



Board Meeting 67

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Statement on the EU2020 mid-term review and the ET2020 follow-up

The European Students' Union would like to emphasise the following points;

Support for national access plans;

National access plans are highlighted as one of the main success factors in achieving the attainment goals set out in the EU 2020 strategy and subsequently the ET 2020 strategy and the modernisation agenda. ESU calls on the European Union to financially support countries who wish to design such access plans and within the Bologna process design a methodology for how to support the creation and implementation of national access plans. ESU stresses the value of including student representatives as partners in the creation, implementation and evaluation stages of these plans. Additionally a follow-up recommendation supporting national access plans in the written follow-up to EU2020 would strengthen the work being done with this in the Bologna process. ESU emphasizes the need of the Commission to remind member states that the target for young people's attainment in higher education of 40% is a minimum target.

Stop promoting tuition fees;

It is our understanding that the Commission aims to promote tuition fees in the next period. We would strongly warn against this. Tuition fees are harmful for the access to higher education and would lead to a decrease in social mobility. By promoting tuition fees, the Commission is contributing to the increasing of student debt and could very easily drown out the good work that is being done to support education reforms. ESU would like to encourage the Commission to stop their involvement in issues beyond their competence, such as tuition fees. ESU sees free education as a public good and a public responsibility accessible for all.

Student Centred Learning;

Especially in the follow-up to ET2020, student-centred learning must be emphasised to assure the fundamental reform in higher education that we need to see. In addition to emphasising the importance of student-centred learning, additional funds must also be in place to effectively encourage comprehensive reform. Student-centred learning represents both a mind-set and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which takes students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking.

Stakeholder involvement;

One of the most successful policy areas in higher education is quality assurance. A key factor for this success has been stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders are not just involved but have ownership of the policies themselves. As European Union policies are not always binding, broad support is necessary to achieve full implementation. All relevant stakeholders must be integrated into the decision-making process at a much earlier stage of policy development regarding the

46 actual documents. In addition, it should be possible for all relevant stakeholders to comment on
47 drafts from the Commission before they are final and voted upon in parliament. If the comments
48 have enough support, there should be a procedure in place for taking them on board. It would also
49 be in the interest of the EU to focus on smaller groups of relevant stakeholders on specific issues
50 instead of gathering large groups of diverse stakeholders that water down any concrete input on
51 specific issues that could be genuinely helpful.

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53 **Use of research to support policy;**

54 The EU should support, encourage and welcome free, academic and rigorous research and policy
55 debate in every interaction with research. ESU encourages the Commission to base its proposals
56 and policy documents on wide objective research and the consultation with relevant stakeholders,
57 including the smaller ones, in order to ensure the inclusion of a variety of political and socio-
58 economic considerations.

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60 **Analyse the expectations;**

61 One of the areas highlighted by different National Unions of Students as well as the European
62 Commission is the difference between the expectation of students and the labour market. This is
63 an issue that has been heatedly debated, with many including ESU, arguing that it is neither
64 possible nor reasonable to predict the needs of labour market in relation to higher education. The
65 relation of the labour market and higher education is of public interest and has to be debated
66 carefully in representative bodies of higher education institutions and students' unions. A critical
67 view of this relation is essential for the future of higher education.

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69 **Cohesive message;**

70 A major concern raised is the conflicting messages being sent from different policy levels and
71 areas in the European Union structures. This is especially a concern for countries facing the worst
72 effects of austerity measures who are perhaps the most in need of investments in education as a
73 way out of the crisis. It is imperative that the input from the European Union is clear to these
74 countries and cohesive when it comes to education. A natural conclusion from such an approach
75 would imply that investments in education not be considered as public expenditure in austerity
76 measures and communications. ESU is convinced that budget cuts in education, health care and
77 social services deteriorate economies and worsen the crisis. Therefore, there should be even more
78 investment in these sectors during times of crisis

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80 **Measured economic focus;**

81 One of the major concerns raised by the students contributing to this publication and by the
82 European Students' Unions since the launch of the Lisbon strategy is the extensive focus on the
83 economic role of higher education and the lack of support for the public responsibility for education
84 and promotion of education as a public good. The European Students' Union notices that the
85 argumentation of the European Union is mainly based on economic deliberations; therefore we
86 wish to reiterate that education has multiple purposes. If the goals of inclusive and sustainable
87 growth are to be achieved the approach must be adjusted accordingly.

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89 **Encourage public support;**

90 In the Bologna process the support for education and public responsibility has been highlighted
91 several times. This should also be reflected in all future communications from the European Union
92 concerning higher education. While encouraging member states to meet the minimum target of 2
93 % of GDP investments in higher education, we strongly emphasize the need to abolish tuition fees
94 and reject any reference to the further introduction or increase of tuition fees. This includes vague
95 references to tuition fees as "cost-sharing" or "student contributions".

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97 **Follow-up on the Youth Guarantee implementation;**

98 Education and training are and should be implemented as an integral part of the European Youth
99 Guarantee as in the Finnish example. It will be necessary to follow up on the implementation of
100 such programmes and guarantees in relation to the goals set out for the higher education systems
101 in the Modernisation Agenda. This falls in line with the cohesive approach to educational policy
102 previously addressed.
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