



Policy Paper “School Students’ Europe 2019”

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Introduction

5 In 2014, elections will be held throughout Europe in order to elect representatives at the European
Parliament. These elections are a crucial moment for all who wish to take part in the European
project and democracy and will have great consequences on the orientation of the EU in the following
years. Despite the importance of these elections, the participation of particularly young people has
10 been very low in the past years, maybe because citizens aren’t sufficiently feeling the outcomes of
the work done by the EU in their everyday lives. If we wish these elections to be a success, and truly
representative, youth’s and school students’ voices must be heard and their needs taken into
consideration.

The European Project should be based on bringing peace to Europe by cooperation between the
15 member states on an economic and political level and share a common vision of human rights and
citizenship. Now, in the fifth year of the worst crisis since the Second World War, these achievements
are under threat from the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination, linked to the deterioration of
Europeans’ social conditions.

Europe is at a critical juncture where the decisions of today’s policy makers will have a tremendous
20 impact on the lives of tomorrow’s citizens. We must choose between the short-term reduction of costs
to lessen the debt and long-term investments in education, in order to overcome the crisis and to
build a European society of knowledge and democracy at all levels. Education must be seen as a long-
term investment in both the economy and the construction of an emancipated society. In this
perspective, education is the key to the success of the European Project.

The previous mandates of the European Parliament were devoted to the development of the common
25 market, the implementation of economic treaties and investment in strategic sectors like agriculture.
Education has not been a priority and has only been viewed from an economic perspective. Education
has almost been entirely the responsibility of national government and has been the subject of very
few European policies. What we, as OBESSU, expect from this mandate is for the EU to give education
the focus it deserves.

30 Massive investments must be made on both the national and European level, hidden costs and fees
must be eradicated and a right to succeed must be guaranteed to all young people. School students’
voice must be heard and taken into account in all stages of the decision-making process and finally
education policies must be set to the highest standards.

A universal right for education and equality

35 Education is the best way of empowering people in society and of giving everyone an equal right to be
emancipated and to access fulfilling employment, regardless of their initial social status. Secondary
education cannot be regarded as a universal right if it does not take into consideration the socio-
economic disparities between individuals. Social differences should not impact on school students’
rights to succeed therefore government must ensure equality in education, by all means possible.

40 Even though public schools are free to access in almost every country in Europe, hidden costs and fees
incurred by school students are a burden sometimes too heavy to carry for families with economic
difficulties, thus leading to exclusion and marginalization. Paying for books, stationary and equipment,



45 food, transport, school trips, cultural activities etc. constitutes a heavy expense for the majority of families and young people, especially in these times of economic crisis when living standards are being squeezed.

These added costs mean that not all necessities and opportunities are available to all students and therefore the aim of equality in education is not achieved. Social status is still one of the strongest determining factors in academic or vocational success. To ensure the right for all to succeed education must be entirely free.

50 The cost of education is not the only impediment to guaranteeing all school students the right to succeed. Extra-curricular activities can be just as beneficial as formal education and social disparities give a significant cultural advantage to the more affluent school students. Implementing an efficient school student welfare system is the best solution to this inequality. Every European school student must be guaranteed basic financial security in the shape of a student income, granted by the national
55 government.

A learning environment free from presumed gender constructions and gender-related discrimination has to be ensured. As school is the most important arena for shaping of personality and identity, it needs to deconstruct, rather than promote role clichés and gender stereotypes. We demand an educational system that allows every individual to discover and develop their identities regardless of
60 gender. By creating a learning environment free from presumed gender constructions and stereotypes, schools should be the first step in changing the way society impose gender-related norms, discriminations and inequalities.

Considering the fact that school students have no income to pay for healthcare insurance or social security, society should provide a free healthcare system for all minors in order to ensure that the lack of medical treatment due to financial difficulties will never be the cause of a young person failing
65 school. Youth is also a time of discovering life and taking risks. Prevention must also be ensured in schools by warning and informing students about the dangers of drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. Sex education should be mandatory for all school students and never become a taboo.

70 Finally, commodification of education must be prevented since it contradicts the principal of free education and delegates a public service to the private sector. OBESSU considers that education should not be a business or a service that can be sold, we believe in a free public service that would be provided to all young people equally.

Participation and Democracy.

75 We consider that the purpose of school is not only to break social barriers and train school students in the best possible way: its aim is also to educate emancipated active citizens. We believe that by changing the way schools are organised we can change society. School students must experience the ways and means of democracy in school if we wish them to fully understand the goals of participation in society. Schools tend to reproduce and contribute to social hierarchies instead of serving as
80 platforms for democratic citizenship and critical thinking. The opinions of young people are often treated as inferior in society, and this trend is clearly reflected in the school reality. School communities must re-claim their function as a grow-ground for democracy and active citizenship.

School students are often denied the right to fully influence their daily school life. In school, democracy remains just a theoretical concept learned in class and not practiced in reality. That is why school students must be free to organise themselves in independent assemblies or in school student
85 councils within every school in Europe so that they can take decisions and discuss any topic they wish to. Such assemblies will only reach their purpose once they are fully taken into consideration



whenever any decision concerning their school are made. School students must also be informed on their rights and on how they can get involved in these structures.

90 School students must also have their say in the way curricula and teaching methods are implemented and given the opportunity to evaluate the work of their teachers. Bringing dialogue in the teaching process will make it easier for all to learn in a safe environment.

95 The European Union must guarantee participation in all discussions and all decision-making affecting school life. School democracy is a way of improving the environment and the social climate in school. There is also an educational purpose in letting students have an influence on their environment and organise themselves democratically in order to take decisions. Active citizenship in society will be fostered if school students are given the opportunity of receiving a proper civic education and there is no better way of learning about democracy than living it. Democracy is a way of life, its culture of co-existence cannot be understood without actively taking part in it.

Vocational Education and Training.

100 Over the last thirty years national governments in Europe have used Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a way of opening access to secondary education to more and more school students. However VET has always been labelled as second-hand in regard to academic education, it is considered more as a solution for school students with difficulties rather than guaranteeing everyone access to higher education and personal fulfilment. VET presents in many cases limited social mobility and systems are
105 organised in such a way that they fail to provide university access to all school students.

In order to provide an equal right to succeed to everyone regardless of their social status, VET must be given the value it deserves. OBESSU believes that VET and academic education must be equally valued, also in gaining access to higher education. VET school students must be given the tools to access further education when finishing VET: this will require providing them with the same basics
110 competences than any other school students in academic education paths, in terms of languages, economics and social sciences. Learner-centred and alternative pedagogical methods should be considered in order to provide them the best education as possible.

115 One of the main differences between VET and academic school students is the hands-on experience gained during vocational education. This often contains training in private companies. In some cases already searching for an opportunity of an apprenticeship poses a problem, to then find oneself exposed to exploitation and bad working conditions.

120 The educational purpose of the apprenticeship or traineeship is also forgotten since some companies only see school students as cheap (or free) labour at their disposal. The government must recognise the status of apprentices as school students but also as workers in contact with the labor market by guaranteeing their rights through contracts and the labour code, at national and European level. Every school student should have a tutor that guarantees his/her rights and ensures that s/he is assigned tasks with high educational relevance during the apprenticeship period.

125 In order to achieve our goals VET will require massive investment and be prioritised. Of course, funding and administration of VET must remain the responsibility of the government as opposed to the private sector and private interests.