Introduction

OBESSU – The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions is the platform for cooperation between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe. It was founded in April 1975 in Dublin, Ireland and brings together Member and Candidate Organisations from 19 European countries. All Member Organisations are independent, national, representative and democratic school student organisations.

One of OBESSU’s aims is to promote equal access to education and to strive for the end of all discrimination and injustice within educational systems. In the spring of 2012 OBESSU held a Study Session in co-operation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe titled “Special Needs”: education, participation and social inclusion. Participants saw a need of an increased focus on social inclusion in education and therefore proposed an amendment including a campaign on social inclusion to the next Workplan of the organisation. The Workplan was adopted including the proposal at the OBESSU General Assembly in May 2012 in Copenhagen. Following this, OBESSU conducted the campaign “Education, we have a problem!” during 2013 and 2014. The campaign aimed at raising awareness of different inequalities that young people face today in attending secondary education in Europe today such as; cost of education, discrimination of immigrants and LGBTQ young people and educational environments that are not accessible for disabled school students.

As an outcome of “Education, we have a problem!” OBESSU has, in co-operation with its partners, produced the following guidelines to inclusive education. Their aim is to shed light on the word inclusiveness, and explain what school students actually mean when demanding inclusive education.

The guidelines are divided into four categories; equal access to education, equality between educational paths, an inclusive school environment and inclusive teaching methods.

Equal access to education

The first step when creating a socially inclusive education system is to give everyone access to it. Every person in Europe has the right to education and this also means that education has to be accessible for everyone. Social standing is inherited and the only way the circle of exclusion can be stopped is to offer everyone equally qualitative education regardless of the students’ socioeconomic background. In a global world national education systems needs to also open their doors to students with origin in a different country. Education systems need to be accessible for all.

The following aspects contribute to making education accessible:

- Free and equal access to all educational institutions for all, disregarding social standing;
- Social autonomy of school students from their parents, by ensuring students an income;
- No hidden costs in education, including costs of school material, school trips and exams;
- School students to have access to means of gaining knowledge outside formal education, including facilitated access to cultural institutions, cultural products and extra-curricular activities;
- All school students belonging to a linguistic, religious or cultural minority to have the same equal access to quality education without any discrimination;
- Education given to every child and young person in a country, including also asylum seekers;
Counselling and career guidance offered to all young people finishing one stage of their education, making it possible for them to take well-informed decisions regarding their future education or career.

**Equality between educational paths**

Young people learn in different ways and different educational paths fit everyone differently. Different types of education should be valued equally and the school student choosing the different paths should be seen as equals. Governments need to make sure the school systems in the countries, independent from the municipality, are offering the same quality education. To avoid gaps between educational providers educational decision makers have to stop looking solely at results from different rankings when improving the education systems. Education is a value in itself and narrow assessments will never give a holistic picture.

The following aspects contribute to more inclusive education paths:

- Equal valuation of merits gained in VET and academic training;
- Education choices based on preference and competences and not influenced by gender stereotypes;
- Prevention of competition between schools and between different types of education based on ranking;
- A shifted focus from ranking based on students’ performance in standardised tests to a focus on the learning process and the individual progress;
- Education and training never to turn into a product on the international trade arena, but remain seen as something with a value in itself.

**An inclusive school environment**

In order for school students to be fully included in education, it is important that the school environment where they attend school is aware and fully supportive of their needs. This concerns both the physical as well as the social environment. All school students need to feel ownership of their education and a sense of belonging. For this reason school democracy and students’ participation in decision making contribute to the wellbeing of students in a positive way.

The following aspects contribute to a more inclusive an educational environment:

- A physical environment that is inclusive to school students with special needs; e.g. all spaces have to be accessible for wheelchair-users and all school material has to be accessible for school students with any disabilities;
- Clear anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies have to be adopted at national level and in every school community;
- A school environment that recognizes every student as an individual person rather than a member of a gender and reflects all students’ identities;
- Structures and bodies supporting active student participation to be established in every secondary school in Europe.

**Inclusive teaching methods**

A big part of inclusive education is what happens in the classrooms. It is important that also the teaching methods are designed to fit the different school students with various needs. It is important to remember that there are as many ways of learning in a classroom as there are learners. This means that the methods used have to be designed to fit the individuals in the group, they have to be various and inclusive. Too often the teaching methods used in formal education today are frontal and formal, a way
of teaching that only fits some of the school students. Teaching methods in a modern world cannot remain in the 1990s. The way young people are being taught today needs reflect the world we live in. A way of making sure the teaching methods used are inclusive enough is to include school students in shaping the curricula and in determining the methods used.

The following aspects contribute to more inclusive ways of learning:

- Alternative pedagogical methods to be used as an added value to the formal education methods and students to be equal partners in the creation of curriculum and teaching methods;
- Teaching material free from hetero-normativity and gender stereotypes;
- A learning environment free from stereotypes and discrimination on the ground of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression;
- Teacher education that gives teachers a broad spectrum of different teaching methods, including NFE (non-formal education), to use and adapt according to the group;
- Teaching methods to reflect the modern world including broader use of ICT in education, and equal access to ICT through prevention of the BYOD principle (bring your own device).