

# HØRINGSUTTAELSE

## General comments on the EU 2020 strategy consultation paper

The national student organisations of Norway welcomes the advanced position that education and research has been given in the draft EU 2020 strategy, and that there is a strong focus on education as a public good that benefits the whole population of Europe and the interdependence of the member states. Norwegian students would like to point out these key challenges for education and training in the next decade:



### Access to higher education and the social dimension

A key priority for the next decade should be to improve the social dimension in European higher education, by fostering more equal access to higher education and reverse the growing trend of introduction and increase of tuition fees.

Norwegian students support the anticipation that “the next decade will see an increasing demand for high-qualified and adaptable workforce and more skills-dependent jobs”<sup>1</sup>, and also that “cutting spending in forward-looking areas such as education and research” would make it more difficult to achieve the 2020 vision that the Commission has outlined in the draft EU 2020 strategy<sup>2</sup>.

A benchmark of increasing the share of people aged 30-34 years with successfully completed tertiary educational attainment to at least 40 %, was adopted in the Education and Training 2020 strategy. If this is to be achieved, EU needs to advocate social measures such as improved financing of students, student housing and remove access barriers. This should be included in the EU 2020 strategy. We strongly believe increased introduction of tuition fees and financial burdens on students will constrain access to and equity in education. Equal access to higher education is for us also of principal value. Many European states has ratified the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, that demand them to make higher education equally accessible to all, particular by progressive introduction of free education**<sup>3</sup>. Further introduction of tuition fees will violate this commitment.

In the draft strategy, the Commission raises many crucial arguments for the maintenance and further development of social security systems in order to meet priorities listed in the strategy, such as education and training. One of those arguments states that “social, economic and environmental objectives must go hand in hand”<sup>4</sup>. The social dimension in higher education represents a combination of at least two of these components: social and financial objectives. The social dimension of higher education aims at providing the best possible conditions for the population to acquire knowledge and competencies through higher education, by ensuring broad access to higher education (education for all) and affordable and decent living conditions for students. The current trend of introducing tuition fees and the increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> COM (2008) 868/3 New skills for New Jobs

<sup>2</sup> COM (2009) 647 Consultation on the future “EU 2020” Strategy

<sup>3</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 13 (c)

<sup>4</sup> COM (2009) 647 Consultation on the future “EU 2020” Strategy

growing size of the fees, are developments that systematically weaken the social dimension of higher education in Europe, thus it also threatens the region's ability to meet the priorities listed in this draft strategy by undermining the society's ability to acquire much needed knowledge and competencies. The Norwegian students would like to see adequate indicators and benchmarking for the social dimension in the follow up of this strategy. It is important that benchmarking is not only done on rankings and excellence for institutions, and we see that there has already been taken initiative on European level to design such a benchmark.

### **Quality and mobility**

Furthermore, the EU 2020 strategy should introduce aims of improving student centred learning, entrepreneurship, employability, learning outcomes, success in education and cohesion with research and innovation on all levels of higher education. An important step to improve quality in education is to increase the advantage of mobility in higher education. EU should adopt a benchmark for mobility that complies with the Bologna Process' objective for 2020.

### **Public investment in education**

As mentioned, the Norwegian students acknowledge strongly "that cutting spending in forward-looking areas such as education and research" will make it impossible to achieve the visions of the 2020 strategy. Following the financial crisis, it is urgent that the commitment to stronger public investment in higher education is raised on all levels. The EU has fallen behind in spending on higher education compared to the US and Japan, and we fear that the gap will not be repaired by private sector contributions alone. Also, as outlined above, we see increased introduction of tuition fees as undermining the society's ability to acquire the needed knowledge and competencies as outlined in the draft EU 2020 strategy. Thus, the strategy should mark a stronger commitment to public investment in higher education that in turn will benefit the whole society. The success of the EU 2020 strategy will rest on the ability to ensure necessary investment in skills and education.

The students of Norway welcome the central place given to higher education in the EU 2020 strategy, however, we strongly urge that the priorities outlined above will be included in the strategy.

### **Specific comments on the text of the consultation document**

*Europe has some of the best universities in the world. But our ambition should be to have many more and turn them into a true engine for knowledge and growth. This will not only require investment but also reforms and where necessary consolidation, closer co-operation, including with business, and a more open attitude to change. To assist in this process of change, European universities should be benchmarked against the best universities in the world<sup>5</sup>.*

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<sup>5</sup> COM (2009) 647 Consultation on the future "EU 2020" Strategy

The draft strategy outlines an ambition to have more world class universities, however, the Norwegian students believe that it is considerably more important to formulate an ambition that includes a diversified *and* high quality mass of higher education institutions in Europe. The 2020 strategy clearly lacks an aim of developing high quality higher education for all, which complies better with the Commission's objectives of developing skills and knowledge that will benefit Europe as a whole. We believe in a renewed focus on broad and flexible quality assurance such as revisiting the European Standards and Guidelines, rather than simplified benchmarking based on incomprehensive data.

*Raising the quality of Europe's universities and of their research should go hand in hand with greater mobility of students to acquire new knowledge and languages, gaining experience living and studying abroad and building networks. A new phase in the existing programmes Erasmus, Leonardo and Erasmus Mundus should be considered, complemented by national initiatives, giving all young people in Europe the possibility to spend part of their educational pathway in other Member States.*

Norwegian students support the priority of mobility, but would like to point out that also mobility to countries outside of the European community is valuable and important in order to improve programs and other educational cooperation-agreements.

*The way forward is a research partnership between the EU and Member States which maximises synergy with other policy areas especially innovation and education.*

We also support this aim, and wish to emphasise that better cohesion between research, innovation and education on all levels of higher education is essential.

*"A well-functioning system of intellectual property rights, which allows for efficient and costeffective protection, enables innovative business start-ups, provides authors with a transparent management of their rights, and helps universities and research institutions to raise capital through the commercialisation of their ideas and inventions is needed to develop the creativity, knowledge and research capacity in Europe."*

When developing the system of intellectual property rights, it is crucial to ensure academic freedom, and that executing institutions of research are given the rights to their research results. To expand the access to research results, use of open access publishing should be expanded.

### **Policy process on implementing education objectives within EU 2020**

*"The aim for 2020 is to achieve a genuine European Knowledge Area, underpinned by a world-class knowledge infrastructure, in which all actors (students, teachers, researchers, education and research institutions and enterprises) benefit from the free circulation of people, knowledge and technology (the 5th freedom)."*

If this aim is to be achieved there is a strong need to improve the policy implementation process. When evaluating the implementation of the Lisbon agenda and the Education &

Training 2010 strategy in the last decade, we see that neither progress nor commitment has been strong enough. We believe this clearly indicates that the Open Method of Coordination has not been open enough and has failed to combine forces with governments, institutions and stakeholders on national and local level. The students in Norway agree fully that if the goals of 2020 are to be achieved “*Europe needs to promote key, agreed priorities and to work on delivering them over several years*”. That is why we would like to stress the importance of balanced and essential priorities within higher education that are supported by key stakeholders, such as students themselves.

It is also clear to us that EU should not compete with the Bologna Process in building a European Knowledge Area that have incompatible priorities with the objectives of the Bologna Process’ EHEA. In too many instances we see that the EU Commission introduce recommendations and actions that fail to achieve consensus within the Bologna framework, but regardless of this get pushed further by the Commission. Examples of this are the feasibility study of rankings of universities and repeated recommendations of tuition fees.