OBESSU Political Platform

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Introduction

A distinction is very often made between youth and the rest of the population on the basis of age and experience. In political discourse and action, youth is often treated as a homogenous group without much respect for the social diversity it represents. School students have to be considered a social group of their own and it has to be acknowledged that there are special experiences, needs and rights unique for school students. Every group in society has the right to be represented and to have influence over decisions concerning them. As such, school students cannot be represented by anyone other than themselves. Only the principle of direct self-representation prevents school students from vanishing in the large generation defined as “young people”. This principle must be maintained and encouraged, not only in schools, but also in politics at local, regional, national and European level. Nevertheless, there is a serious lack of opportunities and a remarkable number of obstacles for school students to take part in decision-making processes already at school level. The result is that policies affecting the every-day life of school students are developed without any involvement of the school students themselves. This democratic failure is what justifies the existence of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions, OBESSU.

OBESSU as Educational Stakeholder

OBESSU is a non-profit, independent, nonpartisan organisation, founded in April 1975 in Dublin, Ireland. Being the lead organisation for school student unions active in general secondary and vocational secondary education in Europe, OBESSU serves as a platform for school students across Europe to unite in one strong school student movement. OBESSU is a unique structure run by school students for school students, and therefore possesses a wealth of knowledge and information exclusive to the organisation. Being the sole representative of European school students, OBESSU has to be recognised as an expert in the field of education. OBESSU is a key player on the European arena of policy-making on educational and youth matters, representing the voice of secondary school students towards European decision-making bodies, political institutions and other stakeholders in the field of education. The protection of school student rights must be ensured in the European and national policies on education. OBESSU takes initiative of cooperation and dialogue between representative bodies for students, teachers, school principals and other institutions possessing political power. In this process, OBESSU plays a key role in widening the well-represented narrow perception of education. In the eyes of OBESSU, the matter of education can never be tackled without, in parallel, tackling society as a whole - education is not a static fragment of society, but a process constantly shaping society. It represents a challenge to bring the debate on education to society as something valuable not only for the few actors interested in specific educational matters, but also for society as a whole. As such, the existence of OBESSU is wholly dependent on the relationship between the organisation and its members: without a direct link to the grassroots, OBESSU loses its value and meaning as educational stakeholder and school students’ representative.

OBESSU’s Core Values

At OBESSU’s core, we believe that education is fundamental and is therefore a human right. Therefore, we have produced the Declaration of School Student Rights which advocates for equal rights for all school students.
Why is education fundamental?

Education should be considered a lifelong process of developing knowledge, skills, abilities and social competences. Education is the development of a personality and an identity. Education is a growing curiosity and a will to examine, question and to learn more. Education is opening up one’s mind and senses to yet unfamiliar fields of knowledge. Education is confronting established truths, never accepting “that is just the way it is” for an answer. Education is social inclusion and building solidarity. Education opens up possibilities. Education is a process enabling us to become reflective and self-determinate persons and citizens of the world. Education is a human right. That is to say that everyone has the right to self-fulfilment and to develop the critical thinking crucial to democratic citizenship. Thus, the right to access an education of free and informed choice must be granted to everyone at all times. Knowledge is the only thing that prevents us from being isolated.

OBESSU believes that educational curricula should always stem from respect for the interests and needs of different learners. However, educational content is at present to a large extent dictated by external factors, such as the interests of the private sector and private investors. A focus is put on what the students should become, not who they could become. OBESSU wants a school where diversity is both respected and actively promoted, where individual talents are encouraged and each student feels included in the social school community. OBESSU wants a school where there is space for personal development, active participation and curiosity. OBESSU wants an education that gives students the tools and the will to question the current values, surrounding power-systems and structures. Only by these measures is it possible to measure quality in education and only through high-quality education is societal progression possible. The school students of today are not only forming the society of tomorrow, but also the society of today. Educational structures and contents must be designed accordingly.

School as the basis for democracy and active citizenship

Often the opinions of youth are regarded as “less worthy” by society, and this tendency is reflected in school reality. School often reproduces the hierarchical power structures of society in which young people are found at the very bottom. OBESSU is concerned by the lack of students’ participation in decision-making processes in school. Democracy remains merely a theoretical concept preached in class, and not practiced in reality. OBESSU believes that school provides the perfect environment for the growth of democracy and active citizenship at a grassroots level, and that every actor within the school community must be given equal value and equal ownership of the school. That includes having an equal voice in shaping school environment. School democracy is a way of experiencing democratic processes first hand; learning what it means to cooperate, compromise and work together in order to achieve common goals, as well as improving the social climate in school. There is an obvious connection between students’ participation and performance. Active participation in the school leads to an increased sense of ownership, fuelling engagement and resilience, which in turn leads to higher self-esteem, a deeper motivation and in the end, more effective learning. Schools are also the place of learning about the world and its people and should adopt a more global education approach within its walls and curricula. These schools should be accessible to all.
Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- students to be recognised as equal partners in all decision-making processes not only within school, but also in politics and civil society wherever decisions affecting school-life are made;
- structures and bodies supporting active students’ participation to be established in every secondary school in Europe;
- Student councils, bodies and structures should receive resources from schools (e.g. financial support, spaces and time)
- European wide Citizenship education accessible to all students, which also focuses on combating intolerance through fostering: mutual understanding, respect and solidarity;
- teacher training on supporting students’ initiatives and students’ participation;
- the expansion of curricula in order to encourage students to more actively participate in affairs related not only to their school, but also to activities within the community and political arena.
- that international schools and schools with a more global educational approach should be available to all students

The Declaration of School Student Rights

The situation of school students in Europe varies remarkably from region to region and thus OBESSU works towards guaranteeing every European school student a high-quality education and an equal set of rights - not only in different regions but also in different educational institutions. In this context, OBESSU works for the recognition of school students as a unique group of society with special needs and rights. These rights are laid down in the Declaration of School Student Rights, paying attention to the specific situation of school students not covered in any other globally recognised declaration of rights. The Declaration of School Student Rights highlights rights which are already granted in some parts of Europe, and promotes others in areas not yet covered, neither by European regulations nor by national legislation on the continent. The human rights, rights of the child and the rights given to employees by the European Social Charter are not directly referring to students and nonetheless they are violated in many schools in our continent. The objective of the Declaration is to guarantee the same rights for students throughout Europe and secure their standing both in school and in civil society. This document must empower school students all over Europe to stand up against mistreatment and engage in influencing the everyday life in school. As a right has no force unless it is used, school students must be informed about their rights and empowered to take active use of them, both as school students and as citizens. Due to the fact that school students are not made aware of their lawful rights, they are not given sufficient opportunities to claim these rights or to complain when they are violated. Therefore, an independent body with the responsibility to watch over school student rights, to take action when these rights are violated, to handle and investigate complaints and to develop and revise school students’ rights must be established in every education system. School students’ representatives must be involved in the work of such bodies, and, due to their practical experience, be regarded as experts when dealing with these issues.
Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- the Declaration of School Student Rights to be adopted and implemented into legislation by National authorities, the Council of Europe and the European Union;
- the establishment of independent authorities in charge of supervising and promoting the implementation of the Declaration;
- student involvement in every stage of the implementation of the Declaration.

**Policy areas**

**Access to education**

Making education throughout life accessible to all is the key to a prosperous future. Unfortunately, only primary education is part of the Declaration of Human Rights. OBESSU believes that secondary and further education are also human rights. All across Europe, there are cases of young people being denied to attend education, without the possibility to pursue and develop their interest and bring out their personal potential. Exclusion from education appears in numerous ways, among them disadvantaged socio-economic background, ethnic origin and stereotypical patterns. We trust that all the obstacles keeping young people from entering any educational paths must be abolished. Access to knowledge and the protection of its public character must become the main focus of the renewed European social protection systems, since this is also the key to a socially responsible European future.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- the abolishment of any kind of fees linked to education and training;
- free and equal access to all educational institutions for all, disregarding social standing.

**Privatisation of education**

Privatisation of education is the process by which partial or total responsibility for the management and administration of public educational systems is given to private stakeholders or foundations. Potential financial challenges within educational systems cannot be faced through reforms involving privatised management and cost cutting strategies from the private sector. OBESSU firmly believes education should always remain a governmental responsibility and a public service, reflecting the interests of the society and not those of private contractors. OBESSU trusts that an enlarged variety in educational institutions is something that could empower the whole school system, also with the help of non-profit institutions and other private actors, but should remain responsibility of the government to fund institutions with alternative approaches to education, to ensure that these alternatives are accessible for everyone.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- decision-making within educational institutions to remain independent from any actors of the labour market and the international trade arena;
• education as a public service, funded by the state, enriched by non-financial contribution from the private sector to develop alternative learning systems.

Access to further and higher education

All students must have the right to access further and higher education after secondary school, which should give all the instruments to choose how to continue the formation process, in base of students' skills and dreams. Furthermore, there should be no financial, social, cultural or any other kind of barrier preventing students from accessing higher education. Higher education entrance criteria should be flexible and not linked with any kind of fee that could exclude the most disadvantaged. Degrees in VET should entitle the student to access both academic and vocational third-level education and must not be regarded less worthy than a degree in academic secondary education. Higher education should always be a responsibility of the public state and never be given into hands of private companies, in order to ensure high quality education for all.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• higher education to be guaranteed by the public state to ensure same chances for everyone;
• free access to further and higher education for all students that have completed secondary education;
• both academic degree and a degree in VET to allow equal access to tertiary education;
• school to prepare the students for entering higher education by providing them with accurate skills and information;
• student grants to enable everyone to continue further and higher education.

Prevention of early school leaving

School must be a place for every type of learner and every kind of person. School must adapt to the needs of the students, encouraging all kinds of learning processes. A growing trend of school dropouts at secondary level is clearly a consequence of marginalisation, due to school's lack of catering for the needs of different learners together with disadvantaged social and economical circumstances. Supporting students in finding and developing their own learning methods is one of the foremost tasks of school. OBESSU believes that school can succeed in adapting to different learners only when teachers are given the social skills required to recognize and support different learning styles and the time to pay attention to each and every individual student in the classroom. A teacher must also be given the freedom and space to adopt learning methods to every separate class, consisting of mixed learning styles in agreement with the students themselves, to develop a sense of ownership towards the school in each learner. Furthermore, counselling and orientation services accessible for all are of paramount importance in making sure that students fulfil the educational path they have entered. In the transition to different level of education high quality counselling services are indispensable.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• teachers’ education to include set of varying methodologies to be able to meet the diversity of learners in the classroom;
high quality guidance accessible for all;
educational institutions to abolish any kinds of hierarchical power-structures and enhance the principles of school democracy.

Social Inclusion
School carries the responsibility of opening up access to education for everyone to overcome social and economical inequalities. Society shapes and transforms our personal identities, and school must be a place where one can freely discover, explore and express one’s own identity without imposed frameworks of normative behaviour and other prejudice. All too often students are oriented towards stereotypical behaviour and expected to behave in accordance with constructed roles. Social diversity is a value in itself and must be treated accordingly in school. Thus, school must fight all forms of segregation and discrimination. 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 materials while ensuring that these are free from hate speech. Students should be encouraged to recognise and explore different realities respecting and understanding differences. An inclusive school community is one where students practice mutual respect, solidarity and support, instead of competing with each other. It is crucial that students learn to understand their role in promoting and practicing values such as respect for human rights and democracy, both inside and outside schools. Everybody has the right to learn and everybody is able to learn. Students with special educational needs have to be included in the school community. Educational institutions need to reflect society through class composition respecting social diversity. As matters stand today, European educational systems perform a function of social reproduction, so children tend to end up on different educational paths depending on the schooling of their parents, with the absence of learning opportunities for most socio-economically disadvantaged students. In order to realise social inclusion, equal access to education, free from any barriers, has to be guaranteed for everyone.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- national governments to pay attention to marginalised groups in infrastructural planning and education policy formulation;
- a school community free from any kind of discrimination and segregation based on social status;
- a school community and learning environment which take clear positions against any kinds of discrimination;
- cooperation between school and local networks engaged with social issues.
- curricula and teaching materials to be inclusive and to hold values of democracy, solidarity and of respect for human rights.

Students with Disabilities
Disabilities should not preclude anyone from receiving an education. To ensure that students with disabilities can fully benefit from their classes they often need highly individualized assistance or infrastructure. The issues students with disabilities face are as varied as they are. Schools must therefore be prepared to work with these students to provide them with what assistance is necessary. Certain common measures, such as wheelchair accessibility, should be made universal. Students with disabilities are often offered special courses which are easier or where they are provided with more assistance. These courses do not always
offer the same qualifications students in other courses receive. Enrolment in courses which do not offer the same possibilities should not be a prerequisite for receiving assistance. Enrolment in such courses should never be mandatory, but only another option for those who wish to take advantage of it.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- that states set standards for accessibility in schools in cooperation with student movements and interest groups for people with disabilities;
- that schools work with students with disabilities on an individual basis to ensure that they have comparable access to education as their peers;
- that students with disabilities not be deprived of options for their educations;
- that schools have to be designed inclusively and students with disabilities do not experience education separated from students without disabilities.

Migration and minorities

Europe has always been a culturally diverse continent. To ensure peace, a common understanding and practice of human rights is necessary. Unfortunately, xenophobic and racist ideas are widespread. OBESSU believes that education must always defend democratic values, supporting mutual understanding, respect and solidarity. However, students with a migrant background have faced disadvantages in education across the continent. Not only newly arrived refugees are often denied access to education, but also second and third generation immigrants are continually supported less in education systems. Only suitable, coordinated policies at both national and European level can be the answer. Equal access to education and equal possibilities to participation have to be ensured. Educational Institutions should react to the high amount of early school leavers among migrant children, promoting lifelong learning and guidance especially among groups with a high risk of social exclusion. Indigenous minorities often face linguistical and cultural difficulties not only in schools, but also in everyday life. Education should be accessible for them in their own language, and they should be helped to overcome issues regarding the use of the official language by developing a curriculum that satisfies their needs. To prevent social exclusion, it is essential that there are common and not separated classes and schools.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- intercultural education at all levels;
- all students in Europe to have equal rights and access to education regardless of their ethnicity, language, country of origin, nationality and citizenship status;
- the right to organise to be ensured for all immigrant students and other ethnic minorities;
- teachers with a migrant background to be encouraged and supported to act as role models;
- promotion of lifelong learning approaches and guidance to counteract school leaving, especially for groups at high risk for social exclusion;
- provide free language courses in the arrival country’s official language(s);
- access to education in the languages of indigenous ethnical minorities.
Student Wellbeing

Social autonomy of students and the student welfare

OBESSU is concerned by the number of hidden costs linked to education which can endanger a student's financial security. Every school student has the right to concentrate fully on their studies, therefore, OBESSU believes that any situation where school students are forced to work in addition to their studies are to be avoided. This can be solved with the introduction of a student income, granted to everyone who holds the status of a school student, based on personal need. In order to respect the various social and economical backgrounds of the school students of Europe, OBESSU believes the student income must be granted according to general standards determined by the financial situation of the school student in question. Scholarships can also help relieve financial burden, however, this is a bonus granted on the basis of individual merits and should be seen not as a replacement, but rather an addition to the student income.

Furthermore, every school student must be granted access to internet in their community and the possibility to get acquainted with additional skills necessary for taking full advantage of evolving technological improvements. This requires strategic city planning where schools’ buildings are used as open spaces and as resource centres for young people to take part in non-formal and informal learning.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• a student income to be granted to everyone who holds the status of a school student, based on personal need;
• school students to be provided with public transportation free of charge and discounts on services functioning as educational, non-academic aids (such as materials needed for studies and entry to public cultural institutions);
• national governments to make scholarships available for any school student in the country with special skills and visions, who wish to attend specialised schools or conduct a project in connection with their standard studies;
• all school students to be informed of available scholarships and supported in the application process;
• city planning attentive to using school buildings as open spaces is promoted;
• All education to be completely free of charge for the student, with no costs for materials and other necessities.

Health and Safety

Every school student has the right to conduct their studies in an environment that takes care of both their mental and physical health. OBESSU firmly believes that the outcome of the learning process must never become of higher value or importance than the well-being of the individual student. OBESSU believes that student well-being springs out of an environment where every individual feel included and of value for the whole school community. Thus, the most important sets of mind school can foster are solidarity and respect. Furthermore, education should include discussions of mental health without a stigmatising connotation, allowing students to talk freely about mental health problems in the school community. Professional health support needs to be available in all schools.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:
• That all school facilities and equipment guarantee the physical and mental health and safety of students;
• That all actors within the school community work together to promote a positive, healthy social-environment;
• National governments to provide professional health services free of charge for all school students;
• That secondary schools provide high-quality mental health support and resources, that are inclusive and easily accessible, with on-site psychological support and personnel at schools;

**Gender and sexual identity in education**
As school is the most important area for the shaping of a personality and identity, school students should be able to explore their own unique identity in an environment free from gender-based discrimination and restrictions imposed by traditional gender and sexual identity constructions. OBESSU believes that school must cater for the needs of the individual, not a presumed social construction - no role is naturally given and the educational system must ensure that every person can fully discover their talents. Furthermore, OBESSU believes that schools should deconstruct, rather than promote, role clichés and gender inequalities. It is essential to prevent hetero normativity in education and schools should help students understand the spectrum of gender and sexual identities. A critical examination of gender and sexual identity related forms of discriminations must be a part of education, looking at all forms of discrimination and harassment - structural, physical and psychological.

Training on deconstructing prejudices or gender-based stereotypes must be a crucial part of education. For this to be possible, the whole school community, including teachers and staff, must be provided with tools through which any forms of gender discrimination can be fought.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• a school environment recognising every student as an individual person rather than a member of a gender;
• a learning environment which actively encourages to question presumed gender and sexual identity constructions, through educating about sexual and gender diversity, and combats discrimination;
• an environment supporting students to find and develop their own identities and skills regardless of gender;
• the whole school community, including teachers and staff, be provided with tools to fight prejudices and discrimination based on gender, sexual identity and other social categories;
• curricula and teaching material free from hetero-normativity and gender stereotypes.

**Anti bullying**
A good social climate in which everyone feels welcome and respected is a prerequisite for learning and personal development. Sadly, bullying is widespread in schools and takes different forms. Bullying must never be tolerated and steps should be taken, by the school, to prevent and tackle the problem. Hence all schools must have concrete policies in order to prevent bullying and to react when cases of bullying are produced. Peer support systems are
useful too, both when improving the social climate and when preventing problems such as bullying.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- the implementation of anti-bullying and harassment policies with explicitly defined steps to be taken in cases of bullying;
- anti-bullying teams in charge of monitoring the bullying situation and taking action;
- a peer support system so students know who to turn to if they have a problem;
- "social learning lessons" to make space for students and other staff to discuss how to treat each other in a positive way within the school community and how tension can be avoided;
- appropriately trained staff offering support to students to be integrated in every school community;
- the promotion of an environment where bullies do not become segregated or discriminated in return, but involved in the social climate.

Youth policies and education

School Student Mobility

Mobility gives school students the possibility to understand different cultures, societies and realities and additionally enables them to develop skills useful for life and work in intercultural environments. OBESSU firmly believes that mobility should be available for all, and that extra support is necessary to all the excluded groups to ensure that all students can have this opportunity. A disadvantaged financial situation must not influence the possibility to take part in mobility programmes. There should be an increase in official recognition to enrol more school students in this form of intercultural learning. We strongly believe that the intercultural experiences of school student mobility are equally valuable as the educational part. For OBESSU, mobility encompasses formal and non-formal learning experiences in a different cultural sphere. Hence a mobility experience must not necessarily cross national, but cultural borders. Not only students benefit from experiencing different ways of life, but so do teachers and trainers as well. A crucial stage in Lifelong Learning for teachers and trainers is to create platforms for exchange of best practices, such as inter-regional or cross-national mobility programmes.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- mobility programmes to be made available for all groups of young people, disregarding of educational path and socio-economic background;
- the range of mobility programmes to cover both academic training and work placement;
- Europe-wide mobility programmes to be developed for teachers and trainers;
- the European Union and its member states to withdraw the requirements for visa documents for school students and students active in youth organisations;
- official recognition of all performances that were obtained abroad.
Education globally: international cooperation and solidarity

OBESSU extensively works for the interests of every European school student; however, our advocacy, charged with a belief that “All human beings are born free and equal, in dignity and respect” (UDHR, Article 1) has been recognized beyond European borders. Therefore, OBESSU is a spearhead movement for access to education to every child in the world. OBESSU is a backer of 4th Sustainable Development Goal and urges national governments and every community to adopt legislations, ensuring access to quality education, and to declare their solidarity with 265 million underprivileged children world-wide that are up-to-day out of school (UN, 2019).

OBESSU will act in full solidarity with our peers from occupied countries and lands or part of forcedly displaced populations in which youth rights and social rights are not respected or achieved. OBESSU departs from a philosophy, that structured dialogue is an essence of major changes, whereby, we commit in working for a globally organized student entity, that would induce our influence on supranational institutions.

OBESSU will shape the would-be entity with its partners to be a platform of strategic advocacy, knowledge sharing and strengthening of student movements. OBESSU will prioritize work for European affairs but will take an active part in global processes concerned with the access to education.”

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- all national governments in the world to adopt legislations, that would ensure equal access to quality education;
- all communities to declare their solidarity with impoverished and underprivileged children world-wide that are up-to-day are out of school;
- recognition of would-be global student entity and institutional support that is required for sustainability and efficient advocacy;
- the would-be entity to be a platform for strategic advocacy, knowledge sharing and strengthening of student movements;
- the active promotion of International Students’ Day on 17th November.

Lowering the voting age to 16

Participation in the democratic process is of utmost importance for our society and the right to vote and to be elected are key elements of citizenship. Experiences of participating at a young age are also crucial in the encouragement of a tendency to vote at an older age as well. The general aging of the population and the higher turnout of older generations may result in the voice of youth fading further in society. Affording young people the right to vote would be a genuine way of empowering the voice of young people who would not otherwise be heard. The voting activity and participation of youth in civil society must be increased. For these reasons OBESSU supports the lowering of the voting age to 16. It is, however, necessary to adopt other steps as well in order to increase youth participation in politics. Democracy requires a well-informed electorate and a democratic school should fulfil the purpose of providing one. The educational curriculum needs to tackle this question in a more thorough way instead of failing to inform students about their rights and duties as citizens of a democratic state as is often the case. Of course, this should not be limited to curriculum content, but should also include a greater democratisation of the entire education system which would enable students to get in touch with democratic principles directly and in person already in their young age.
Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- Young people be granted the right to vote at the age of 16 in all elections taking place on local, national and European level;
- Educational curricula to include citizenship education.

The role of education in the fight against climate change

Our century is marked by climate change: the world temperature is rising in a slow but relentless process. Climate change puts our ecosystems at risk and is the cause of many events that affect our lives, including migrations from desertic areas and the meteorological cataclysms we have recently seen in Europe.

The main cause of climate change is a global model of development and production: for decades a blind economical perspective based on unlimited growth influenced negatively our production systems. The idea of putting all the resources on the market, without taking care of the effects on the environment, made our common lifestyle unsustainable.

Stopping climate change is not only about differentiating waste, but also about educating ourselves to a different way of producing and consuming, training citizens to know their rights (such as the right to health and the right to job quality) and know how to live in community.

Even if, as school students, we will be most affected by what’s happening, we aren’t taught on how to react: this is why we need to raise awareness starting from schools, either by changing the curricula and doing school activism.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- schools to adopt programs and to train teachers in order for the students to receive an accurate knowledge about climate change and how to prevent it: environmental education should be in the school curricula.
- school buildings to be adapted to common security and environmental standards in the whole continent.

High quality education

Pedagogical methods & Teachers’ education

Quality of teaching is an important factor influencing student performance and learner-centred education should be one of the main guidelines to teachers in their work.

OBESSU believes that the use of technology in education helps the students to learn skills needed in the modern world.

Students should be empowered to take an active part in the classroom discussion and that lessons should include a balance of artistic, practical and intellectual content.

When students are involved in designing lessons, they have a sense of participation and interest and are thus more committed to the learning process.

Teachers should be professional and committed, just as much as imaginative, responsive and providing a moral presence. We also believe that teachers in order to create a good teaching atmosphere ought to motivate students solely by positive methods, strictly avoiding any humiliation, bullying or maltreatment.
Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- the principle of learner-centred education to be the core value of all pedagogical methods in school;
- schools to support students’ use of laptops, tablets and mobile devices in taking notes, looking for information, etc.;
- that apart from in-depth subject knowledge, teachers should possess advanced pedagogical skills, reflective practice and ability to adapt teaching to the needs of each individual as well as to the needs of the group of learners as a whole;
- the high-quality, continuous professional development of all school teachers;
- teachers to use different pedagogical methods to encourage interaction and critical thinking of the students and that teachers’ education throughout Europe provide prospective teachers and trainers with tools of non-formal education;
- students to be recognised as equal partners in the creation of curriculum and teaching methods.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational Education and Training (VET) provides learning-by-doing and is a valuable choice for interest-based education. Unfortunately, this high value is not recognised in many countries. VET is often seen as second-class education for low-achievers and therefore often lacks government funding and promotion. OBESSU believes that there are no such things as “low-performing students”, as the measures by which students are placed into categories of “low” and “high” achieving, are based on a very narrow view of education and knowledge.

It is the task of the earlier school types to guide students towards an informed choice when facing continuous education within either academia or VET.

A degree in VET should entitle the student to access both academic and vocational third-level education and must not be regarded as worth less than a degree in academic secondary education. It should also be possible to pursue a degree in both VET and academic secondary education.

The foremost role of VET is a path to personal self-fulfilment and that the learning and development should be given more priority than the demands of labour market. OBESSU believes the precondition of quality in VET must always be competent teachers and trainers, alongside learning-conductive facilities that meet the requirements.

Education of VET trainers should provide the perspective of both professional training and a teacher’s pedagogical education. Student counselling services must make sure never to label VET as an education into which students with low ambition are pushed into.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- VET to never serve as a second-hand alternative inferior to an academic education, since both VET and academic education constitute indispensable values in themselves;
- VET should be considered as a part of CULT-committee in the European Parliament instead of EMPL;
a learner-based approach to elementary education, catering for the needs of every individual learner and giving students the space to discover and develop their own way of learning and processing knowledge;

VET students to be given the opportunity to develop skills over a period of at least three years of education and training;

employer representatives to be consulted as external experts, but always together with student and teacher representatives;

VET institutions to provide facilities and equipment up to date with the labour market;

the education of VET trainers to provide not only subject-specific knowledge, but also pedagogical education; as well as continuous re-training of VET teachers and trainers;

students to receive quality guidance to break social norms of gender, class and ability directing them towards certain professional paths;

governments to take responsibility for sufficient public funding for VET and public promotion;

equal valuation of merits gained in VET and academic training;

VET institutions to encourage students to join a trade union corresponding to the professional choice of the student.

Digitalization of Teaching Methods and Out-of-School Education

Advances in communications technology have recently brought significant changes in all sectors of society, and education is no exception. Computers and the internet make new teaching methods possible and allow for improvements in old methods. In order to provide their students with the best possible education schools must adapt to take advantage of these technologies and must put emphasis on preparing students to interact with and make use of the increasingly common digital tools available to them.

Tools such as digital textbooks, online management of assignments, and making recordings of lectures available online can vastly improve student experiences. Tools such as makerspaces in VET schools and out-of-school online courses can offer students options for educations they would otherwise not have access to.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

that school and national authorities make a concerted effort to develop and provide digital materials where appropriate, and to maintain and improve information systems allowing students keep track of their educations;

that schools develop high quality out-of-school online courses to make education more accessible to broader groups;

that schools work to increase the availability of diverse computer-related courses.

Apprenticeships and on-the-job-learning

Every young person should have the right to get their vocational education through a fair and high-quality apprenticeship.

Every VET-student has the right to complete on-the-job-learning experiences as a part of their education.
OBESSU believes that all interns, apprentices and on-the-job-learners have the right to a quality working experience, that follows the guidelines of a national curricula and where they are respected as a part of the workforce, yet not treated as cheap labour. OBESSU believes in free movement of apprentices. It should be easier for apprentices to take apprenticeships across borders. Cross-border apprenticeships should be accessible for every young person and include fair pay and fair working conditions.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- a European set of rights for apprentices abroad to be set up and implemented, as well as national standards for quality apprenticeships;
- student to be supported by the school when looking for a suitable on-the-job-learning workplace;
- students to be given tasks that develop their professional skills and elevate their capacity to perform them;
- students to be informed of their rights at the working place and whom to turn to in case these rights are violated;
- a continuous dialogue and monitoring process between the students, the school and the workplaces throughout the work-based learning experience;
- an improvement to the accessibility in cross-border apprenticeships in Europe.

**Recognition of Non-Formal Education**

OBESSU believes that learning is a continuous process taking place wherever we go, through whatever we do.

Informal and non-formal education should be fused into one dynamic approach to learning, catering for needs of various learners.

OBESSU thinks that student activities outside academia should be recognised as learning processes equal in value to the learning taking place inside the classroom. Connections between non-formal and formal learning should be encouraged by school communities, for example by giving organisations space in different school activities. OBESSU also believes that there is a need for non-formal learning activities to be officially validated in order to support the promotion of non-formal education.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- recognition of alternative approaches to education, such as non-formal education;
- for non-formal learning methods to be incorporated in the formal education;
- that school students should be encouraged to take part in civil society in various ways, and school student unions and NGOs are recognised by governments as providers of non-formal education and active citizenship;
- a Europe-wide system of promoting and validating non-formal education to be implemented on national level;
- national governments throughout Europe to support secondary school student organisations as providers of non-formal education.
Evaluation of learning

OBESSU believes that not all knowledge and skills are easily assessed. When students get grades on a numeric or alphabetic marking scale, much of the students’ knowledge and skills are not reflected in their final mark.

OBESSU believes that evaluation can and must be used as an educational aid supporting the learning process. It should be constructive and encourage the school students to reflect on the learning process with an aim to improving their performance. The evaluation process has to be democratic and it is essential that it is based on a dialogue between the teacher and the school student.

Furthermore, the process of rating school students’ personal performance in secondary schools all over Europe serves usually only the objective of comparing school students with each other. So, the traditional system of marks creates competitiveness between the students, as well as unfavourable individualism in the classroom. The comparison of student outcomes serves as the basis for students’ acceptance in higher education, or for the labour market. Far too often, in the evaluation process instead of focusing on the needs of the students, the needs of the system are given higher priority.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• a democratic, transparent evaluation of individual student performance based on written and oral feedback;
• students to be given the opportunity to evaluate the work of their teachers;
• students to have the right to demand re-assessment of their work by an objective source, if necessary and without being subjected to negative repercussions.

The evaluation of educational systems

It is the responsibility of every government to provide a high-quality educational system. Assessments of school systems are used in order to evaluate and compare the different educational systems at both European and international level. This research tests students’ performance in different subjects but focuses mainly on the quantitative aspects of the education, such as the PISA surveys. The fact that that the PISA surveys focus on learning performance only might easily give a distorted understanding of the quality of educational systems. OBESSU believes that quality in education cannot be measured in terms of learning performance only, since this way of assessment completely overlooks factors such as the mental well-being of the students, democratic school structures and the social climate of the school. OBESSU claims that the key to a high-quality education is, in the first place, a good social learning environment where every student feels safe and empowered in their studies.

Aiming at assessing quality in education, not only quantitative factors, but also elements characterising quality education have to be taken into account. The results of PISA surveys and other methodologies of testing educational systems must not be misused or misinterpreted in favour of anyone. The complexity of the results has to be highlighted, as neither governments nor institutions should misinterpret the results or use them for political purposes.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

• a shift of focus from quantitative to qualitative aspects in the evaluation of educational systems;
to highlight the complexity of the results of surveys measuring any aspects of education and training.

Lifelong Learning
The concept of Lifelong Learning must be promoted, implemented and acknowledged in schools. Schools must promote Lifelong Learning in the sense of recognising the knowledge gained in school and providing students with skills and competences for its practical use. The concept of Lifelong Learning must be the link between formal, non-formal and informal education and must ensure the setting of standards in education. Lifelong Learning is too often limited to the “labour market approach”, based on the adaptability of the individuals to the needs of the market and to an informative approach, based on the capacity of opening individuals to different training opportunities. Its goal is social, cultural and personal and is therefore not limited to solely the economic dimension. Its ambition is that individuals become “lifelong learners”: aware of the knowledge, competences and know-how they acquire and able to use them in the different situations they are confronted with. The risk of social exclusion has to be highlighted and prevented. This means that school should provide as many possibilities as possible for students to experience continuous learning by providing them with access to internet, books and different source of information necessary for personal development in the framework of lifelong learning.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- promoting, implementation and acknowledging the concept of Lifelong Learning; - Lifelong Learning to trespass the “labour market approach”;
- the goal of Lifelong Learning promoted in schools to connecting formal, non-formal and informal education with social, cultural and personal dimension;
- access to Lifelong Learning for all students, thus decreasing the risk of exclusion of experiencing continuous learning.