



Strategic Priorities 2018- 2020

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

- ESU's vision

The new strategic priorities outline the objectives within ESU's work areas for the three years of 2018 to 2020. Five specific objectives have been identified based on the cross-policy clusters. These are: Mobility and Internationalisation, Social Dimension, Quality of Higher Education, and Public Responsibility, Governance and Financing of Higher Education. ESU adopts a strategic priorities framework with long-term objectives to ensure the organisation is working towards a defined direction. ESU wants to work on necessary reforms for increased access and inclusivity in Higher Education, supported by an active role of students and equal participation in governance. ESU strives for an innovative learning environment, where education is not only a mean for employability, but most importantly a public good for the whole society. ESU strives to be an inclusive environment, where equity in participation and contribution is of utmost importance. ESU has set its strategic priorities as a cohesive vision, which is further detailed by the annual plans of work until the expiration of these priorities. Each plan of work establishes a clear link between its actions and the strategic priorities.

1. Necessary reforms for increased access and inclusivity in Higher Education

Today, we share the ambition of making higher education accessible for all, however, this is far from the reality. This manifests in the way that still big groups of potential students are left out from our higher education systems. Not only the right to study in itself, but also to benefit from the potentials of gaining intercultural competences, networks and experiences. Such an experience benefits from an international higher education funded by public means.

Therefore, ESU will focus on:

31 **1.a** Formalised and well-functioning procedures for fair recognition of prior learning,
32 encompassing non- formal and informal learning, including non-documented when
33 necessary.

34 **1.b** Strategies for balanced mobility and widened participation in the renewed
35 Erasmus+ programme

36 **1.c** ESU works towards facilitating widened participation among students in higher
37 education, most notably students from marginalized groups and students lacking
38 representation. Such action is taken through fighting for publicly funded, free higher
39 education.

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41 **1.d** Concrete and research based policies for widening access to higher education,
42 including equitable rights for completion. National access plans should become a
43 widely implemented Bologna tool and its' scope should be widened to include at
44 least student support and measures to help completion.

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47 **2. Co- creation through meaningful participation**

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49 Building higher educational systems that are designed to meet future needs and are
50 motivating for students as well as wider society requires the active participation of students.
51 Only by listening to, and involving the ones experiencing and benefiting from higher education
52 practices we can increase quality and reach ambitious targets in higher education and
53 research. We view with concern and condemn seeing the decline of student participation in
54 decision making bodies. ESU will work towards:

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56 **2.a** Equal and meaningful engagement of students: students are full academic
57 members and equal partners in all" formal and informal decision-making bodies within
58 HEIs and on the national level as a prerequisite for participation in the Bologna
59 process.

60 **2.b** Students being co-creators of curricula and learning outcomes all across Europe to
61 become a reality on the programme level.

62 **2.c** Member unions being supported in their involvement in European higher
63 education policies. ESU will facilitate the work of an informal network of unions that
64 are working with EU advocacy.

65 **2.d** A united global student voice.

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68 **3. Innovative learning environment**

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70 ESU is committed to developing or promoting existing innovative means of transforming the
71 learning and teaching environment in order to make it truly and comprehensively student-
72 centred. This entails fulfilling a role as advocate and of a facilitator of such transformation and
73 this role is to be manifested by achieving the following goals:

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75 **3.a** Student-centred learning and accompanying teaching competences, including
76 language, pedagogical and didactical competes, and constant personal development
77 of teachers, are being treated by the political and expert bodies as the priority, and by
78 higher education institutions as a concrete approach to be implemented at all levels
79 and in all elements of education.

80 **3.b** Quality assessment procedures are seeing implementation of SCL approach as one
81 of the fundamental indicators of quality and an essential part of an effective learning
82 and teaching process at all HEIs regardless their specificity and differences.

83 **3.c** Process of digitalisation of HE is performed in a way which leads to improved
84 quality of education and a more student-centred learning and teaching process.
85 Furthermore, digitalisation should not be used as a tool to reduce funding for
86 education. On the contrary, implementing digitalisation in a quality enhancing way
87 requires increased investment.

88 **3.d** Extra-curriculum activities of students which lead to acquiring of both generic and
89 specific competencies are recognized through fair qualification-based assessment

90 **3.e** Easily accessible open educational resources are a political goal of HE policy-
91 makers at the European level, as well as of stakeholders' organizations, and are being
92 actively promoted and supported by these organizations.

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94 **4. Increase the value of multiple purposes of education**

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96 As students enrolled in Higher Education we need to achieve knowledge and
97 understanding of our surrounding society and rights, enabling us to be a greater part
98 of the knowledge society. We take responsibility and aim to make our knowledge
99 universally accessible. For this we need to put higher emphasis on the necessary tools
100 to gain in-depth understanding of what we know outside formal education and how it
101 can be used in a changing world for the public good. In recent years there has been an
102 increased focus on education as mainly an instrument for employment. This is
103 problematic as it neglects the multiple purposes of education and often leads to
104 commodifying policies. As adapting to the fast changing and challenging environment
105 around us stays important, as well as gaining competences that can be beneficial for
106 entering into the job market, the purposes of education must remain wider, public

107 and must give us relevant abilities to also change the circumstances we find ourselves
108 in.

109 **4.a** Equal rights and remuneration for the same work is given to students as to
110 other workers regardless of whether the work is done as part of a learning
111 experience or not.

112 **4.b** The importance of independent research and accompanying funding
113 necessary for carrying it out, is recognized in the national and European-level
114 funding schemes

115 **4.c** ESU is strongly involved in movements which promote evidence-based
116 arguments in the political discourse

117 **4.d** HEIs and policymakers are treating democratic competencies as equally
118 important as other benefits of Higher Education.

119 **4.e** Within the Bologna process there is stronger emphasis on compliance with,
120 and support of, the fundamental values of EHEA. These values are a
121 prerequisite for participation in the Bologna Process

122 **4.f** Monitoring commodification tendencies in the European Higher Education
123 Area and supporting initiatives which combat commodification.

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125 **5. Social Dimension: Addressing the living conditions of students**

126 We recognize that society and higher education are mutually dependent. Therefore, the
127 concerns of students encompass unequal structures in our societies. Some people are more
128 likely to access and excel in higher education by virtue of the advantages they have in
129 society alone.

130 Hence, it is paramount to challenge these structures and engage in policy making processes
131 which relate to the social dimension of learning and the conditions around it.

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133 **5.a** The financial situation of students is often precarious. ESU will strongly involve
134 itself in movements countering this intolerable situation. ESU will lobby for state-
135 funded support systems for all students which ensure equitable access to higher
136 education.

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138 **5.b** It is important that students with disabilities or health issues, including mental
139 health, get the support they need to succeed in their studies. ESU will advocate for
140 broad access to specific support, health and mental health support for students and
141 provide NUSs with lobbying and advocacy tools.

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143 **5.c** ESU opposes all forms of existing and planned tuition fees as they are a barrier
144 toward the access to higher education. ESU will act in its capacity to support
145 protests against tuition fees.

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5.d The structural disadvantages students with different backgrounds are facing, entering and excelling in higher education, must be made visible and taken into account in decision-making processes.

6. An inclusive European Students' Union: equity in participation and contribution

At ESU BM72 a membership strategy was approved. Throughout the process of implementation, we need to strategically steer ESU to improve its relevance and inclusiveness for the members to grow stronger within the organisation. We need to develop new ways of participation in ESU events that are accessible to all members and their representatives. ESU will also improve the communication between ESU and NUSs in order to make ESU more inclusive. Through the following measures, we make ESU participation more meaningful:

6.a ESU creates new ways of participation using, for instance, digitalization to improve accessibility. Inclusiveness is increased by consulting all ESU full- and candidate members when crafting (policy) documents, strategies and plan of works and making the process itself more transparent. ESU keeps members active by communicating and by providing them clear goals for lobbying and advocacy.

6.b Increased interaction and collaboration between members and ESUs activities through a larger number of participants in internal working bodies, candidates running in the elections and increased level of responsiveness.

6.c Structured fora for efficient and widely used exchange of information and experiences between members within different fields which can help all members to achieve policy goals

6.d In order to enrich the organisation increased capacity building for ESU s/elected representatives is taking place.

6.e The organization should place more emphasis on the working conditions and structures in which its representatives and staff operate. There are high standards expected of those representing students on an international level, yet they are not fully supported while doing so. ESU will evaluate aspects of these conditions, and internal and organisational structures and present the Board with concrete plans to improve these.

6.f Making ESU more inclusive and promoting an open collaborative working environment. This includes but is not limited to emphasis on mental health and accessibility for first time participants and people of all gender identities. And also, ESU needs to continue working to take sufficient actions to create a zero-tolerance environment for harassment within its activities.