



Board Mailing 61
Document number
Revision
Author
Date

BM61/Part 7
001
Executive Committee
10/10/2011

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ESU Plan of Work 2012

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A Main political priorities

ESU feels the need to face the current crisis and to foster the student voice of all students across Europe. In this context our main priorities for 2012 will be:

Education as a public good – Working on the different aspects of commodification in order to define the term in the current situation of crisis in education. ESU works against the trend of introduction and raises in tuition fees, promote more public funding to higher education and the fundamental principle of education as a public good.

Internal development – Further developing the union by implementing the structural changes and making ESU a strong and sustainable organisation, both politically and economically.

Social dimension – ESU promotes equal access to education and a more diverse student population. ESU takes a firm stand on promoting the role of higher education as a fundamental tool against reproduction of social inequalities.

Bologna and European cooperation – Strengthen the Bologna cooperation and push for more coordinated implementation. ESU strives for increased mobility by expanding Erasmus and increasing grants and removing mobility obstacles such as economic costs and bureaucratic procedures.

B A celebratory year for a renewed organisation

B.1 Anniversary year – celebrating student leadership

17th of October 2012 will mark 30 years from the foundation of the Western European Student Information Bureau, established by seven unions in Stockholm. Evolvement of the organisation to the European Students' Union that has a strong position in policy-making and in uniting national unions and that is spanning all of Europe owes itself to dedication and mission of student representatives, volunteers and staff. 2012 will thus be a year dedicated to the student leaders in Europe, to those that have fought for the establishing and upholding of the rights of the students, their efforts in securing quality and accessible higher education and those that have built the European students movement. As a tribute ESU will organize a celebration at the 24th European Students' Convention.

B.2 A strategically minded union

It is of great importance for ESU to work based on a strategic plan that spans several generations of elected representatives and establishes a medium-long term base for development. Looking beyond the immediate and the obvious should be a standard for a professional organisation that works for the benefit of its membership and that sees its own responsibility towards its constituencies and the society at the core of its actions. Focus of ESU should be in building a strong dedication to societal advancement by further developing the views and capacity of its membership and by promoting European integration in higher education through building a more professionally oriented and strategically minded union.

Activities

- 1) Developing a three-year strategic plan for the European Students' Union that is based on the vision, mission and value statement of the organisation and that sets goals and priorities for policy and development. The strategic plan should span the period from July 2012 to the end

of 2015.

- 2) Initiating a review of ESU policies in order to move towards a more systematic and structured revision of ESU policy by setting a timeline for renewing policies and setting a framework and guidelines for future policy work. The main aim should be to keep the policies up to date, relevant and coherent through issuing a concise ESU policy document from 63rd ESU Board Meeting onwards that would be updated by chapters at following regular Board Meetings.

C Policy development priorities for the European Students' Union

C.1 Financing the Students' Future

One of the core principles of the policy of ESU is that Higher Education is a public responsibility and an investment in the future that should be accessible to all. Current political and economical climate calls on ESU and national unions for more action in safeguarding these principles than ever before. ESU will thus continue to work in developing research, argumentation and tools within the Financing the Students' Future (FinSt) project to enhance the capacity of ESU and its membership to act and fight for public investment into higher education.

Activities

- 1) Advocating for increased public investment into higher education and lobbying for excluding education investment for counting towards government sector deficit targets.
- 2) Publishing the FinSt Research Compendium that contains an overview of funding systems and future funding scenarios of higher education.
- 3) Organising an European Training on Financing of Higher Education before 62nd Board Meeting in Bucharest, hosted by ANOSR.
- 4) Preparing and publishing the Toolkit on Financing of Higher Education and associated lobbying sheets.
- 5) Introducing a sub-website at the ESU page that will enable access to the research results and give students a chance to comment on the findings and share their view on the funding debate.
- 6) Preparing policy recommendations for stakeholders on the funding of Higher Education.
- 7) Organising the Final Conference in Brussels where the results of the project will be presented.

C.2 QUEST for Quality for Students

Students at the heart of the life of higher education institutions can only come true when students are involved in issues concerning quality of education. Thus, Quest for Quality for Students (QUEST) project will be carried forward to its goal of developing a student led quality concept and supporting tools for its implementation. The research project will gather information and will compare students' perception of quality, their involvement and will link it to ongoing processes built to support quality or in providing information about quality of higher education. This will form a basis for development of tools for ESU membership that enhance student participation in areas of quality assurance and student-centred learning.

Activities

- 1) Advocating for meaningful student involvement in quality assurance and promoting the ESU policy view in arenas concerned with quality of higher education.
- 2) Preparing a QUEST publication of research results that contains the outcomes of the student survey that will be carried in a sample of countries and that explores students' perspective on quality and their involvement. The survey will be complemented by selected institutional site visits.
- 3) Preparing a QUEST publication that contains policy recommendations and the ESU advocacy position of the student quality concept and information provision about quality.
- 4) Organising the QUEST for Quality for Students conference ahead of the 63rd Board Meeting held in Malta, hosted by KSU.
- 5) Organising two workshops involving the Quality Assurance Student Experts' Pool that will focus on the development of a toolkit that is due in 2013, for putting the student quality concept into practice.

European Quality Assurance framework will see further developments through the adoption of the recommendation by the Ministers regarding the review and revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). ESU will be a proactive actor in these policy developments and will be supporting a thorough revision of the ESG as well as further development of EQAR. Further, cooperation projects with E4 will be continued.

Activities

- 6) Together with E4, MAP-ESG project results will be presented towards the Bologna Follow-Up Group ahead of the Ministerial Conference by hosting a launching event in Copenhagen
- 7) In line with the adopted position of the Ministers, continuing to develop and improve the ESG, together with the E4, while including other representative stakeholders concerning quality of higher education.
- 8) Together with the E4, continuing to organise the European Quality Assurance Forum that enables stakeholders in quality assurance to exchange on ideas and developments, enhance cooperation and feed into the policy of the E4 organisations.
- 9) Being an active participant in the EQAR and supporting its development by promoting the aims and goals of EQAR towards the governments, stakeholders and students and by thus increasing its visibility.

C.3 Social inclusion and equality in Higher Education

Social dimension has been on the highest policy priority list of ESU, but as we only see some mainstreaming of the actions, it is important for ESU to continue to carry through concrete work in the area. Thus, various actions will continue like EquNet project, but also in relation to policy processes by setting up an Social Dimension Observatory.

Activities

- 1) Developing a project to foster equality and gender equality within the NUSes. The Project should be seen as means of support and information for the NUSes to foster the equality and the gender equality in their national Unions.
- 2) Contributing to EquNet project final report on social dimension and the promote indicators and benchmarks on equality to be established.
- 3) Supporting and advocating for the set up of Social Dimension Observatory in which ESU would be an active member of the consortium.
- 4) Contributing to EUROSTUDENT project consortium in an advisory capacity.

As the biggest development activity in the field, the implementation of Science in Society project SISCATALYST will continue. An international network of children universities leads the project and it is aiming to address access to higher education issues by introducing children and adolescents of various ages and backgrounds, but especially those of underrepresented groups, to science and higher education environment. This is designed to increase the chances of those entering higher education that would normally not be incentivised or encouraged by their surrounding environment.

Activities

- 5) Developing different models in including student interns in the Children Universities project.
- 6) Empowering national unions and their members to address different action lines on equality issues specific to their own situations, in accordance with ESU's stated values and goals..

C.4 Students' Advancement of Graduates Employability

Concerning the economic situation, pressure is mounting on higher education to be more relevant to the labour market, but with this there comes a threat of only seeing education from a utilitarian perspective. It is thus pertinent for ESU to work on issues concerning employability in relation to higher education in which one of the aims should be to mainstream a broad understanding of employability in the sense of providing key competencies that are not only relevant to the labour market, but also to society at large.

ESU will thus work on the Students Advancement of Graduate Employability (SAGE) project that is aimed at enhancing the capacity of student representatives to take part in influencing and building policies aimed at improving the rate of graduate employability at European, national and local level. The project falls into the footsteps of several previous ESU-led projects looking at various aspects of educational policy and empowering student representatives to take a more active part in the governance of higher education institutions or the decision-making process with regards to national policies.

Activities

- 1) Organising the 22nd European Students' Convention on "Getting Young Europe Out of the Crisis" in Copenhagen, in conjunction with the Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting in March, hosted by DSF. This will bring forward 10 clear recommendations to policy makers and governments.

- 2) Employability as a theme will be researched and explored in the ESU publication Bologna With Student Eyes 2012 to see what impact have the higher education reforms concerning the issue.
- 3) Doing general desk research and starting the study on the impact of European Union policies to employability that will be published in spring 2013.
- 4) Organising a consultations seminar in the frame of SAGE project at the 23rd European Students' Convention in Cyprus, hosted by POFEN.

C.5 Commodification

According to the priority of the plan of work which is the topic of commodification of education and taking education of a public good the work of the EC will focus on the following:

The main goal is the presentation of a policy paper to the BM62, drafted by the content committees, especially by the Academic Affairs Committee. The policy paper takes into account the history of Bologna and the Lisbon-Strategy respectively the EU2020-Strategy,(modernization agenda) but also looks into the future related to EU2020 and further developments of Higher Education. The paper aims at having an integrative policy considering commodification position for the next few years.

D Policy advocacy and follow-up

D.1 Internationalisation, mobility and recognition

- 1) Due to the increased awareness of students about the benefits of mobility and its importance for creating a real European Higher Education Area, ESU should reinforce its attempts to increase funding for mobility and focus also on quality of mobility. Thus ESU will commit to initiating an activity or a project on the funding and quality of mobility with relevant partners. Further, ESU will be part of active follow-up to the adoption of the EHEA mobility strategy in terms of monitoring and lobby action towards policy processes.
- 2) Recognition is closely linked to fostering mobility and it is of vital importance for a true EHEA. ESU has been invited to the meetings of ENIC and NARIC centres and intends to cooperate with them in the future. Therefore ESU is one of the partners in EAR-HEI project, which aims at developing a practical, concise and user friendly Recognition Manual for higher education institutions.

D.2 Student rights and academic freedom

- 1) In relation to academic freedom, ESU will make a proposal for a European network for advocacy and fight against academic corruption.
- 2) For work on issues of student rights and academic freedom, ESU will cooperate with Magna Charta Observatory in getting recognition to Magna Charta Universitatum and to build an

understanding of academic freedom from the students' perspective and to find relevant ways to help national unions in advocacy on the issue.

D.3 Gender Equality

- 1) Gender Equality Cross Committee is in the interesting situation of a Gender Equality LGBT(Q) watchdog, facilitating the upcoming transition of the organization into the new structure and while still being heavily involved in events, campaigns, press releases on the topics of Gender Equality and LGBT(Q), but an updating of the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy is crucially needed.
- 2) Taking campaign action on Equal Pay Day on 25th of March 2012.

D.4 Student-Centred Learning

- 1) Paradigm shift from the teacher centred learning towards more learner centred approach resulted in the creation of the Student Centred Learning Toolkit, defining the purpose of the shift and guiding through the process itself. Recognizing SCL as a policy priority of an immense importance for the enhancement of the quality of education, ESU will continue its advocacy in this area with the aim to increase the level of its implementation within the European Higher Education Area.
- 2) Preparing a proposal for a seminar training for policy makers and representatives of higher education institutions on how to understand and implement student-centred learning. It would be self-organised and funded through participation fees. This activity would be done in cooperation with representative organisations of higher education institutions and if successful, would be turned into a regular ESU activity.

E Priorities for International Policy Arenas/Processes

E.1 Bologna Process – leading to the European Higher Education Area

ESU will represent the European students' voice in all the working groups surrounding and feeding into the work of the Bologna Follow-up Group and the Ministerial Conference, based on its policies and the above-mentioned political priorities. ESU will concentrate on lobbying for establishing a more targeted approach to further implementation of the agreed reforms. For this purpose, ESU will take an evidence-based approach to advocating its policy priorities, which are social dimension, funding of higher education, mobility and quality assurance.

Activities

- 1) Publication of Bologna With Student Eyes 2012 ahead of the Ministerial Conference, taking stock of implementation from the students perspective.
- 2) Developing an interactive "Bologna Black Book" to illustrate issues with higher education reform that is negatively affecting students and the quality of higher education.
- 3) Participation to all Bologna Follow-Up Group meetings and basing the ESU representation on a regular communication with the national unions.

E.2 European Union policy

Many important decisions on European Union higher education policies will be taken in 2012. First of all the Multiannual Financial Framework will be negotiated and adopted during the Danish and Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union. ESU's main priority will be to influence the priorities in the budget, the Education Europe priorities and legislation and the policy communications and recommendations related to higher education.

ESU will ask for the increase of the size of the grants in Erasmus, to open the programme to as many ESU member countries as possible, to influence the establishment of a EU student mobility loan guarantee and work for ESU's policies to be included in EU policies.

Activities

- 1) Initiating a more aggressive advocacy and lobbying, involving active external communication and media relations, cooperating with member unions to advocate from national level towards EU institutions.
- 2) ESU will continue engaging itself into the experts' groups, set by the European Commission and call for meetings with the other intergovernmental bodies respectively to the relevance of the issue discussed (i.e. EU Council, Committee of Regions).
- 3) Ensuring lobby actions and follow-up to secure adequate funds for the Education Europe programme, which will be replacing the current Lifelong learning one within the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. To keep students' voice stronger, ESU will consider forming alliances with organisations of a similar policy line and keep on engaging itself actively into public discussions and other forms of consultation.
- 4) ESU has previously proved successful in establishing a dialogue with countries holding the Presidency of the Council of EU. ESU will thus cooperate with Danish and Cypriot Presidencies, especially concerning the Multiannual Financial Framework, Education Europe programme, the Education & Training 2020 Framework cycle priorities and the communications related to higher education.

F Organisational Development

F.1 Membership

Membership support is a certain set of actions, meant to be of service to the member unions in order to enhance their capacity and strengthen their actions. Membership support is meant to be complementary to the ESU policy work and should also be considered across the board effort among the elected representatives. Membership support can be facilitated by the various means, which should fit the purpose and be attractive and accessible for member unions.

Activities

- 1) Issuing regular briefing notes on core policy developments within the main political processes including the Bologna Process working areas, the EU policies, social dimension, mobility and student participation.
- 2) Preparing briefing notes on the specific regions, which have been lacking recognition for students' participation: Eastern partnership countries, including Belarus and Russia, Northern

Mediterranean countries, Western Balkans. Involving ESU in partnership with other organisations to assist democratisation process in education in above mentioned regions by utilising the experts and trainers pools.

- 3) Setting a pool of trainers and facilitators after organising a study session for the practitioners in the field of training and capacity building from ESU member unions in July 2012.
- 4) Enhancing the capacity ESU QA experts' pool by involving its members in direct steering of the pool and development activities, such as co-organizing capacity building events under QUEST project, maintaining a functional ESU experts database, available for promotion and external use, enhancing ESU experts' input into ESU activities in policy and development.
- 1) Enhancing quality and reliability of study visit reports by involving ESU experts and the facilitators' pool into practice of preparing and conducting the visits.
- 2) Monitoring the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities of member unions towards ESU and initiating respective actions in case those are not being followed. This should also include supportive action to the concerned members.

F.2 Development plans

In relation to the decision of the Board to change structures of ESU, handover and preparation needs to be prioritised if the new structures are to fill the expectations laid on them and be successful. Furthermore, the importance of diversifying ESU income streams has been widely recognised. Recent experience proved the potential of ESU to continue in the direction of optimising the expertise and know-how for building a financially more sustainable union. Thus the ESU development and fundraising work will continue to be in focus in 2012. Activities

- 1) Enhancing the visibility of the ESU Quality assurance Experts' pool for more reviews and capacity building activities. Including the pool into project work such as QUEST and Sharing Practice in Enhancing and Assuring Quality Project (SPEAQ).
- 2) Utilising the current expertise and know-how for the purpose of providing services and subcontracting and consultation for interested sides with the support of ESU pools and alumni network.
- 3) Organising a fundraising event on an education related cause in possible partnership with European Voice on the basis of their yearly EU study fair.
- 4) Improving communication in three main directions and dimensions; firstly internally between the unions and sharing information within membership, secondly in improving communication between the elected structures and the Board and thirdly in external communication where the visibility of ESU needs to be further enhanced.

F.3 Secretariat

In the past years ESU Secretariat has greatly expanded, which has raised some challenges that need to be addressed. Due to reliance on project income in ESU, it is crucial that the development of Secretariat is based on continuity, thus high standards in quality of project management and improved internal communication are expected. Continued improvement of the working conditions in the Secretariat is crucial, but in addition, concrete steps will be taken in following activities.

Activities

- 1) Developing a comprehensive and easy-to-understand project implementation handbook that would be complemented by user-friendly and simple collaborative project working space in the ESU back-office.
- 2) Keeping an up to date ESU project inventory, storing files on both finalised and ongoing projects and making project outcomes available for broader use.
- 3) Supporting the ESIB-ESU legal transfer of contracts and maintaining stability in eligibility to project funding.

G General political alliances

In addition to main partnerships of ESU that serve to underpin the work of ESU on representation of student voice, ESU increasingly focus on striving towards better contact and cooperation with other student organisations and target its work with partner organisations towards students also internationally.

Action areas

- 1) Strengthening partnership with associate organisations through including them more regularly to ESU events and project work in particular with ESN, OBESSU and IGLYO.
- 2) To strengthen ties across the Mediterranean, deliver a workshop on “Building Student Leadership and Democratization in the Southern Mediterranean Rim” in cooperation with Euro Mediterranean University, Union for the Mediterranean and European Institute for the Mediterranean.
- 3) Being a dialogue partner to the European Commission, European Council, European Parliament, UNESCO and the Council of Europe by actively providing reactions and input to policymaking processes.
- 4) Being an initiative partner of the E4 Group of stakeholders concerning the field of quality assurance and fight for inclusion of the perspective of academics.
- 5) ESU will actively support and promote the Magna Charta Observatory by looking for ways of engaging in a strategic partnership on issues of academic freedom and student rights.
- 6) Increase cooperation with UNICA interlinked with Bologna Experts network.
- 7) Cooperate with NUS UK in organising a global event for national and regional student unions.