

# LEARNING FOR THE GREEN TRANSITION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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*OBESSU reaction at the  
Council recommendation*

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), representing school students rights in Europe since 1975 advocating for participatory, inclusive and quality education, welcomes the approval of a Council Recommendation on Learning for the green transition and sustainable development that could lead to a European framework, supporting Member States in developing and implementing policies in support of environmental sustainability at all levels of education and training.

The following reaction is based on the recommendations outlined by OBESSU in the frame of the Open Public Consultation leading to the Recommendation: the OBESSU Member Organisations collected these remarks during focus groups organised during the #EcoFighters project and through a consultative process involving independent, national unions of secondary school students and VET learners.

OBESSU takes this opportunity to highlight the crucial role of student and youth movements in raising awareness on environmental issues, leading a global mobilisation in which the Fridays for Future have been the central actor. Enhancing the school and VET students participation in the main decision bodies as relevant stakeholders on issues related to environmental issues is a decisive tool to impact our future in a fruitful way. OBESSU recalls the EU Youth Dialogue as the international frame in which the Council of Education and Youth Ministers can organise a positive cycle of exchange of views for a sustainable green Europe, as pointed out in the Council Recommendation.

OBESSU welcomes that the Recommendation recognises the need for interconnected learning across the environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainable development, implementing the frame outlined by the European Pillar of Social Rights and by the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, notably the targets 4.7 and 13.3. At the same time, OBESSU regrets the continuous centrality of the labour market, highlighted by the goal of “creating a generation of environment-conscious professionals and green economic operators”.

OBESSU demanded Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) had to be learner-centred, involving learners in each stage of the process, starting from the conceptualisation stage of the courses, and having an active role in co-creating learning methodologies and in designing curricula.

The Recommendations invite Member States to implement and further develop comprehensive and collaborative approaches, encouraging co-creation and gender-balanced participation of learners from all backgrounds. It is particularly relevant that the Council recommends to give learners hands-on opportunities “to observe and care for nature, and to reduce, repair, reuse and recycle, thereby helping them to understand the importance of sustainable lifestyles and the circular economy”: this is the final purpose of OBESSU’s suggestions on outdoors activities, outlined as a result of the requests of students collected in the research Through School Students’ Eyes. A direct link with nature is crucial to overcome the risk of an individualistic approach to EES, maybe driven by fully-digital approaches to the learning programs: this is a precious lessons learnt from the pandemic and highlighted by the Council, recognising “a long-standing concern for the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children, young people and adults” as a point to be addressed in a renewed focus on education and training systems.

OBESSU welcomes the strong invitation to the Member States in aligning “in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, strategies and plans in education and training with the green transition and sustainable development, including those related to curricula and assessment and educators’ initial training and continuing professional development”. Nonetheless, OBESSU regrets that the inevitable reference to the “principles of subsidiarity and proportionality” and to the “high degree of autonomy” of the Education Institutions replaced the importance of a broader coordination at the EU level. OBESSU recalls the need of setting up comparable frameworks for skills and competences in EES across the EU.

If the Council Recommendation suggests to “strengthen cooperation with existing international organisations”, as UNESCO and UNECE, “to foster an approach to education and training for the green transition and sustainable development with policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders”, OBESSU hopes that the EU International Cooperation Partnerships will provide substantial funding opportunities for developing common models of EES between EU and non-EU Countries.

OBESSU welcomes the whole-institution approach adopted by the Recommendation, where sustainability is included in all the activities and lifelong learning is a core component of its implementation, both in formal and in non-formal education. Nevertheless, OBESSU claims that each education and training program integrating EES needs to be accessible and inclusive for marginalised youth: young students in rural or internal areas, students or apprentices with limited financial resources and young unemployed people should receive consistent and specific support, because EES cannot be a luxury. In this field, OBESSU hopes that the few recommendations raised by the Council will be better developed by the Commission and by the Member States.

OBESSU is happy to report the positive inputs from the Council on creating, through the Education for Climate Coalition, “a community led by students and teachers, together with their schools and networks and other educational actors, to learn from as many relevant experiences as possible, and bridge fragmentation between education sectors, domains and people”: the European school students demand an effective interaction between the Educational Institutions and the local communities, with a concrete commitment of the public authorities.

Implementing educational programmes on environmental sustainability means financing better any social and cultural opportunity for school or VET students and young people to enhance their contribution in the community life: this is why OBESSU welcomes the Council’s invitation to stimulate, recognise and finance “traineeships, apprenticeships, volunteering, extra-curricular activities, youth work activities and other forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning and the links between them”.

Finally, as outlined also by the European sectoral and cross-sectoral trade unions, teachers and educators need to be empowered and equipped with skills, training opportunities, career development tools, mentoring schemes and substantial funding opportunities, in order to carry out an effective and proactive attitude in decoding, supporting and shaping the main contents of the green and digital transition.

OBESSU welcomes the overall approach of the Recommendation, adding that the specific role of the educator is to make any learner critically aware of each nuance of the twin transition, assuring their proactive role in this angle of citizenship education. This role and this set of tools is also important to assure the attractiveness of the teaching profession in line with the students' needs for the 21st century. As for the students unions, OBESSU advocates for the involvement of teachers and their unions as effective stakeholders, starting from the key role of Social Dialogue.