

ESU Plan of Work 2011:

More money for our education



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A Introduction

Dear friends,

Following your signals across Europe the European Students' Union will focus its next working year on defending education as a public good, and a public responsibility. To better serve your national debates, ESU will be gathering data on different funding systems, and will try to change the European agenda to our demands.

Next to this project ESU will also be initiating the QUEST project that goes on a research quest to find a concept of quality that better answers to the learner-centred high quality model of higher education students in Europe need. But apart from these external priorities, 2011 also has to be the year in which the European Students' Union (re)defines itself to truly become the union that the 44 different national member unions are looking for on the European level.

Since the very start of the new ESU team in July 2010 the ESU elected representatives have been working to develop a new political vision for the next ESU working year, that both entails these three priorities and a lot of more activities for the next year. The Plan of Work 2011 (POW2011) is the result of a thorough consultation of the elected representatives, staff and ESU's member unions. This Plan of Work has been drafted in the surrounding of the new task division structure (referred to as the New Deal), which aims at topic responsibility per elected representative rather than committee responsibility for the work planned. We are confident that the New Deal will contribute even more to the progression in this Plan of Work and to the expansion of ESU's capacity, both organisational and intellectual. The Board will have a more transparent overview of which elected representative works in every topic area and how she or he progresses.

As you can see the POW2011 has a new and more concise structure that only entails the political priorities for the next year, the general political alliances ESU plans to maintain or strengthen and the background and processes under which we function instead of the political priorities/dossier/activities division we've known until last year. This new approach takes out the operational detail and turns this document into a manifesto we can use for external representation and advocacy work. An operational plan of work will be complementing this document to practically activate the ambitions written down here.

Another addition to this year's Plan of Work is the annex 1 : Workload estimates, which is an attempt to give the Board more insight in the workload of the elected representatives, and the reason of our sometimes maybe limited ambitions. This document is not up for voting, has no actual value, nor does it bring any certainty that it reflects the actual situation the elected representatives face in their day-to-day ESU work. Not only does the document use very rough estimates, it also does not take into account travelling, giving feedback on other's documents and the numerous other small things that take up time in an ESU mandate. However, we are convinced that the estimates might give a broader perspective to the debates on our Plan of Work and can help the Board in prioritising ESU's activities next year and beyond.

The document you are about to read is shorter than it used to be. However, we, as elected representatives, believe that the POW2011 holds all the priorities ESU needs to have next year, and gives a feasible outline of the work year. We hope that you compare this Plan of Work against the expectations you have from us and the budget we have to fulfil these tasks. With your input, we will surely find a balanced and challenging year, in which we will gladly further defend your rights!

B Political priorities for the European Students' Union

B.1 More money for education, a public good

Ever since its start the European Students' Union has been advocating for education as a public good, a cornerstone of every society that is striving for welfare. However, the quality, accessibility and form of higher education are highly dependent on financing. Since the economic crisis hit in 2009, the use of public financing in education has been under constant scrutiny by both governments and institutions, but real changes in financing have come only with a delay in 2010 when austerity measures are really starting to cut into public expenditure. Contrary to this, the European Union has increased its focus on higher education as one of the top priorities for the next decade of European development, though has shied away from presenting a satisfactory solution to the ailments of educational financing in Europe. In the meantime, on the ground, the first ten years of our century have seen the amount of funding per student decrease in many countries, often for the first time in decades. This decrease has often been replaced by the introduction or increase of tuition fees while not filling the funding gap and having negative effects on the quality of education. Following these processes, ESU will focus its debates and activities on a project on **Financing the Students' Future**, with the square aim of ensuring that students will not be forced to expect less from their education.

1.1 The financing of higher education and its management calls for **better understanding of a diversity of systems and approaches that are used**. Therefore ESU aims both at building and strengthening the knowledge of different forms of financing in Europe and at raising the awareness among its members through the research, data collection and training.

1.2 In order to increase the capacity of its members ESU wants to **encourage the sharing of good practices among its members as well as providing useful tools such as lobbying sheets and argumentation papers** to deal with financing questions under the relevant context. Also, part of the research we are conducting on financing will look into ways of how to finance life-long learning and continuous education with respect to ESU's policy of education as a right, a public good and public responsibility.

1.3 Given the declaratively strong focus on education in the EU2020 Strategy, ESU will initiate a coalition of education stakeholders to match this aspiration with budgetary priorities through **pioneering a European Citizens' Initiative that asks for 'More money for education'**; meaning an increase in the funds going to education and supporting national governments in enhancing the quality and access of education in Europe (and a bigger allocation of the EU budget towards Higher Education in particular). Through this, ESU will also raise the voice and clout that students have in society.

1.4 Recent initiatives that have been introduced (such as the Bolkestein directive on services in internal markets that came into force in 2009) can evoke processes, which endanger not only access, but also quality of education by treating it as a service. Thus, there is an urgent need both for evaluating the impact of such initiatives and reinstating the importance of education as an inclusive process by

condemning any reference to education as a service, to mainstream it and also **update ESU's policy** in this regard.

B.2 Strengthening the Union

Next to striving for more money for education, ESU will reflect upon its organisation and enhance the support provided to the member unions. Only through stronger financial and political support for the elected, a better cohesion between ESU's members and by developing an educational strategy to enhance the level of knowledge management, the European Students' Union can truly strengthen the students' voice in Europe.

2.1 **Follow-up on the work of the Vision Task Force and support the development of a long term vision** that is based on thorough consultation for adoption by the Board. This vision discussion in ESU should result in prioritization of the work. The proposals should help ESU to truly function as a more effective voice of students in the long term through defining the position of ESU more clearly, but also to help increase the impact of the student movement in European society.

2.2 Carry through an **evaluation of ESU's working structures and where necessary to propose adjustments by BM60** to allow for greater flexibility in the team of elected representatives to carry through the Plan of Work. Included in the evaluation of the working structures will be the financing of human and other resource costs for ESU in the scope of the projects.'

2.3 Set a transversal training and education strategy for the member unions that starts with **expanding the scope and improving the quality of ESU's experts' pool**, to become a support structure to meet members' expectations, installing the **system of peer review based quality enhancement** and support for member organizations (upon request), and by **organising a Capacity Building Academy** for student representation in the Western Balkans and **revising the concept of the European Students' Convention** as a networking and information exchange event for the ESU members in order to improve the capacity building of the unions and their representatives and increasing their active participation in the decision-making process in higher education.

B.3 Creating a Student Quality Concept

Although the main political focus of ESU will be on financing, the debate on quality of higher education will remain in the core of ESU's work in 2011. Not only does ESU remain a member of the E4, but it will also start its work on the idea of a student quality concept, that can bring a revolutionary change in the field of quality in terms of transcending the discussions surrounding quality assurance and information provision to reflect the views of students as the main benefactors rather than other actors.

3.1 Initiate the **development of a quality concept of higher education** that seeks to identify Pan-European perspectives on what matters for students and what information is necessary to be provided to them about higher education and studies. In addition, focus should be given to identifying how quality processes can facilitate the development of student-centred learning and can lead to the creation of a quality culture in the teaching and learning process. The quality concept should facilitate and help ESU, together with its members, to take the lead in quality discussions on the European, national and local level and define the student perspective.

3.2 Through cooperation with E4 Group as authors of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, carry through a **consultation in regards to quality assurance processes so as to be able to assess the usage of the guidelines**. ESU will carry the consultation at the national, institutional level and also consult students as the end beneficiaries directly, including those who are actively engaged in quality assurance processes. In evaluating the implementation of the ESG ESU will raise special attention to student participation and the social dimension of higher education.

3.3 Co-organise a next and innovated edition of the E4-organised European Quality Assurance Forums (EQAF), and ensure full student participation to it.

B.4 Back to basics in Bologna

ESU will also strive to increase cooperation and communication especially with the student members of national Bologna Follow-Up Groups and to push for the creation of such bodies that include student representation where they have still not been set up. It is important to have a unified voice of students across Europe so as to maximize the impact that students have through pushing a concrete agenda. ESU will continue stressing the need for a holistic national implementation of the Bologna action lines.

4.1 ESU was actively lobbying in order for the mobility benchmark of 20% to be set, though, great obstacles remain to be overcome, out of which financing is one of the most significant. Since we strongly believe mobility should be accessible for all students, we intend to follow-up the development and **promotion of the European mobility treaty concept** throughout the existing lobbying sets (EU Presidency events, BFUG, etc) as well as **advocate for removal of recognition barriers**.

4.2 ESU has strongly pushed for the creation of a working group on social dimension. Our main objectives for the working group will be the **identification of concrete and measurable benchmarks for social dimension** as well as **exchange and promotion of good practices** so as not to delay political action with the excuse of missing data.

ESU is planning to work more closely with unions in the coming year to have a clearer picture of how much progress has been achieved on social dimension and to raise some of the main issues at European level.

B.5 Students' rights and equ(al)ity

ESU will continue its work for the recognition of students' rights and equal access to higher education. During 2011 ESU wants to put the focus of its gender equality work on societal problems such as gender related discrimination in institutional level, enrolment paths, pay gap and gender graduate unemployment.

5.1 Drawing on the work of the Students' rights task force that prepared explanatory notes for the Students' Rights Charter and complemented it with a mapping of existing practices from the member unions, ESU will **ensure the promotion of the Students' rights charter on the national level in order to push for relevant provision in national/European-level legislation**.

5.2 Following ESU's study visit to Belarus, steps will be taken to work with Belarusian students to strengthen their capacity for working on students' rights and student representation. This will be carried out in close cooperation with several of ESU's member unions as well as other international

organisations with an interest in the field and is dependent on securing external financing for the activities.

5.2 ESU will work on **proposing an equity benchmarks framework** that addresses the national and the institutional levels and ensures concrete action and policies on social dimension of higher education through engaging in the project consortium EQUINET (Enhancing Equitable Access to Higher Education). The framework should be adopted in 2012 on the European level.

5.3 ESU will lead the **development of a European framework for student interns for children universities**. This will be achieved in partnership under a project Children as Change Agents for Science in Society that engages students in activities with children thus tackling access to higher education issues focusing on cultural reasons. It is also a new approach in our social dimension work, by tackling issues at primary level, when often the first barriers in what could be eventual access to Higher Education appear.

5.4 Look into potential project funding for projects relating to gender and higher education.

5.5 In times of great economic uncertainty, graduate unemployment places a tremendous stress on students' participation in higher education while at the same time calls for revising traditional approaches, forms and methods in education in order to make them more relevant for students and for broader societal needs as well. Therefore ESU will aim to develop a **policy on students' employability** with a specific focus on higher education, recommendations to increase graduate employment and how to grant full access for students to job opportunities.

5.6 There still is a very concrete need for a comprehensive strategy and constant monitoring of the changes in the area of social dimension in order to keep updated and continue staying a change agent in the academic society. Therefore, complementary to the main surveys we will be sending to member unions, **research** will be conducted **on immigration policies related to the access to higher education by the Working Group on Immigration and Ethnical Minorities**. Based on data collected in this research the need for an overhaul of policy can be assessed.

C Process involvement

C.1 External

1.1 ESU will represent the European students' voice in **all the working groups surrounding and feeding into the work of the Bologna Follow-up Group**, based on its policies and the above mentioned political priorities. Of all these working groups the working group on **Social Dimension**, which ESU has fought for in the first place, will be prioritised. This working group is now lacking serious commitment and therefore ESU needs to be very active and **fight for a further prioritisation of the social dimension in higher education**. ESU will also lead a parallel effort to monitor progress in the social dimension and compare results with those of the Bologna reporting process.

1.2 ESU will actively engage in **defining the new age of programmes under the Youth on the Move initiative of the European Union** with special relation to the European Commission communication on **modernization of higher education** with a focus on advancing ESU policies on priority issues such as promoting higher education as a right, a public good and a public responsibility, promoting aspects of social dimension, mobility and student-centred learning with the aim of committing to remove barriers to access and obstacles to participation to higher education. ESU will coordinate a lobby campaign, including a joint day of action, delivering the demands of students to the modernisation agenda both on

European and national level. ESU will therefore **implement its strategy on the European Union** while consistently monitoring and reacting on the processes relating to the interests of the students of Europe and will initiate work on **assessing the impact of the modernization agenda and the single market directive**.

1.3 By prolonging the **International Cooperation Working Group's** mandate ESU wants to further explore the opportunities for global students' cooperation in order to continue implementing the action lines, agreed by the Global Students' declaration, **strengthening the global cooperation of students in joint work against the commodification of higher education** and follow-up **safeguarding students' rights to education worldwide**.

1.4 The current context of increased global dialogue on education forces ESU to establish its name as a partner when discussing issues of commodification of education, proactively, monitor the initiatives undertaken under the topic of privatising higher education in a **dialogue with UNESCO, OECD, World Bank, IMF, and other HE related world-wide institutions**.

C.2 Internal

2.1 ESU has several task forces, among which the **Gender Quota Task Force** that will continue working on the **evaluation of gender quota practice** through the research, collecting data and analyzing as well as proposing the changes to the system where necessary. By following up the mandate of the **Membership Task Force** in completing the revision of the study visit guidelines and precedents in order to further work on enhancing the quality and transparency of study visits.

2.2 From ESU's working groups that are not mentioned in the set out priorities above, the **Working group on Gender Equality** will assist GECC in analysing the gender mainstreaming strategy, its effect and implementation in ESU's work and propose the changes to this paper where necessary in the BM60.

D General political alliances

ESU wants to ensure its position as a **dialogue partner of the European University Association** and its member institutions and make it less dependent from personal relations. Agreeing on a memorandum of understanding would entail mutual invitations to events and cooperation on the development of certain expertise.

A similar ground for agreement can be explored with the **Council of Europe** to deepen the cooperation in areas of higher education, youth policy, democracy and human rights in order to join forces when striving for quality education, equal access and participation in governing processes.

Together with the representative organizations of the European higher education institutions and teachers, ESU will strive to **become official partners of the European Commission in relation to policies concerning higher education**.

Asked in 2009, the OECD stated not to be internally ready to agree to a memorandum of understanding. In 2010 the question should be repeated to **establish ESU's position as the representative organisation for students in higher education in Europe for the OECD fora**. Again this memorandum of understanding would serve to abstract the current situation from personal relations.

ESU can also use the external expertise to increase the quality, reliability and visibility of ESU surveys and strengthen the alliances with organisations ESU has a common agenda to work on (mobility benchmark of 20%, third cycle and research, monitoring student rights, monitoring changes in legislation and financing). A stronger cooperation with inter alia **Erasmus Student Network** and **EURODOC** could be fruitful.

E Background

The expansion of ESU's activities during the past years needs to be reflected behind the screens as well. The **work on a better financial and legal sustainability of ESU** and its elected representatives can only be achieved by strengthening the secretariat. ESU will develop **guidelines** for communication between the board and the elected representatives, and within the elected, division of workload and financial or other support with the elected representatives and the member unions. To ensure the rights of ESU's employees a **new employee handbook** will be created. Initiated in 2007, the **ESIB-ESU transition** is calling for urgent finalisation. Following the Belgian and Austrian law the liquidation of ESIB asbl should be started in 2011.

ESU should also aim at being more visible in its work on a day to day level. Therefore ESU will change its press work and website to be more interlinked with the NUSes and social media in which they are participating in as well as more interaction with the national unions of students news and activities. The idea of ESU being known on to the NUSes members can serve to create more competition in elections and to have more successful European campaigns, thus strengthening once more the position and representativeness of ESU.

For updates about ESU's work in 2011, visit esu-online.org.