The Role of Students in The Implementation of The European Higher Education Area

Emphasis on developing and upgrading of competences for academic teaching (Educa-T)
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Overview
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Who Am I?
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Member of the Executive Committee of ESU since July 2016
Human Rights and Solidarity Coordinator of ESU from July 2015 until June 2016
Representing the Union of Students in Italy in ESU from 2013-2015
Starting activity in the Student movement in 2010 at the local level.
What is the European Students’ Union?
Membership

• The European Students' Union (ESU) is an umbrella organisation of 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 38 different countries. Through its members, ESU represents over 20 million students in Europe.

• The NUSes are open to all students in their respective country regardless of political persuasion, religion, ethnic or cultural origin, sexual orientation or social standing.

• Our members are also student-run, autonomous, representative and operate according to democratic principles.
Aim
Represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Mission
Represent, defend and strengthen students’ educational, democratic and political and social rights. ESU will work for sustainable, accessible and high quality higher education in Europe.

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

Values
ESU is diverse, democratic and open-minded.
Structures – Bodies I

Legislative Body: Board Meeting (BM)
• The highest decision making body in ESU
• Each country has 2 votes which are held by the respective national union(s) of students

Executive Body: Executive Committee (EC)
• The Executive Committee is responsible for the execution of the decisions of the Board Meeting, political affairs and the overall finances of ESU.
• Elected by the Board Meeting for the term of one year, re-elections are possible
• President, two Vicepresidents, seven regular EC-members

Secretariat
• Employed personnel such as an Office Manager, a Financial Officer and a Project Officer
• **Controlling Body: Commission for Internal Auditing Responsible of the internal audit of ESU**

• Three members, elected by the Board Meeting for the term of three years, re-elections are possible

• Members can not be elected representatives of ESU’s staff or its member unions.

• **Coordinators** are three individuals appointed by the Executive Committee for max. 2 years. They are responsible for the areas of Equality, Human Rights and Membership.
• **Working Groups** are established by a motion at the BM, they shall deal with specific areas of work relevant to the work of ESU or its members. Members of working groups are Member Unions.

• **Task forces** are mandated by the BM or the EC. They shall carry out defined tasks in limited time. Members of task forces are individuals.

• **Expert pools** are established by the BM and implemented by the board. They provide expertise, consultancy and training externally. Members of experts pools are individuals.
Main Working Areas

Social Dimension: Access and support

Funding and Governance: Public responsibility for education

Quality and transparency: Structural reforms, academic affairs, Student Centred-Learning

Mobility and internationalisation
How Is ESU Working in These Areas?

- Representation & advocacy
- Research & concept development
- Capacity-building & information exchange

ALL THESE WORKING FIELDS ARE ASPECTS OF STUDENTS INVOLVEMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EHEA
How Is The European Students’ Union Involved in The Implementation of EHEA?
History of ESU

• **1982:** The organisation is founded as Western European Students’ Information Bureau (WESIB)

• **1989:** Iron curtain falls and WESIB becomes the European Students’ Information Bureau (ESIB)

• **1999:** The Bologna Process starts and ESIB creates content committees - information exchange to more advocacy

• **2001:** ESIB gets involved as stakeholder organization in the Bologna Process

• **2007:** ESIB is renamed into ESU
How ESU Became A Stakeholder in The Bologna Process I

- 1999 Bologna Declaration – nothing about students mentioned
- 2001 Prague Communiqué: student participation first mentioned as a part of the Bologna Process and the Ministers agreed that:
  - “students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions”
  - “students are **full members** of the higher education community”
  - The European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the **National Unions of Students in Europe** and the Council of Europe should be consulted in the follow-up work.
2003: Berlin Communiqué

- **ESIB** to be involved to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance.
- Establishment of a Follow-up Group, which shall be composed of the representatives of all members of the Bologna Process and the European Commission, with the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, **ESIB** and UNESCO/CEPES as consultative members.
- “A Board also chaired by the EU Presidency shall oversee the work between the meetings of the Follow-up Group. The Board will be composed of the chair, the next host country as vice-chair, the preceding and the following EU Presidencies, three participating countries elected by the Follow-up Group for one year, the European Commission and, as consultative members, the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE and **ESIB**. The Follow-up Group as well as the Board may convene ad hoc working groups as they deem necessary.”
Current Involvement I

**Working Area Representation & Advocacy**

- **Ministerial Conferences** (every 3 years)
- **Bologna Follow Up Group**
  - Board
  - **Social Dimension & LLP Working Group** – co-chairing
  - Internationalization and Mobility Working Group
  - Structural Reforms Working Group
  - Reporting Working Group
  - Other sub-groups: ESG revision, ECTS users’ guide, NQF, etc...
- Cooperation with **European Commission** (Directorate General Education and Culture, DG EAC) and the **European Parliament** (Committee on Culture and Education, CULT)
Current Involvement II

Working Area Research & Concept Development

- **LLP-Projects (Erasmus+ projects coming up)**
- Finalized: FINST (Financing the students Future), QUEST (Quest for Quality for Students), SAGE (Student Advancement of Graduates Mobility)
- Ongoing: PASCL (Peer assessment of Student centered learning)

- **TEMPUS-projects:**
- Ongoing: ESPAQ (Enhancing Students Participation in Quality Assurance in Armenian Higher Education)
Current Involvement III

Publications (examples)
Current Involvement IV

Working Area Capacity-Building & Information Exchange

• **ESU’s pools** empower individuals from national unions to participate in Quality assurance and implementation of Student Centred Learning in national, international and local context.

• **Trainings & Seminars** linked to ESU’s project work rise capacity among the member unions to help them acting as competent full partners.

ESU SUPPORTS ITS MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES IN THEIR NATIONAL CONTEXT.
The Involvement of National Unions of Students in The Implementation of EHEA
Student participation is an integral part of the Bologna Process:

2001 Prague Communiqué: student participation first mentioned as a part of the Bologna Process and the ministers agreed that:

“students *should participate in and influence* the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions”
- “students are **full members** of the higher education community”
Why Student Involvement? (II)

• The ability to **see the situation from the perspective of a student** and of a learner
• Students are the **largest stakeholder group** in HE
• Students are **co-responsible for management** of higher education as higher education is developed for students
• Quality culture cannot be reached without the effort and **sense of ownership** from the side of all stakeholders
Why Student Involvement? (III)

• Student participation is the **key for fair higher education**, which is the only way to secure social development and sustainable economic growth

• Student involvement in governance is essential in **preparing students to be active citizens in democratic societies**

• Students are an **important catalyst for reforms**
Possible Future Improvements

- Students should truly be seen as full partners with relevant perspective and experience instead to be treated as customers.
- The quality of data available on students’ participation across EHEA is still considerably poor and must be improved.
- Students do have an increasing say on matters directly related to the learning process (like curricula design), however, they are being gradually excluded from the top-level decisions.

It is important that students are recognised as competent and constructive partners with a say on all aspects of governance, since decisions themselves are interlinked
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Student Centred Learning
What is Student Centred Learning

-a new shape for the learning process
-where is the teacher?
-new concept or very old concept?
-different teaching method, quality and participation
PRINCIPLE I: SCL requires an on-going Reflexive Process

Part of the underlying philosophy of SCL is that no one context can have one SCL style that can remain applicable through time. The philosophy of SCL is such that teachers, students and institutions need to continuously reflect on their teaching, learning and infrastructural systems in such a way that would continuously improve the learning experience of students and ensure that the intended learning outcomes of a given course or programme component are achieved in a way that stimulates learners' critical thinking and transferable skills.

PRINCIPLE II: SCL does not have a “One-Size-Fits-All” Solution

A key concept underlying SCL is the realisation that all higher education institutions are different, all teachers are different and all students are different. These all operate in very diverse contexts and deal with various subject-disciplines. Therefore, SCL is a learning approach that requires learning support structures, which are appropriate to each given context, and teaching and learning styles appropriate to those undertaking them.
PRINCIPLE III: Students have Different Learning Styles

SCL recognises that students have different pedagogical needs. Some learn better through trial and error, others learn through practical experience. For some learners much is learned by reading literature, others need to debate and discuss theory in order to understand it.

PRINCIPLE IV: Students have Different Needs and Interests

All students have needs that extend beyond the classroom. Some are interested in cultural activities, others in sports or in representative organisations. Students can have children or can be faced with psychological conditions, illness or disability.

PRINCIPLE V: Choice is Central to Effective Learning in SCL

Students like to learn different things and hence any offer should involve a reasonable amount of choice. Learning can be organised in liberal formats, such as at colleges of liberal arts or choice can be offered in a more traditional, disciplinary style.
PRINCIPLE VI: Students have Different Experiences and Background Knowledge

Learning needs to be adapted to the life and professional experience of the individual concerned. For instance, if students already have considerable experience in using information and communications technology, there is no point in trying to teach them the same thing again; if they already have considerable research skills, perhaps it would be better to help them in theory. Personal experience can also be used to motivate students, for instance, by allowing students to share a personal story to illustrate a point.

PRINCIPLE VII: Students should have Control Over their Learning

Students should be given the opportunity to be involved in the design of courses, curricula and their evaluation. Students should be seen as active partners who have a stake in the way that higher education functions. The best way to ensure that learning focuses more on students is by engaging students themselves in how their learning should be shaped.
PRINCIPLE VIII: SCL is about Enabling not Telling

In simply imparting facts and knowledge to students (telling) the initiative, preparation and content comes mainly from the teacher. The SCL approach aims to give the student greater responsibility enabling the student to think, process, analyse, synthesise, criticise, apply, solve problems, etc.

PRINCIPLE IX: Learning needs Cooperation between Students and Staff

It is important that students and staff co-operate to develop a shared understanding both of the problems experienced in learning, as well as their problems as stakeholders within their given institution, jointly proposing solutions that might work for both groups. In the classroom, such cooperation will have a positive effect as the two groups increasingly come to consider each other as partners. Such a partnership is central to the philosophy of SCL, which sees learning as taking place in a constructive interaction between the two groups.
Learning Outcomes (LO)

Learning outcomes (LO) form the core conceptual basis for a student-centred higher education system.

A description in terms of expected or desired learning outcomes should be a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of a learning process.

It should not refer to input criteria, such as what exactly is taught or the mode of teaching.

During the learning activity, the student acquires those learning outcomes with the teacher acting as a facilitator of the learning process, “enabling” not “telling”.

ESU believes that learning outcomes should accommodate the multiple purposes of higher education; including preparing students for active citizenship, creating a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. All study programmes should be designed with an intention to achieve certain learning outcomes.
Students have been leading the paradigm shift, but also recognising and rewarding the efforts of other stakeholders, firstly teachers. A great example is the Bologna Teachers’ Gala, a project of The National Students Union in Romania (ANOSR), an annual tradition that began seven years ago. The Bologna Professor project allows Romanian students to annually give awards to the top values of Romanian higher education, represented by teachers the students appreciate for their involvement, devotion and commitment to the act of teaching. The professors are proposed by their students, their classes are subsequently attended and they are monitored and interviewed about their scientific and didactic activities by a commission made up of students from other cities. Thus, society acknowledges the professors’ contribution to the development and implementation of quality education in Romanian universities. The 2010 Bologna Professor Gala awarded prizes to 116 out of the almost one thousand teachers proposed and heard by the student juries.
The Bologna process and the EHEA

After first committing to the full implementation of SCL at the Ministerial Conference in Leuven in 2009, EHEA ministers reiterated their commitment to SCL in the Bucharest Communiqué (2012). Ministers agreed to “Establish conditions that foster student-centred learning, innovative teaching methods and a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment, while continuing to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels”. Bologna tools also support the implementation of SCL through providing more choices for students, mobility opportunities and extracurricular activities.
European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

As the biggest accomplishment on the European level, much attention is placed on the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, commonly known as the ESG, as they now, for the first time include, support and promote SCL as a standard.

“Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and the assessment of students reflects this approach.”
Thank you very much for your attention.

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