Final Resolution

“New Skills for New Schools: Education & Training and Work”

Adopted at the OBESSU General Assembly, Copenhagen, 19th-20th May 2012

From the 11 to the 15 of December 2011 the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) gathered its members in Oslo for a convention on the topic of Vocational Education and Training (VET), with a special emphasis on the structure of the VET system and the existing support systems.

We, as school student representatives, see this as an integral part of school student representation and the social dimension of the school environment. We believe that a broad consensus on the matters of Vocational Education and Training is needed and therefore we have concluded the following:

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational Education and Training (VET) should in essence provide school students with: a specific hands-on knowledge within the selected course of choice, the skills and qualifications to use their knowledge in a practical sense and assure that the individual has the qualifications to take on the career of his or her choice.

We, the school student representatives of Europe, are concerned about the low social status of VET and the fact that in many countries VET is seen as less important than academic education. VET school students are often considered to be less likely to do well in academic studies or that they come from a lower socio-economic background than academic school students. We want to correct these preconceptions.

During the convention, OBESSU launched a campaign on the matters of Vocational Education and Training. This will focus on VET as an integral part of all upper secondary school student representation; and on how to correct the social discrimination towards VET and VET school students, thus making sure that VET school students are properly represented in their education both in schools and out in the labour market. We want to raise awareness of Vocational Education and Training and increase the value of VET and VET school students.

The quality of VET includes up to date equipment and information, quality of apprenticeship and qualified teachers.

Therefore we demand:

- That decision-making in VET schools should be independent from any actors of the labour market, in particular when it comes to the curricula;
That VET school students should have language and social studies. Alternative pedagogical methods should be considered;

Free education that includes materials, facilities, transportation and health care, without any consequences;

Safe educational environment and materials;

Enough adequate study places in VET schools;

Quality education provided by adequate number of qualified teachers;

VET students should be heard in all decision making processes concerning them, on their terms;

That the importance of VET should be recognised;

That VET and academic school students must be viewed as equals and have equal rights;

That School Student Unions must include VET school students more and give them more responsibilities.

Apprenticeships

When talking about Vocational Education and Training one must not forget that apprenticeships are also a big part of that discussion. In order to finish their VET studies, school students need to go out into the labour market to get the experience and the skills needed in order to gain the qualifications to work in the field of their choice. Therefore we see apprenticeships as integral part of all VET studies.

When school students are out in the labour market during their apprenticeships it can often be forgotten that they are still school students and should have the same rights and protection as those still within the formal institutions.

OBESSU strongly believes that a set of conditions must be ensured to all VET school students. By setting a clear list of conditions we can prevent the school students for (possibly) being exploited as cheap labour for the companies’ benefit, often in bad working conditions in a discriminative environment.

The valuable experiences they receive during their apprenticeships are vital for their future work and the society. So quality apprenticeships must be ensured to all VET school students.

Therefore we demand:

That there are enough positions provided for any school student who wants to do apprenticeships;

That all school students must be given educationally relevant work at the place of the apprenticeship term;

That the apprentice has to be tutored both by the school and the work place to ensure that they and the apprentice are in good co-operation. The tutor must monitor the work and make sure the school student does not lose motivation;
• That the work conditions and the rights of the apprentice should be regulated in a contract signed by all parties;

• That health and safety risks regarding the apprentice must be considered at the workplace and the school, and that relevant social protection must be provided;

• That equal payment must be guaranteed without it undermining the educational value of the apprenticeship;

• That the material and equipment needed at the workplace must be provided, for free, by the workplace;

• That the length and tasks of the apprenticeship have to correspond to specific learning objectives. Time spent at school and the workplace have to be balanced;

• That after the apprenticeship, a standardised certificate must be given to the apprentice that states the competences acquired.

Representation of VET school students and relations with the labour market

Education and training are processes of lifelong and life-wide learning, as well as inalienable human rights for the achievement of cultural and social emancipation and fulfilment. Being a cornerstone of everyone's life, it is necessary to emphasise the value of the cultural and formative aim of education. It needs to be avoided to consider it merely as a tool for social selection with the specific aim of creating a workforce.

At the same time it is fundamental to promote a fruitful relationship between schools and the labour market. Education should never passively adapt to current labour market trends but, on the contrary, it should be a space to foster and experience active citizenship and promote a rights-based society for tomorrow's worker.

Thus, it becomes crucial to define a clearer and more structured cooperation between the labour market and education. School student representation covers both secondary school students within the formal education institutions as well as apprenticeships, thus making it important to look at the connection between the school students and the trade unions.

All mentioned actors together are able to provide a wider perspective and constructive inputs for the development of academic and Vocational Education and Training.

Therefore we demand:

• That, at all times and at all levels, school student representatives should have communication with the state, the trade unions and the teacher unions about the student needs and the current labour market trends;

• That by any means the cultural and formative value of education should be preserved;

• That during the apprenticeship the school student representative bodies should have an interactive dialogue with the involved trade unions;

• That school students undertaking an apprenticeship as part of their education are still considered school students and should therefore be represented by the school student representative bodies as well.
New School System Structures

As secondary education can lead to higher education, it is important to assess the structure of the school system and to guarantee that there is a clear link between the two education stages: upper secondary and higher education. Upper secondary education must be able to provide students with the tools and the knowledge needed for further studies. The current division between vocational and academic education should not be seen as a barrier for critical assessment of the challenges and possibilities of a combined educational system. Both VET and academic students’ access to higher education should be guaranteed.

Guidance is a key factor in the school students’ decision making process. As young people make choices concerning their future and possible further studies, it is of utmost importance that schools provide them with sufficient information about their options and that school students are given a hands on experience of different opportunities.

Therefore we demand:

- That in every level of the education system there must be one counsellor for the school students’ private matters and one to guide them in matters relating to their education. Counsellors must be properly educated;
- That school students should have the possibility to visit different types of educational institutions before deciding on their possible further education;
- That objective material on the differences between educational institutions should be provided on national level focusing on teaching methods and focus points;
- That regular counselling must be combined with peer-to-peer counselling;
- That a combined VET and academic education should be available, and it should co-exists with academic and VET schools;
- That school students socio-economic background must not affect their access to higher education;
- That if school students want to change from VET to academic education the state should give the necessary additional education to be able to get accepted to university;
- That school students’ qualifications should be recognised throughout Europe.

The demands mentioned above were made with utmost concern about the situation surrounding VET. We, the school student representatives of Europe, believe that only by taking these points into consideration can a change for the better be possible. We urge school students around Europe to take a stand and Claim Their Voice.