

OBESSU is the European platform for national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education. OBESSU brings together organisations from more than 25 European countries. Being an organisation defending the rights and the interests of the European school students, OBESSU wants to put forward the following:

## ***2. How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?***

In most cases school constitutes the first experience of formalised learning and thus it influences the students' views on learning in general. A wide range of pedagogical methods, a supportive learning environment and a good social climate helps the students to learn to learn. Learning to learn includes identifying the methods that suits and support your learning as well as your strengths and weaknesses and ways of dealing with them. Therefore it is important to offer the students guidance as well as opportunities to influence their education. Learning to learn also includes learning to search for information and to critically analyse one's sources.

The view on education is far too narrow, often restricted to activities taking place in formal learning structures. The possibilities of learning through all kinds of non-compulsory activities are often forgotten, as is the value of the learning process itself. Firstly, non-formal learning should be included in the formal education. Secondly, activities outside of class have to be encouraged and recognised. Non-formal education is an important complement to formal education, offering learners the possibility to develop new sides to themselves and take active part in the civil society. OBESSU demands that a system for the recognition of non-formal education is developed, taking the specific nature of the non-formal learning into account.

As mentioned above, school has an important role to play in forming the attitudes towards learning. The link between the school and the surrounding society must never be lost, as it constitutes the bridge between the school and a continuous learning process.

## ***3. How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth in Europe?***

We do not believe that education should be considered merely a tool for economic growth. Education is a tool for individual and social development, through which people are able to develop critical thought and an awareness of what they want to achieve in life.

Economic growth is only one of the potential results of developing peoples' skills; limiting the focus of education systems and curricula to an economic perspective can, in the long term, be disadvantageous for an economy: an educational system which is concentrated on the existing labour market is useful only for preparing a labour force in the short term, and may fail to provide individuals with skills for intellectual enquiry and an appreciation of learning, and may also prevent education from acting as a tool for personal development and as a contributing factor to the development of an equitable society.

Indicators and benchmarks outlined by EU to meet the goals of the Lisbon strategy should not be seen as comprehensive for educational progress towards economic growth in Europe. Progress towards these benchmarks show large inequalities between European countries. It is absolutely necessary to stress that member states need to set benchmarks and work towards these according to each country's individual situation and needs.

## ***4. How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?***

The governments in Europe have to ensure all young people's access to education, not only to primary

education, but also securing the access to secondary education, encouraging young people to take part in different educational pathways. Free access to education has to be guaranteed and the schools have to be prepared to welcome all school students, from all socio-economic backgrounds. Free access to education is not only an education free from tuition fees, but includes free learning materials, access to libraries and cultural institutions as well as subsidised trips to and from school and possible housing benefits.

Education should always remain a governmental responsibility and a strictly public service, reflecting the interests of the society and not only those of a private contractor. A privatized education is not promoting an equal society but a concept of competition, efficiency and profit maximization. This is not only limiting the access, but also the “circulation” of the knowledge and thereby preventing social mobility.

All stakeholders in the field of education need to be involved when addressing the issue of early school leavers, especially the expertise of the school student representatives have to be recognised.

Guidance is an important tool to use to inform the school student of their possibilities within both the formal and non-formal education. Easily accessible and objective counselling from professionals is an absolute necessity in order to reduce early school leaving. Counsellors must provide information and guidance in an educational context, but also focus on the well-being of each student. This will contribute to school students getting the adequate motivation to not only finish their current educational situation, but also to continue learning in a lifelong perspective.

Many students feel a lack of ownership of their own education; it is often difficult to influence the content, the teaching methods and the school community in general. Many schools also stand for rather old-fashioned values and views, creating a distance between the school reality and the one of the students. In order to be really inclusive and follow its educational purpose, schools must include all stakeholders in the decision making process and take their different needs into account. The school has to encourage diversity and create a good social climate, where the students are well cared for. Moreover, school has to stay open to the surrounding society, especially the civil society. Different forms of practical occupational experiences should also be encouraged.

### ***5. If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organization and the roles of teachers?***

When developing and improving the education and the pedagogical methods, the needs of the school students have to be the starting point. Therefore the teachers and the school students should plan the education and evaluation together.

Learning is never a simple transmission of knowledge from teachers to students but an exchange of knowledge. The students must never be considered “tabula rasas”, but as individuals with certain skills and expertise and therefore students should be encouraged to actively take part in their education and share their knowledge.

There are as many ways of learning as there are school students in the classroom. This reality requires a wide range of pedagogical methods and a continuous development of these. Emphasis should be put on participatory methods, since these are often neglected. The EU should publish research on different pedagogical methods and the results of them. Different pilot projects on pedagogical methods should also be encouraged and financially supported.

An area that has remained undeveloped for a very long time is the evaluation of the performances of the students. The existence of marks in school education shapes the curriculum, the teaching and learning methods and the relations between teachers and students. This does not favor the students learning process. Constructive evaluation is vital. Evaluation cannot only go one way; the competence of both giving and taking critique

leads to a development process, where both the school student, the teacher and the learning itself are in focus. A test result or a grade is not enough to highlight the weaknesses and strengths of a student. Therefore completions of oral and written evaluation are essential. The test should be a learning situation in itself. Today's final exams do not encourage students to have a long-term perspective on learning, but merely a teach-to-test attitude.

Since the school is the common place of work for school students and teachers, the buildings have to be of good standard and provide them with the appropriate spaces for learning activities, enabling both individual work and group projects, as well as open spaces where students can meet to study, improve their skills and express their creativity. Schools should be open in the afternoons for different projects run by school students and teachers.

The social climate is also a self-evident part of the working environment and the whole school community has to join their efforts to create a school where everybody feels welcome. This includes the production of anti-bullying and harassment policies.

The school community needs tools for conflict management and solution, based on collaborative problem-solving methods, where all parties involved are respected.

Students with special educational needs have to be entitled to extra support and training, but should never be put in separate special schools.

Education in both the official language(s) of the country of residence and the mother tongue of the student has to be guaranteed.

***6. How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?***

School holds an important role in the development of active citizenship and the understanding of democratic processes. However, school is still an undemocratic institution; school students are not able to influence their daily school life enough. In schools of today democracy is taught but not practiced, despite the fact that democracy can only be understood through experience. School democracy is to enable and promote participation of all the students, all the teachers, and all the school staff in all discussions and all decision-making affecting school life, through the establishing of structures and bodies supporting it.

All schools have to have a school student representative body and the role of the school student unions at national level has to be recognized. National and local institutions should financially support the work of the school student unions. EU should formally recognise the proposal of a Declaration of School Student Rights that was adopted by the European School Student Unions in 2006.

Active citizenship and entrepreneurship are learned especially through experience, so are the respect for human rights and diversity as well as the awareness of sustainable development. Therefore the school community has to live according to these ideals and promote these values in all of its activities. Global-, human rights- and environmental education have to become an integrated part of the formal education throughout Europe, enabling teachers to address and work with these issues already in primary school.

School reflects society and therefore school students should never be segregated because of gender, nationality, religious beliefs, social background, or skills.

The educational systems have to reflect the multicultural Europe and intercultural learning has to be an integral part of national curricula. The intercultural approach has to be visible in all subjects. History manuals should be rewritten from an intercultural point of view, making sure that we don't picture the "others" as inferior or "enemies", and helping both students and teachers to reach understanding

It is important to reflect on and critically analyse the surrounding world, therefore space has to be provided in the classrooms for discussions about current events, what the historical background of conflicts is and why the media is picturing events the way it does.

Internet can be a great resource for participation and exchange of ideas and therefore it is important to find a way to use it constructively in education. Teachers need to be trained in this and schools should be equipped with sufficient technology.

Twinning of schools should be encouraged and financially supported since it increases the understanding for different realities. Cultural exchanges for students should become an integral part of the curricula. The Junior Erasmus Program should be a clear priority of the European Union, since there is no such exchange program for secondary students. All stakeholders have to be involved in the development of the program and it has to be granted sufficient funding.

### ***7. How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?***

All teachers must be as highly educated in pedagogy as in the subject they teach. Teachers must be entitled to continuous training, in all issues identified as important by teachers, students or the school staff.

Teachers need to have preparedness for the diversity of the classroom to be able to take it into account and benefit from it. In order to guarantee a secure learning environment for all, the diversity of the school students has to be reflected in the curriculum and all teaching methods and materials.

Many teachers are unaware of gender-related issues and their importance. Hence, teachers should be properly trained about these issues and how to deal with situations arising from the associated stereotypes, both in school and society.

Teachers should be encouraged to evaluate their teaching regularly. The school students must have the opportunity to evaluate the lessons and the teacher's performance.

### ***8. How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?***

To have a high-quality educational system is the main objective and task of every national government. Assessments in school students' performance in different subjects are used in order to evaluate the different educational systems on both European and international level. If the aim is to test the quality of the education, all the aspects of the education have to be taken into account; factors as the well-being of the students, the social climate and the democratic structures should be considered as important as the success in particular subjects. Therefore OBESSU demands that the international community improves the benchmarks of the tests. These criteria have to be defined by all stakeholders, including the school students and teachers.

The opportunity to influence the daily school life increases both the motivation and the feeling of ownership. Thus a system of co-decision-making has to be introduced in the governing bodies of the school, including stakeholders such as students and teachers in the running and the development of the school.