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INFORMATION NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	The higher education package. Views from the European Students' Union
	- Presentation by the European Students' Union (Education Committee meeting on 22 July 2024)

Delegations will find attached the presentation[1] given by the European Students' Union[2] at the above-mentioned meeting.

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[1] This document contains a presentation by an external stakeholder and the views expressed therein are solely those of the third party it originates from. This document cannot be regarded as stating an official position of the Council. It does not reflect the views of the Council or of its members.

[2] EU Transparency Register number: 947001511571-77.

ESU
EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

Fighting for students' rights since 1982

The higher education package: Views from the European Students' Union

European Students' Union (ESU)

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European Education Area

- Starting point: Bologna Process
- Critical for achieving a true EEA:
  - Inclusivity Framework
  - Framework for adequate student participation
- Finally: EEA and the values it underpins must impact and leverage all students and higher education institutions

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Measures at European level:

- Integrate in the Higher Education observatory data on staff working condition, appraisal and assessment policies, academic career paths

- Create a voluntary competence framework for teaching, promoting comparability, similar to other competences frameworks created by JRC

- Promote advancements in the assessment of teaching quality and pedagogical skills, by collecting best practices and foster space for dialogue and exchange, including through promoting bottom-top change

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Improving working conditions

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for creating more permanent positions in academia.
- Establish fair and gender-equitable recruitment procedures and employment conditions.
- Define clear and predictable career paths for Ph.D./Doctoral positions and academic staff contracts.
- Protect student assistants and doctoral candidates from the impact of dual dependency on supervisors.
- Safeguard rights as workers of student assistants and PhD students/doctoral candidates, where applicable.
- Embed jobs within collective bargaining agreements where applicable.

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ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Addressing discrimination:

- Enforce and strengthen regulations against favouritism and nepotism in recruitment procedures.
- Establish incentives and measures for the employment of underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable groups.
- Develop comprehensive strategies to address gender-based violence and discrimination in higher education.
- Implement awareness programs and support systems for victims of gender-based violence in the higher education sector.

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Flexible entry routes

- Introduce and incentivise recruitment of academic staff through flexible entry routes.

- Recognise prior and non-formal learning regarding skills needed to successfully apply for academic staff positions.

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Pedagogical training of academic staff

- Elevate the prestige of teaching by introducing incentives for higher education institutions to prioritise pedagogical development of academic staff.
- Elevate the prestige of teaching through financial incentives and reevaluate HEI financing models where HEI funding is not only dependent on the number of students against the effects of other indicators.
- Legislatively anchor pedagogical training as both a right and a duty for academic staff. Where this is not possible, set intensives for HEIs to integrate pedagogical training as a mandatory item within working contracts.

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Enhance mobility:

- Implement clear policies and targeted measures to support mobility programs for academic staff.

- Focus on addressing economic constraints as an obstacle to staff mobility.

- Prioritise support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in academic staff mobility programs.

ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers

Recommendations

Mitigating brain drain:

- Implement measures to enhance the attractiveness of pursuing academic careers in countries suffering from brain drain.
- Provide financial support for academics in those countries.
- Encourage international collaborations to create opportunities for academics to contribute to the development of their home countries while maintaining internationally reputable connections and work experiences.

ESU's position on the European Degree (label)

Students expectations

- What we hear students want for a potential European degree (label) is what they actually want for all study programmes. We must enhance the quality of all study programmes, while focusing for the degree (label) on the aspects that make it international and give the added value of deep (institutionalised) transnational cooperation
- Joint degree that leads to relevant, coherent learning outcomes, incorporates and combines good practices from various higher education institutions, offers unique international opportunities and includes up-to-date curriculum which fulfils their personal aspirations, their needs for professional development and can offer added value on the European labour market
- Students expect that such programmes are automatically recognised, offer flexible learning opportunities and pathways, are inclusive and student-centred, create true inter-university campuses and that the student is supported along the pathway to progress in and complete the study programme.

Transnational cooperation in higher education through joint programmes and the European Degree (label)

Joint programs and Bologna Process
- Despite several commitments within the Bologna process - no significant increase in number of joint programs
  - Remaining barriers, especially in national legislation - some related to the lack of implementation of already existing tools and commitments

Change enabled by the creation of European University Alliances
- Long-awaited boost and revival of interest in internationalisation of higher education in Europe
- Deep, long-term institutionalised forms of transnational cooperation is offering a more enabling framework for the creation of joint programmes

Transnational cooperation in higher education through joint programmes and the European Degree (label)

The concept of a European degree (label), rooted in the Bologna Process

- the most important work to be undertaken is the full, swift and comprehensive implementation of Bologna tools

- To reduce the challenges:

    - Closing the implementation gap and completing the arch of reforms within the Bologna process to ensure comparability and compatibility of degrees, adequate use of qualification frameworks, learning outcomes and ECTS

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Potential added value and the scope of a European degree (label)

- European degree (label) should promote transnational cooperation through removing undue barriers
- European Degree (label) should in no way create a two-speed Europe, where national programmes or joint programmes without the denomination of European degree 'label' are considered of lesser quality
- All study programmes in Europe are 'European' by the compliance with Bologna tools and should abide by the same quality assurance standards, stemming from the ESGs
- All study programmes in Europe are 'European' by the compliance with Bologna tools and should abide by the same quality assurance standards, stemming from the ESGs
- The creation of a European degree (label) should neither chip away funding from Erasmus Mundus programmes or for Erasmus+ funding allocated to international mobility, nor reduce funding for national study programmes.

European degree (label)

- Main rationale: proof of successful compliance with Bologna tools and commitments
  - Through materialisation of common criteria; quality assurance, adequate usage of ECTS, promotion of inclusive policies, student-centred learning…

- Motivate the creation of joint degrees

- Enhance quality of education provision
- Moving from European Degree Label to European Degree - requires proper piloting in practice and assessment
- Should not be seen as a sign of elitism carefully and only in a step-by-step approach, in order to uphold student rights and the guarantees embedded in higher education systems

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Barriers on the substance of legislation, which have the potential to undermine student interest

- Admission systems
  - Member states have different approaches towards access to higher education
  - Common admission system could create spill-over effects towards more selective practices in open higher education systems
- Student participation
  - Student involvement in the governance of HEIs and the design and delivery of study programs is regulated in national legislation at various degrees in most member states
  - Deficit of (democratic and meaningful) student participation in Alliances
  - Need for adequate regulations for the student involvement in alliances at European level
- Financing of the joint degree
  - Education should be free of charge → work towards using best practices and the benchmarks of student conditions
  - Grands and loans available for students enrolled in national study programmes should be equally available to students enrolled in joined degrees

Criteria for a European degree (label)

- Consortium agreement that defines joint arrangements for admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, progression, assessment and recognition procedures, including recognition of prior learning, for the joint study programme

- Democratically elected students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint arrangements and in its implementation

- Access to services in all participating HEIs in equivalent conditions as all enrolled students, **including services such as accommodation, academic guidance and psychological services, digital infrastructure**

- The joint programme is described in ECTS, **determined according to the ECTS Users Guide**

Criteria for a European degree (label)

- The joint programme **ensures** wide participation through socially and geographically inclusive admission **and student support systems** through tailored measures for all categories of disadvantaged students. **The joint programme does not include tuition fees** (alternatively: **The arrangements for financing the joint programme do not put students in a worse condition than the financial arrangements for equivalent national study programmes**)

- The joint programme **uses student-centred approaches, fosters flexible learning paths,** embedded interdisciplinary and/or intersectoral components **and acquisition of transversal/soft skills**

- During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different languages **within the study programme**.

Criteria for a European degree (label)

- Addition to the mandatory criteria

    - The joint programme offers the possibility for students to participate in activities promoting democratic values and addressing societal needs of the local community(ies), including volunteering, and to receive ECTS for it.

    - The joint programme offers the opportunity to receive and combine micro-credentials, based on the criteria in the Common approach to microcredentials

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Issuance of the European Degree (label)

The European degree (label) should be available for any type of institutionalised cooperation between any HEIs in EHEA. The possibility to issue the label/degree should be given after successful completion of an external QA review:

- At alliance level, by a QA agency registered in EQAR, based on a dedicated QA framework adopted at European level, in line with and stemming from the ESGs, which includes criteria related to the use of the European degree (label)

- As an addition to the European approach to the QA of joint programmes, where there is no alliance of HEI involved or when the accreditation/external evaluation of a single joint degree is required.

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ESU's position on the Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition

The Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition: ***the QA dimension***

- underlying principles which stood behind the 2006 Council Recommendation are equally applicable - ramain basis of the upcoming Council Recommendations
- Imperative: national quality assurance legislation which is fully compliant with and enables the adequate implementation of the ESGs
- importance of maintaining quality assurance processes up-to-date and fit-for-purpose
- defending academic integrity and fostering inclusion
- furthering the integration of green and digital skills, as well as soft and transversal skills

ESU's position on the Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition

The Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition: *__the QA dimension__*

- ESU is against the notion that all member states should invariably move towards exclusively institutional accreditation
- Microcredentials - different rationale applies
- Alliances:
    - should be both internally and externally quality assured
    - should be supported to create meaningful criteria, QA units at alliance level
    - meaningful student participation
    - alliance-level evaluation could not and should not replace national quality assurance procedures
- One consequence of undergoing an external QA procedure of an Alliance should be giving the right to waive the evaluation of joint programmes

ESU's position on the Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition

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The Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition: _**the QA dimension**_

Building blocks of the external QA system:
Elements related to:

- Strategic planning
- Governance
- Procedures related to joint activities (including joint programs)
- Stakeholder participation

ESU's position on the Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition

The Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition: ***the recognition dimension***

Automatic recognition

- Pillar for free movement of persons and an enabler for credit or degree mobility - supports objectives of mobility like internationalisation and intercultural understanding
- essential also for the visibility, transparency and permeability of learning pathways
- need for a mentality shift from expecting uniformity instead of comparability in order to support and enforce AR
- shifting the procedure of automatic recognition from institutional to national level
- emphasise the role of data collection and monitoring, in order to create evidence-based policies

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Links and contacts

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