



BM72 - MALTA

Resolution: Support for student representation

In the current economic and political climate, many governments have a reflex of economizing their expenditures. In light of this recent development, ESU supports the Flemish student representatives, in their statement against the current widespread trend of economizing in public higher education and the ever-increasing financial pressure students experience.

Student representatives are competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of higher education policy. In the 2001 Prague Communiqué, European Ministers in charge of higher education confirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions.

Therefore, ESU highly values the work that has been done in the last few months by the Flemish Students' Union (VVS) around the promotion and reinforcement of the rights of student participation. **Though student representatives are seen as a constructive partner, they are not always perceived and supported as one.** It was in the end of the academic year 2015-2016 that VVS pushed for a working group within the Flemish Educational Council to tackle the problem of facilitating and encouraging student representation.

The working group was specifically asked by VVS because firstly, the Union saw that student participation was - for a variety of reasons - being found more difficult and complex in the last few years. The complexity is linked to the fact that less students do more work, both on the level of the institution, the faculty and the course. Secondly, student representatives find it increasingly difficult to combine their mandate with their studies, since there is no specific reward system present in Flanders, when student representatives perform their mandate. Furthermore, students seem to be apprehensive of student representation due to the lack of information about it, the lack of recognition and the perception of it being too much work.

In the beginning of the academic year 2016-2017, a study around the topic was asked by VVS and carried out by the Flemish Education Council. The conclusions as mentioned before were supported by this study.

With this resolution, ESU supports the request of the Flemish Students' Union for measures by the government to enable student representation.

VVS recommends that:

The European Students' Union (ESU) is being used to refer to "ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe" Belgian asbl BE0890.019.936, due to the fact that both legal entities are going through a merging process. Likewise the visual identity of ESU is being used instead of the one from ESIB.

1. In every university or university college, **a control mechanism will be put in place** to check if the facilities that should be given to student representatives are rightly in place. This mechanism should inspect if the facilities are sufficiently present and if they are recognized in a qualified manner.

The control mechanism should not be seen as top-down managed and quantitative but as an interactive and regular exchange of information between the institution and the student.

VVS identifies possible opportunities to embed this control mechanism in the quality assurance model, carried out by NVAO, a member of ENQA.

2. Each student council has **a clear and financially sufficient operating budget**. Today, the work of student representatives within the Flemish higher education institutions is underfunded. Firstly, not every student council in Flanders has an own operating budget. There is a possibility, though, for operating costs to be reimbursed by the institution. Too often, this causes restrictions on the budget choices of the student councils. This is not in line with regulations. The Flemish "Codex Higher Education" stipulates: "The board of directors gives the student council the necessary infrastructural, financial or administrative support. To this end, the Student Council will submit a work plan." Therefore, VVS recommends that the student council should have ownership of their own budget.

Secondly, some of the institutions have a "participation coach". Many of the student councils who have a participation coach indicate that this makes a big difference in supporting student representatives. VVS would like to ask if the budget for these coaches can be budgeted in the working budget of the student councils themselves. In this way, the student coach can take a full supporting role without interfering between the institution and the students. VVS also wants to draw attention that the cost of this participation coach is sufficiently budgeted.

3. **A scholarship-system supports those students who would not have the means to be active in student representation.** As a very involved student representative, opportunity costs can be high, foregoing the opportunity to have a student job or put in extra study time. To partly compensate this, VVS proposes a specific fund to help this particular group financially.
4. Special **attention is paid to the recognition of student representatives**. Today in Flanders, our representatives can fall back on some legislation regarding a special statute as a representative. However, not all teaching staff recognizes the importance of student representation. This means that students cannot always make use of their statute. We would like to ask for support with the instalment of letters of recommendation, written by teaching staff. This could both make a direct difference for the students' further career, as to increase the recognition of the work that student representatives do.
5. **A discussion should be started for some form of financial compensation for student representatives.** In Flanders, student representatives are usually the only non-

professional attendees in external meetings. Every other stakeholder is attending the meetings in a paid and professional capacity, which creates an inequality. Therefore, we would like to propose a system in which small financial compensations are distributed over the representatives according to attendance. Avoiding an extrinsic incentive (because of the low amounts), we would like to recognize the opportunity costs representatives face.

Proposed by: ____VVS_____

Seconded by: LSVb, SAMOK, NUIS, USI, HÖOK, SRVS, ANOSR, SFS, FEF, ÖH, CSC, UdU, UNEF