find more information about the elections on the European Parliament’s website [www.elections2014.eu/en](http://www.elections2014.eu/en)

# Employability students'

Employability was first mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, and it was one of the key ideas behind a harmonised European higher education system. Definition of employability, ever since then, kept on changing and gaining new forms and contexts. In the Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999), employability was referred to as “citizens’ employability”, while in the Prague Communiqué (19 May 2001) it was clarified as “graduate employability”. (Frederiksen, Vuksanović, 2013)

With the Bologna Declaration, ministers and higher education institutions committed themselves to creating higher educational systems that will widely reflect societal needs, encourage critical thinking and help coherent development of the “citizens’ em-

ployability”. For these purposes, various action lines and tools have been created in both parallel processes: the EU and the Bologna Process (European Higher Education Area since 2010), i.e. Qualifications frameworks, Cycles and ECTS, Recognition, Lifelong learning. In the European, national and disciplinary levels “learning outcomes”, “competences” and employability have been largely promoted in order to ensure similarity of curricular thrusts (Schomburg, Teichler, 2011). However, development of the educational system that will be based on societal needs and encourage “citizens’ employability” had scarcely forwarded from the initial plan. Moreover, higher education reforms have taken downturns in certain national contexts and jeopardized autonomy of higher education institutions,

# with eyes

SAGE

*Student Advancement of  
Graduates Employability*

endangering further independent development of teaching, learning and research.

Employability With Student Eyes, as the main research study of the Student Advancement of Graduates Employability project, reflects opinions of the National Students' Unions on the current higher education trends, focusing primarily on the buzz word "employability" and the ways this concept is being dealt with in various national contexts. It is also set to prove that employability is not a one-size-fits all concept and that its understanding and implementation highly depend on the national educational and economical policies.

The survey was developed in accordance to the Bologna With Student Eyes questionnaires, consulting the questionnaire of the Bologna Implementation Working

Group of the Bologna Follow-up Group.

## **Status quo of understanding, defining, implementing and developing employability**

Employability has been put into focus of educational developments by governments, policymakers and other stakeholders since the beginning of Bologna process. This has often met with strong negative reaction coming from academics and students. Keeping academic values at the core of education is opposed to transforming HEIs purely into agents for economic development. Freezing of the public sector hiring and encouraging the private sector efforts to reduce the overhead costs have made obstacles for graduates to becoming autonomous members of society. This has been made even worse

when after leaving higher education, graduates are burdened with debts, due to the increases of tuition fees in many countries.

There is even a higher concern that structural implementation of Bologna process has failed to strengthen the diverse roles of higher education, due to the lack of actual implementation of Bologna tools and action lines on the national and the institutional level. Low participation of students in structural reforms of higher education has also been one of the means to support consumerist approach and restrict autonomy of students and graduates. Many students are forced to work alongside their studies and they predominately continue to take up positions unrelated to their studies, and the Bologna bachelor degree is perceived to offer too few employment opportunities.

#### *First meaningful employment*

With the SAGE survey we investigated the possibility of gaining the first meaningful employment after studies and in 31.5% of answers the possibility was characterised as medium, in 17.8% low and in 9.6% high. In addition, 78.1% of respondents claim

that employers are not aware of the value of bachelor's degree. Denmark (DSF) reports that the ordinary bachelor degree scarcely gets recognised by employers. In Check Republic (SKRVS) recognition exists in theory but not in practice, and in Switzerland there is no data on the matter.

In 19 countries there are initiatives facilitating graduates' entry to labour market. In seven countries (Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Serbia and Sweden) there are none. The initiatives are for example subsidized employment after graduation, cooperation with third sector, career centres in employment offices and universities, firms collaborating with universities, career days, R&D projects and internships. Most often these initiatives have been started by the universities (14 countries). In eleven countries they have been initiated by students, and in twelve by the state. In many countries there are either initiatives that have been started by several parties together or several initiatives started by different parties. The initiatives have been fairly successful, in twelve countries at least some of them have been working as planned but

in five at least some of them have failed in one way or another. Also here many answered that they don't know. In 13 countries the students are more prepared for the labour market due to the initiatives. Employers appreciate the initiatives in most of the countries. Only in Croatia they don't appreciate them.

There are career centres in universities in 21 countries, in three (Belarus, Belgium, Macedonia) there are none. According to the answers to the survey they typically organise career fairs, facilitate contact between students and employers in different ways, give guidance and help students improve their job seeking skills. In addition to these they relay information on available jobs and internships, give lectures on getting employed, help the foreign students to find work and organize information campaigns. It seems that in most of the countries students are happy with the career centres, in some countries they seem to be not active or the support to graduates is not of good quality.

#### *Cooperation of stakeholders*

Cooperation of different stake-

holders on the matter of employability still remains a challenge. The Swedish (SFS) national student union doesn't initiate discussions with stakeholders however there is no lack of support and participation in discussions. In Lithuania (LSS), cooperation with stakeholders is a matter of each individual HEI and there is no common framework of cooperation on the national level. Swiss (VSS-UNES-USU) national union of students doesn't work on the matter and is not aware of any projects regarding the topic. In Romania (ANOSR), cooperation is mostly based on conducting research studies on the local level and creating policy recommendations that are, later on, presented to the stakeholders on the national level. French community student union in Belgium (FEF) doesn't work on the matter and it considers higher education exclusively a matter of academia. Icelandic student union (SHI) has been trying to cooperate with the government on the matter, unsuccessfully.

#### *Responsibility of universities regarding long term employability*

When asked to reflect their opinion on responsibility of universities regarding the long term

employability of graduates, the National Unions of Students stated following:

- One of the **Finnish NUSes (SYL)** states that universities should get financing according to employment of graduates. Quality higher education is crucial and it has to be developed and supported by universities primarily.

- In **Denmark (DSF)** students expect from universities to secure relevant field of studies and quality of education through cooperation with all stakeholders.

- In **Norway (NSO)** students view responsibility of universities in promoting education that is general and used by diverse society.

- In **Ireland (USI)** students expect universities to be responsible for innovating teaching and learning, equipping students with key life-long learning skills and up-to-date knowledge.

- In **Germany (fzs)** students think that universities should provide HE for self-consistent individuals instead of providing graduates for the labour market.

- In **Serbia (SUS and SKONUS)** students state that universities' crucial responsibility should be focusing on cooperation of stakeholders and teachers' training.

- In **Sweden (SFS)** students believe that universities should provide HE that accommodates student needs and not employers', while the active cooperation of stakeholders should be encouraged.

- In **Lithuania (LSS)** students strongly believe that HEIs are the ones responsible for the development of learning outcomes and shaping of the labour market, mobility and hard skills, not vice versa.

- **Armenian students (ANSA)** consider universities not responsible for employment of graduates.

- In **Estonia (EUL)** students believe that universities should be responsible for provision of skills and knowledge relevant for the labour market and that accommodates student needs.

- In **Portugal (FAIRE)** students state that universities are responsible for reflexive feedback and

monitoring of graduates.

- In **Hungary (HOOK)** students believe that universities should be responsible for practical and theoretical knowledge that fits labour market's needs.

- In **Ukraine (UASS)** students believe that universities are responsible for development of lifelong learning and competitiveness on the labour market.

It is obvious that for all students and student representatives, the autonomy of higher education institutions is crucial in making decisions regarding structural implementation of Bologna process. Also, it is clear that students strive for prevention of academic values, leaving decisions regarding development of learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and competences in hands of the academia. Cooperation with stakeholders is expected and encouraged in most of cases however, students do not support development of learning outcomes in accordance to the labour market solely. There is a vast majority of students in Europe that sees the paradigm shift from teacher centred to student centred learning, as one of the key steps in

further development of the concept of employability.

### *Skills and competences*

Generally speaking, obtaining a higher education degree is to the benefit of the individual, society and labour market. Rather than looking at the exact numbers of graduates in each field, the focus should be on the type of skills, or competences, that seem to enhance the opportunities for finding work, regardless of the study background. Those graduating from generally oriented programmes have a lower likelihood of finding a good match in their first job and of staying in that job compared to vocationally educated. However, it is possible that their education provides the kinds of transferable skills that towards getting better matched and higher-skilled jobs in the long term. This underlines the necessity for education and training systems that avoid developing curricula that are overly specific and which are useful in only a limited range of occupations.

The different stakeholders, or interest groups, each have their opinion on what the skills are that are most needed or important for graduates' to acquire during their

studies.

Respondents themselves valued social skills (teamwork, social aspects) (14 mentions) and work and practical experiences (study jobs, internships) almost as equally important (13 mentions). These two categories ranked as the most important type of skills. These were followed by communication and presentation skills with 9 responses out of X, language skills with 7 mentions, hard skills with 5 mentions, mobility and autonomy, entrepreneur skills, learning from prior experiences were all given two mentions. IT skills, academic skills, skills gained from social and political activities, organization skills and having low financial demands were each ranked as least important.

The respondents thought higher education institutions value skills in the following way: hard skills (knowledge, good grades, degrees, short study time) was rated as the most important by 16 mentions, good theoretical knowledge as second most important with 10 mentions. Methodological skills, work experience/internships, academic skills, language skills,

and hard work/effectiveness were all mentioned 4-5 times. Other types of skills mentioned include technical skills (2), critical thinking (2), independence (1), time management (1), competitiveness (1), entrepreneurship (1) and self-learning skills (1).

As for the labour market, the following skills are important in the opinion of the student representatives: work experience (13 mentions), social skills/networking (8), knowledge (6), communication/presentation skills (6), language skills (5), punctuality/availability (3), the right attitude (3), technical knowledge (IT) (3), independence (2), inter-cultural skills (2), academic skills (2), entrepreneur skills (2), creativity (2), organization skills (2), flexibility (1), critical thinking (1), extracurricular activities (1), driver's license (1) and proactivity (1).

As a general conclusion, it can be found that for students social skills and soft skills in general seem to play a bigger role than for higher education institutions and the labour market. For the latter two groups, hard skills and work experience are the most important, according to the student represent-

atives opinions. Why it is important to explore the perceptions of students is because such beliefs may have an impact on the choice students' make concerning different study courses, optional studies, whether they engage in volunteer activities, and what kind of topics and subjects they decide to focus on during their studies. Offerings ways to reach the skills that the students' value contribute to their motivation and successful completion of studies.

### *Student centeredness*

The participants were asked whether they are aware of any mechanisms where students are asked about their expectations towards their degree. 41.1% said that there are mechanisms in place in their country but a larger portion, 58.9%, were not aware of any mechanisms. No gender differences or study status differences were found for this question. Also the duration of working at a student union had no influence on the question. When it comes to the type of mechanisms, mostly questionnaires that are assessed at the universities were used. Sometimes also discussions and interviews are done or personal study plans are made. Career consultations

and student advisory services were mentioned only by two respondents.

A third (32,9%) of the respondents answered that they were aware of studies on both levels. 23% knew of studies on institutional level, and 16.4% were aware of studies only at national level. Almost a fifth, 17.8%, were not aware of any studies whatsoever. According to the findings of study visits to 11 countries and 23 institutions conducted by EUA (2011:32), many institutions highlighted the importance of tracking not only their progression path but also the students' experience, through surveys, course evaluations or focus group interviews. Beyond support to individual students or groups of students, there was a focus on institutional development in various areas, such as the development of teaching and learning (courses and programmes), improvement of services and facilities, and the enhancement of quality assurance, governance and management approaches. In essence, this amounted to improving the quality of the overall student experience, as well as of teaching and learning. In many institutions, tracking

of the progression path of students and of their experience were very closely interrelated and the distinction between the two activities was blurred.

If both the expectations of students' and later on, the satisfaction and how the expectations were met, were measured, the effective planning to answer to the needs of the students would be made easier. Both types of information are needed to understand the interrelatedness and cause-effect relationship of the factors that influence successful study completion.

#### *Recognition of prior learning*

The role the recognition of non-formal learning, including skills gained in extra-curricula activities in higher education could facilitate a significant shift in improving the flexibility of study paths and later on, the transition to working life.

The respondents were asked whether the competencies and skills gained through non-formal education are recognised by the labour market. 68.5 % of all respondents think that this is the case. 13.7 % do not think the skills are recognised by the labour market and almost a fifth, 17.8 %

do not know.

The respondents were asked whether there is a student portfolio system existing in their national context. A portfolio refers to a way of displaying the competences one has gained prior to seeking admittance to higher education, or alternatively, to the working life. In other words, it is a system to have one's knowledge recognized as competences and learning outcomes systematically, so that the higher education institution can recognize the prior learning one has gained. The knowledge might have been obtained in previous work places, extra curricula activities or by having self-studied.

The majority of respondents, 56.2% say that there is no student portfolio system existing in their national context. Only 12.3% state that there such a system does exist. 31.5% of the participants do not know whether there is a student portfolio system in their national context.

Recognition of prior learning on any level, whether institutional or working life, improves the chances of non-traditional learners and immigrants. These groups are

the most vulnerable when it comes to accessing education and work. As the goal of EU2020 is to widen access to education, all possible means are needed: "Broadening access to higher education means attracting more students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds or geographical locations, from ethnic groups and from among people with a disability." However, quantity should never be prioritised over quality.

### **Bologna tools that influence employability**

#### *Cycles and ECTS*

In order to develop a good student-centred system, it is of crucial importance to look into the development of ECTS, estimation of workload and formulation of learning outcomes. Student representatives were asked if the allocation of ECTS is being conducted based on both measures mentioned above. 12.3% of respondents said that allocation of ECTS bases completely on estimation of workload and formulation of LOs, while 20.5% said this happens in majority cases, 12.3% at all levels of HE, hardly at all in 28.8% and not at all in 16.4%.

Also, the room for improvement exists in participation of students in curriculum design, where only 6.8% of students fully take part, 57.5% to a certain extent and 35.6% doesn't participate at all. When asked to reflect progress between cycles majority of respondents stated that if the 2nd cycle is compatible with the 1st cycle, students get automatically admitted. Problems were detected in Lithuania where it is difficult to automatically progress from the 1st cycle in UAS to the 2nd cycle in University and usually students need to obtain additional 60 ECTS. In Czech Republic flexibility is reduced as well, while in Iceland enrollment to the 2nd cycle greatly depends on the individual success made during the 1st cycle.

#### *Recognition*

When asked to reflect whether the Diploma Supplement is free of charge or not, 53.4% of respondents stated that it is free of charge, while in 20.5% it is not.

Diploma Supplement is compulsory and regulated by the law and ordinances, in most cases, while in Ukraine it is guaranteed by the Act of the cabinet of Ministers, in Switzerland it exists only in

the form of recommendation of the RC to use the DS at UAS and Universities while in Romania it is regulated by the Student Statute which states that the DS is free of charge.

When asked to reflect whether there were changes in credit and degree mobility since in the period between 2011 and 2013, in most cases student representatives replied with no, while Netherlands stated that the HEIs strive for more mobility; in Romania external mobility is in development while internal mobility faces too many obstacles.

### *Automatic recognition*

Automatic recognition refers to a process where students' certificates would not need to go through an assessment of equivalence with national qualifications, but which could be checked for authenticity and award by a recognised institution within the EHEA, to ensure authenticity of the degree and its award by a recognised higher education institution.

Although the legislative provision for automatic recognition is very poor, 44% of respondents are

supportive towards the idea of AR implementation. 16.7% percent of respondents has no knowledge on legislative provision for AR in their countries. However, in:

**Denmark:** “There is Nordic cooperation on automatic recognition of qualifications (the Reykjavik Declaration).”

**Norway:** “For certain vocations regulated by the EEA-legislation (EU law governing recognition of professional qualifications), but otherwise there is no automatic recognition.”

Only 23.6% respondents stated that students ask NUSEs for help regarding AR and the issues they usually need help with are long administrative procedures, high costs, the degree doesn't meet all the conditions required for access.

When asked to state if there are other mechanisms that are used by the institutions for recognition of foreign degrees, unions said following:

**Denmark:** “It is the study boards with a 50 pct. student representation that are responsible for the recognition”.

**Norway:** "Recognition of foreign degrees is a part of the mandate for the national quality assurance agency, KUT. There are vocations that are automatically recognised in connection with the EU-/EEA-regulations, however all other applications for recognition are processed individually and paper-based. This means that the combinations of subjects and programmes are taken into account on an individual basis. There is no database, but only a general set of rules for each individual country and the most common levels and types of study. The institutions do the recognition of courses in degrees, for example when a student is halfway through their studies in another country and wants to complete their degree in Norway, or credit mobility. There are new systems being formed where there will be a national register for the universities to use to complete this credit recognition."

**Ireland:** "European and National Qualifications Frameworks"

**Netherlands:** "Nuffic and DUO (two Dutch organisations) are arranging these things."

**Germany:** "It's almost always

handled on an individual basis."

**Sweden:** "A student turns to an institution to get credited. To get recognition of qualification a student applies to the Swedish Council for Higher Education. Decisions can be appealed."

**Lithuania:** "Sometimes there are bilateral agreements existing with non-EHEA countries on one hand, and with some separate universities, while holding a joint-degree programme with non-EHEA HEI."

**Armenia:** "Not a large number of incoming students, therefore we as a union don't deal with the issue of automatic recognition."

**Romania:** "Sometimes there are partnerships between universities from Romania and other universities abroad and based on these partnerships the process of recognition is facilitated between the two universities. This also happens at national level when the Ministry of Education makes some agreements with other countries and they look into specific aspects to HE system from the both countries and build a mechanism who makes the recognition more easy."

**Portugal:** “institutions protocols, national technical areas agreements, and in specific cases teachers good will. International cooperation: international programs that promote student mobility in undergraduate programs or postgraduate courses or research projects, such as networks CLUSTER CESAER, TIME, ATHENS and MAGALHÃES-SMILE. Joint PhD programs with international universities, such as, MIT, CMU, UT Austin, EPFL, etc.”

**Hungary:** “The Hungarian Accreditation Committee established in 1993 is responsible for accrediting and evaluating the quality of teaching and research at higher education institutions. It assesses the standard of education and research in each higher education institution at least in every eight years (institutional accreditation) based on a detailed self-assessment of the institution and the report of a visiting committee. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee also examines the curricula, the qualification requirements as well as the quality of the academic staff and the teaching facilities (programme accreditation). Degrees and qualifications Hungarian universities and colleges grant degrees fol-

lowing a binary pattern. Colleges and universities grant “Főiskolai oklevél” (college-level degree) and universities award “Egyetemi oklevél” (university-level degree). The duration of training at college level requires minimum 3 years and maximum 4 years of studies, while the length of study at university level is minimum 4 years, maximum 5 years (one of the few exceptions is the medical course where the duration of education is 6 years). Students complete their education with a final examination consisting of the preparation and defence of a dissertation, oral and/or written examinations prescribed in the qualification requirements and – in certain programmes – the performance of practical work. (source: Ministry of National Resources - nefmi.gov.hu”

**Belarus:** “Bilateral agreements with other HEIs.”

**Latvia:** LRC

**Switzerland:** “These are made differently by every single institution - it is furthermore common, to have different rules who apply only to one country. E.g. students from Germany must have a high school degree with the mark of 2.5

to enter the University of Basel. For the University of Bern they need a 2. If you are from Austria, you just need a high school degree. If you are from Germany and want to enter a Master in Switzerland, where you need a minimal mark, there are still discussions, which German mark has the same value as the Swiss mark and so on. Students from several countries (but not all!) need to prove, that they have been accepted to study something similar at a university in their country in order to study in Switzerland.”

**Iceland:** “Each university has an international office that goes carefully through any applications that come from outside of Europe and cooperate with certain foreign universities.”

Countries that participated in the survey are following: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Ireland, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Lithuania, Armenia, Romania, Estonia, Macedonia, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Latvia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Slovenia, Switzerland, Belgium, Croatia, Iceland, Cyprus.

### *Qualifications Frameworks*

Regarding qualifications framework, there is still a big lack of knowledge on the side of NUS representatives and students in general. Students are fully consulted on development of NQF, self-certification and referencing in only 12.3%. However, respondents share the opinion that NQFs help transparency, facilitate recognition and enhance Lifelong learning. Also, they are aware of the importance of NQFs for an easier access from VET and other forms of education to Higher Education. 24.7% of respondents believe that LOs are transparency tools while 26.0% of respondents believe that LOs are a common language for achieving transparency.

The most important conclusion to draw out of the Bologna section is that there is a vast lack of the SCL implementation and student participation in structural reforms of higher education on the national level. In the view of ESU, this should be improved as soon as possible and students shouldn't be kept aside as observers of the process, but should rather be treated as equal partners and given the opportunity to equally contribute to the structural development

<b>Country</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No of country selected	9	12,3
Armenia	1	1,4
Azerbaijan	1	1,4
Belarus	1	1,4
Belgium	1	1,4
Bulgaria	1	1,4
Croatia	1	1,4
Cyprus	1	1,4
Czech Republic	1	1,4
Denmark	1	1,4
Estonia	3	4,1
Finland	7	9,6
Germany	3	4,1
Hungary	4	5,5
Iceland	1	1,4
Ireland	1	1,4
Latvia	1	1,4
Lithuania	4	5,5
Macedonia	1	1,4
Netherlands	3	4,1
Norway	1	1,4
Portugal	5	6,8
Romania	6	8,2
Serbia	5	6,8
Slovenia	1	1,4
Spain	1	1,4
Sweden	2	2,7
Switzerland	1	1,4
Ukraine	4	5,5
<b>Total answers</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Table 1**

of higher education.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

From 47 European Student unions in 39 countries, 35 unions from 28 countries filled in the questionnaire between June and beginning of September 2013. As unions were asked to find up to five persons from their organisation to fill in the questionnaire, a total of 73 questionnaires were filled in. In table 1 an overview of the participating countries and the number of collected questionnaire from that country are given. Nine persons did not fill in a country.

Participants were born between 1976 and 1993 (mean = 1988.6; SD = 3.00), mean age was 25years of age. A little bit more than half of the participants were female (n = 39), compared to 34 male participants. Of all participants, 36% were studying in their first three years of tertiary education (Bachelor cycle), 40% already finished their Bachelor degree and 19% already finished their Master degree. 6% did not answer this question.

Participants were also asked how long they are already been active in the student movement. The frequencies and percentages of this question can be found in table 2.

	Frequency	Percentage
1 year	4	5,5
2 years	8	11,0
3 years	9	12,3
4 years	21	28,8
5 years	11	15,1
Other period	10	13,7
No answer	10	13,7
<b>Total answers</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table 2

Fifteen respondents indicated that they are the Student Bologna Expert (SBE) of their country, 58 respondents said they were not the SBE for their country. Participants could also note down their field of

expertise in the student movement in an open answer format. 18 respondents did not fill in a field of expertise, whereas 55 did. Some of them filled in more than one field. Main answers were: Social

# About SAGE



The partners be

Student Advancement of Graduates Employability (SAGE) is a pan-European project aimed at increasing the knowledge of the effects of European higher education reforms implementation on the graduates' employability. SAGE also aims at enhancing the capacity of student representatives to take part in influencing and building policies designed to improve the rate of graduates employability at European, national and local level.

In order to build up this capacity, the project conducts extensive research on educational policies, engages with multiple stakeholders from both national and European level and offers a comprehensive training process to a number

of students and other interested stakeholders representatives from across the continent.

SAGE addresses the following LLP Overall Objective:

- To help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit. The project aims at this objective by bringing stakeholders such as students at the forefront of governance initiatives aimed at improving the employability perspective of students upon graduation. It also offers a content background for this via its research activities, publications and policy recommendations

Within this overall objective,

dimension (15 answers), quality assurance (14 answers), mobility (14 answers), financial issues (13 answers), internationalization (11 answers), employability (11 answers), education policies (5

answers), Bologna issues (4 answers), national higher education (2 answers) and 15 fields which were only mentioned once (for example: research, interest representation, project management, entrepreneurship).

Below form the SAGE consortium



SAGE addresses this LLP Specific Objective:

- To reinforce the contribution of higher education and advanced vocational education to the process of innovation. The project aims at this specific objective by empowering students to contribute to shifting higher education to an increased level of accountability and connectivity with society, in a fashion that does not reduce academic freedom, but that ensures the value of studies for students. This will, in the long run, contribute to a higher level of innovation within institutions, particularly in economically-linked areas that bring an added value to the economy as well.

## Measures

A questionnaire with 85 questions was developed. Questionnaires were divided into different chapters:

Demographic questions, expectations of students towards employment, skills( labor market and skills, quality of internship, skills gained in extra-curricular activities), employability of graduates and students, cycles and ECTS, Recognition, automatic recognition, qualification frameworks, cooperation with the third sector/ companies/stakeholders and case studies (good practices on strategies, initiatives, plans, policies).

25 questions were compulsory to fill in, 60 questions were not. As some questions could only be answered from the NSU view or by the Student Bologna Expert of the student union. In total 10 of the questions were open question,



A training seminar for the SAGE project was organised in Budapest, Hungary, in 2013.

the other questions were single- or multiple choice questions. However, most single- or multiple-choice questions had options for additional open answers.

### **Procedure**

All student unions in Europe received invitation e-mails and reminders about the survey. They received a short description of

the study and a link to the survey page.

The survey was created with lime survey, an online survey tool. The survey started with an introduction about the survey purpose, deadlines and rules to fill it in correctly. Also contact addresses were named, if persons had problems with filling in the survey.



After the 5th of September, the survey was closed and data was exported to an excel document. Qualitative questions were exported to MAX-QDA, a content analysis program and quantitative data was exported to IMB

SPSS statistics for further analysis. Data was analyzed by chapter; per chapter different teams were responsible for analysis and results description. All questionnaires with more than half of the questions filled in correctly were included into the survey data.

# Closing remarks

Currently steered by the consumer trends, higher education is being turned into a tool for producing the outcome-based knowledge relevant for the economy development. It is being price tagged, traded with and standardised. It is becoming fragile, less and less resistant to the political instability and elitism. Students, the biggest potential of the society, are also being turned into consumers or sometimes even a product.

Students are not users of the system, nor are they consumers. They are active partners who contribute to the reform and development of higher education with their knowledge, experience and expertise. Moreover, together

with other partners they create the common ground for discussions and encourage an objective approach to higher education as a tool for social development (Fredrisken, Vuksanović, 2013).

No amount of charters, direct primaries, or short ballots will make a democracy out of an illiterate people (Walter Lippmann), therefore, this SAGE findings and outcomes will revive the concept of the „citizens‘ employability“, suggesting the socially responsible pathway of education and employability and stressing the importance of active citizenship, critical thinking and independent development of teaching, learning and research



The consortium for the Student Advancement of Graduate Employability project has the following partners.



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