



## **Board meeting 78 - Online Meeting due to COVID-19**

Document number: BM78/ Point 4b

Authors: Executive Committee

Date 26/04/2020

# 4b

### **Annex to the Extension of POW 2019/2020**

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 is the gravest health crisis the world has seen in a century. As a segment within wider society, students are hit in multiple ways while facing potentially extreme social and economic distress deriving from the response to the crisis. The European Students Union (ESU) commits itself to be on the frontline when it comes to mitigating the effects of the crisis on students and will do everything in its power to stay operative and vital as an organization while protecting the mental and physical health of its members, elected representatives, and employees throughout this pandemic.

#### **Advocacy and Action Points in the aftermath of COVID-19**

ESU will support its member unions in monitoring and strengthening democratic culture at institutional, national and European level. ESU will enhance its advocacy and communication efforts on issues related to academic freedom, institutional autonomy and freedom of expression in Europe while monitoring infringements closely.

Together with European Youth Forum(YFJ) and Generation Climate Europe, ESU will advocate towards a European recovery plan that is in line with the aims of the European Green Deal paying specific attention to the upskilling of the workforce and provision of sustainable jobs for youth to tackle the emerging unemployment crisis. ESU will lobby for pan-European solidarity in resolving the impact of the crisis on the countries hit hardest and communities suffering the most.

#### **Higher Education - Social Dimension, Academia & Mobility**

In cooperation with its member unions, ESU will put emphasis on the preservation and expansion of student support services, with particular attention to those students who lost their jobs due to the pandemic and no longer have the opportunity to pay for their studies and homes. The deprivation of economic and academic certainties during the pandemic weighs heavily on the individual stability and mental health of students, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. ESU will advocate for the continued prioritisation of the social dimension of higher education. Furthermore, ESU will push for equitable access to support services, including housing and mental health services, as well as the extension of loans and grants and the extension of tolerance semesters where applicable, in order to ensure accessibility and continuity of higher education for all.



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ESU will involve itself in the ongoing discourse on the future of mobility and do its uttermost to alleviate the negative impact for current and future mobile learners and to achieve a smooth transition to the new Erasmus+ programme.

ESU will promote a student-centred approach to digital learning, paying close attention to the quality and assessment of online classes and exams. The EC will engage in hosting a webinar series on quality e-learning. Together with its membership, ESU will lobby for the recognition and value maintenance of academic records acquired throughout the ongoing crisis situation. **This will also include lobbying for student-centered solutions for academic internships which are affected by different movement restrictions in place. ESU will strive to promote equitable access to online learning for all students, overcoming the barriers of the digital divide, as well as ensuring fair examination methods that shall not overburden students compared to the traditional exams, shall respect students' data privacy and shall not penalise technologically disadvantaged students. Furthermore, ESU welcomes and supports NUSes work in containing the negative impact of confinement and forced distance learning and assessment on the academic careers of students.**

**ESU will ensure that the BFUG will reflect upon the current pandemic and its impact on higher education within the next Ministerial Communique, and that it does so as much as possible from a student-centred perspective. In order to do this, ESU will consult students as widely as possible, and ensure that the outcomes are also reflected in its publication BWSE. ESU will also continue its work on all Bologna affairs, ensuring that all topics under discussion will encompass within them the effects of the COVID-19 situation.**

### **Organizational Development and Consequences for ESU**

ESU will continue to work on strategies that lead up to the maintenance of quality students representation through its own organizational capacity and its member unions. It will retain its active participatory role in all relevant bodies, committees, and groups within the institutional framework of the European Union, Council of Europe, UNESCO and the Bologna process as well as all other relevant stakeholders.

The EC will keep a close eye on the restrictions and regulations concerning travel, public health and safety, and gatherings with regard to organizing upcoming internal events. The EC will make preparations for different possible scenarios for hosting the Winter BM in 2020, including distance and online participation and elections, keep the Board up to date with its deliberations, and consult with the Board before deciding upon the best way to hold the BM. It will furthermore take precautions to make possible an online handover if need be.



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The Executive Committee will continue to communicate in the most transparent manner to the board all planned and taken measures that stem from the COVID-19 crisis and its implications on the organizational structure and development of ESU. **On a regular basis the EC will be monitoring the possible financial implications of COVID-19 - both for ESU's external funding sources and for the internal membership fee collection process.**

ESU will sustain the interactivity with its board by continuing to host webinars and sharing their outcomes or in other ways disseminate updated information on COVID-19 and its implications on students' rights, EU policy procedures, Higher Education and Academia. **ESU will furthermore coordinate the information sharing of national policies and NUS proposals to tackle the different aspects of the crisis.**