OBESSU Work Plan 2018-2020

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Introduction

With this document, OBESSU commits to work on a certain set of topics in the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. It follows the Work Plan 2015-2017 and provides direction to the work of the Board and Secretariat. It has a new structure, compared to the former Work Plan and focuses more on long-term planning. The old structure of a year-by-year implementation was too inflexible to get benefit of new opportunities and challenges that appear along the 3-year time frame. OBESSU tries to act in a world where new opportunities appear frequently, and processes can not be foreseen on a three-year timespan. This new approach has several benefits:

- Thematic focuses will be linked easier to relevant funding in a sector where funding panorama’s change rapidly;
- Having a less activity oriented approach allows to match the advocacy work of OBESSU with the Work Plan;
- Having a less predetermined Work Plan makes it more feasible to join project proposals that OBESSU receives.

This document is made in cooperation between the membership, the Board and the Secretariat and is build upon the triangular merger of following elements:

- OBESSU’s Political Platform – as the Work Plan will always follow the political principles of the organisation.
- OBESSU’s Development Strategy – as it is a broader strategic document for functioning of OBESSU.
- The political environment we are functioning in – the main topics that EU and CoE will be concentrating on in upcoming years in our areas.

Combining the inputs of the membership and the triangle of these three documents ensures that the Work Plan answers the needs of our membership and functions in the current European political panorama.

The Work Plan 2018-2020 defines three thematic clusters - Education for Wellbeing, Education in the 21st Century and Defining Quality Education - and each of these clusters contain several more specific topics that we as OBESSU commit to work on in the coming years. A fourth cluster on Organizational Capacity contains capacity building aspects, oriented towards OBESSU growth as an organisation, in line with the Development Strategy. After the rationale for each cluster, there is a key note foreseen for every subtopic. These keypoints provide a certain context and justification. However outcomes and activities are not prescribed. After the exposition of the clusters and subtopics, you will find a matrix in which all the topics are sorted under a certain year. Every year will cover parts of every cluster. Taking into consideration political context, funding opportunities and partner proposals, a yearly implementation plan will be presented before the start of every year.

Education for Wellbeing

Students’ wellbeing is a fundamental precondition for successful participation in education. We understand students’ well-being as the “situation in which all school students’ human needs are met and
covered and allow them to fully focus in education. These needs include, for example, a comfortable
economic situation, good physical and mental health”. Whilst in the past years OBESSU has worked on
defined wellbeing, researched the current situation and outlined the main policy proposals for economic,
social and health welfare, there is a need to explore the topics of mental health, sex and gender as well
as disabilities more.

Mental health

Young people’s mental health has received more attention in the past years, as awareness for
widespread depression, anxiety, eating disorders and other mental illnesses has increased. These have
significant effects on students abilities to participate in education and society in general, and can have
long-lasting consequences on individual health, social and employment life if not addressed early.
Helping students within school systems to achieve better mental health is a key opportunity which shall
not be missed. Our research showed that access to mental health services in school systems remains
scarce, which calls for further work on the topic. Furthermore, there is a need to discuss prevention
mechanisms such as mental health education, as well as ways of reducing stress, bullying and different
forms of discrimination and increasing social support for students.

Sex & Gender

Schools need to present an open and welcoming environment for all students regardless of their
genders and sexual orientations, yet unfortunately that is not the case nowadays. There is a need for an
open debate on LGBT+ friendly sex and gender education in all levels of schooling, especially paying
more attention to non-binary and trans students’ needs. Furthermore, sex and gender education tends to
be old-fashioned and ignore concepts such as consent and pleasure. We should thus aim for defining
open, accessible and inclusive methods and curricula for sex and gender education across subject
areas.

Disabled learners

Students are disabled by society and education systems in various ways, some more visible than others,
although the education system should be inclusive for all. OBESSU’s work on inclusion has so far only
superficially touched upon the topic of disabilities in education, ranging from more hidden learning
disabilities to physical and mental disabilities. It is necessary to create a debate on the needs of
disabled learners in terms of teaching methods, infrastructure and the wider school environment.

Education in the 21st Century

According to OBESSU’s Political Platform, education should be considered a lifelong process of
developing knowledge, skills, abilities and social competences, but also the development of one’s
personality and identity.

It is important that education today is inclusive to each and every student, regardless of their gender
and sexual identity, socio-economic background, nationality, religious and ethnic background or any
disabilities. Learners and their needs need to be at the centre.

We need to think about what the role of education should be in the 21st century, re-evaluate outdated
teaching methods, consider what values and skills are important to teach students to take care for each
other and the planet. We need to highlight the importance and need of civic education and human rights
education, and that it should be ensured for every learner in Europe. We need to foster intercultural
understanding to address xenophobia and racism, and create welcoming and safe learning environments and communities.

**Minorities Rights**

As OBESSU we need to ensure that the rights of students that belong to ethnic groups that are considered minorities in certain communities are respected, both within the school environment as well as in our societies in general. We need to ensure that every ethnic minority group has a seat at the table, so that they can voice their opinion and ensure that policy makers attend to everyone’s needs. We already started our work on the inclusion and empowerment of refugees in schools with ‘Seeds for Integration’. We believe that there is a need to strengthen this work and discuss education access of minorities of any kind and related issues, such as language rights, in more depth. It is crucial to note that when working on issues or topics related to minorities we include learners within those minorities in our work processes, so we ought to work with our members to make their organisations more representative of minorities and cooperate with partners.

**Human Rights & Global Citizenship Education**

Global Citizenship Education is considered a priority in many international organisations yet it is defined in different ways according with the different context where it is used. Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. OBESSU needs to sharpen its position on this topic and then take an active part in shaping this term on a European level. OBESSU should contribute by introducing a learner’s perspective to the topic and discussing what skills we need to provide students with, in order for them to think more globally and how they can contribute as world citizens.

**Environmental awareness**

OBESSU has not focused much on the topic of environmental awareness in the past, but it is important that OBESSU promotes environmental and social sustainability in schools, highlights the importance of environmental education in upper secondary schools in Europe. Schools should give space to discuss environmental concerns and empower students to take action for a sustainable use of natural resources. It is important for students to understand global environmental challenges and their role in addressing them locally and globally. OBESSU shall develop concepts for practices that promote and practice a culture of environmental awareness and activism in schools.

**School Student Mobility**

School Student Mobility promotes intercultural experiences and understanding, which are crucial in the 21st century. It enables students to develop skills useful to be active and work in intercultural environments, supporting the growth of global citizens. One of the main barriers students face towards School Student Mobility is the recognition of abroad studies. It can be seen as a factor of demotivation that the skills and the education a student receives during the time in a mobility program are not recognised by their school. OBESSU’s Political Platform states that School Student Mobility should be accessible and available for all, and that a disadvantaged financial situation or any other social barriers should not influence in any way the possibility to take part in mobility programmes.
Hate Speech

The topic of Hate speech has been quite prominent within the work of the Council of Europe for the past 12 years with the “No Hate Speech Movement” combating hate speech online. OBESSU has also worked to some extent on this particular topic, most notably during the “Study Session 2015: Deport Xenophobia from European Classrooms”. But with the rise of xenophobia and acts of extreme violence around the world, the topic remains highly relevant. In the Political Platform it is stated that OBESSU believes that one of the most prominent ways of combating intolerance is by encouraging democratic schools to foster mutual understanding, respect and solidarity among students. But it is also important to look at the role of student unions when combating hate speech, and what they can do to promote understanding and tolerance within their realities.

It is crucial when speaking about hate speech that we have a specific focus on online hate speech. With a growing use of social media, hate speech online is spreading even more quickly and affecting school students in their daily lives. We thus need to be at the forefront of developing ideas on how to prevent and address it through education.

Digitalization

Digitalization of education is a hot topic on both the national and European level. OBESSU recognizes that online learning and digital tools have potential to support both students and teachers but also that it comes with both risks and assets. With the presence of the topic on the European agenda OBESSU commits to work on it in the coming years to secure students’ rights in this area. In OBESSU’s policy paper on ICT education the importance of of equipping school students with ICT skills is highlighted, so that they can effectively use these skills to further their studies since ICT skills are a big part of our everyday life and are also required for many jobs.

Given the labour market oriented view on digitalization of education we should focus in the coming years on how to secure that digitalization is always in line with individual learners’ needs, apart from what the labour market requires. Another focal point will be the balance between on- and offline education to secure the quality of education. Lastly we will focus on the terms and conditions for an inclusive digitalization with equal opportunities for all.

Defining Quality Education

Quality education for all is the overarching aim of our work. We often find that at all levels of the political debate, the term is defined in vague terms and used for a variety of purposes. Therefore it is important that we, as school students, ensure that we have clearly outlined and coherent concept of “education quality”.

In the past years, we have been working on the role of technology to advance the quality education and held an event to develop our positions on applying innovative teaching methods.

We are still lacking clearly defined positions on certain areas when it comes to quality education. In the upcoming three years, we will therefore work on defining the quality of teachers, quality of funding, quality of VET and quality of assessment more.

Quality of teachers

The dynamics of the teacher-student relationship has still a strong power-relation component. We strongly believe that democratic cooperation of both key actors in schools is crucial to create good learning environments. Innovative teaching methods need to be understood in their theoretical
relevance and used by teachers in practice. Teachers need to give space to students input and feedback and make changes accordingly to empower the learners. OBESSU shall explore different existing and new practices to foster teacher and student cooperation in classrooms, school councils and policy-making level to spread best-practices of democratic school student cooperation with teachers across Europe.

Furthermore we want to discuss the quality of continuous professional development of teachers. It is crucial that teachers are constantly developing professionally to apply new curricula and teaching methods.

**Quality of funding**

OBESSU has long had a clear stand for investment in education and taken many actions against cuts experienced in the last decade. As the EU is now also promoting investment in education and it seems that governments are spending more again, it is necessary to pay attention to the quality of education spending. Analyzing the allocation of funding from a student perspective will reveal which parts are still underfunded and allow us to have a stronger advocacy position on the financing of education.

**Quality of VET**

VET is a prominent topic in education policy debates all over Europe. Yet the debate is still driven by a market-oriented approach which leaves the needs of students aside. With our increasing work on apprentices, we want to pay more attention to the quality of different segments of VET in depth.

Furthermore, schools student participation in the VET sector needs to be investigated more as it is still scarce in most countries. Both the role of government institutions but also existing school student unions in empowering VET students shall be analyzed. An in-depth exploration of the quality of VET is needed to develop concepts for improving VET in all its aspects.

**Quality of assessment**

Advocating for an increased focus on qualitative assessment methods has been central to OBESSU’s work. On an individual student level, “a democratic, transparent evaluation of individual student performance based on written and oral feedback” is the key demand as stated in the Political Platform. Concerning the assessment of national education systems, we have long criticized the reductionist methodology and use of PISA surveys. On both levels, there are open questions. How do assessment methods compare across countries and what stands out as best practice? Which assessment methods should be applied when? How can we evaluate national education systems best? We want to sharpen our positions on these topics in order to advocate for quality assessment at all levels.

**Organisational Capacity**

Besides being an organisation advocating for the rights of school students on a European level, it is fundamental to build capacity within our member organisations.

So far our main capacity building activity has been the Training Course for International Officers, an introduction to European policy work for our member organisations. In the past years, not enough space for organisational development, networking and peer learning has been provided. The members are the core of OBESSU - the members are OBESSU, we believe that without strong member organisations, OBESSU will not be able to function to its fullest potential. This is why this cluster will focus on organisational capacity building in different forms to make our members even
stronger and thereby making OBESSU stronger. We will focus on grassroots management, inclusive organisations and last but not least, peer education.

Grassroots management
Grassroot activism should be the basis of every functioning democratic school student organisation. When discussing youth organisations, big or small, the grassroots-level is often forgotten as organisations turn more and more bureaucratic and hierarchical. This is why we want to focus on this topic to ensure that our connection to local activists continues to flourish within the structures of OBESSU. How do we work with volunteers? How do we secure that everyone feels heard in our organisations? How do we secure a sense of ownership? How do we secure that our organisations are not only functioning on a national level, but have the very local perspective as well? These are some of the questions we will attempt to answer.

Inclusive organisations
Social inclusion in education has been a central topic for OBESSU in the past years - whether it’s for migrants and refugees, for LGBTQI+ people or disabled people. Now it is time to look at how we make our own organisations inclusive. We see that within our own organisation most activists tend to be from very privileged backgrounds, both financially and socially. Obviously this is not the case everywhere, and some organisations are doing a great job being inclusive. But if we are to advocate for an inclusive society, we need to empower the voices of those who are excluded to truly make their voices heard. It is therefore necessary to facilitate a discussion and exchange practices and ideas on how to make our own organisations - both OBESSU and member organisations - more inclusive and representative of all school students.

Peer education
Empowering young activists to educate and train other young people is a key pillar of organisations such as OBESSU. Our Pool of Trainers currently gathers experienced youth trainers who give pedagogical support for our member organisations and European level OBESSU events, whilst at the same time building the capacity of the selected group of trainers. Furthermore, our Toolbox gives activists at all levels quality session outlines to be used in various contexts. Yet only some organisations at national level provide non-formal education training for their members and many lack experience in training grassroots activists, making it more difficult for them to apply these templates or take part in OBESSU preparatory teams for events. It is thus in our interest to build the capacity of member organisations in the field of peer education and training in order to broaden the use of non-formal methods across Europe and widen access to OBESSU facilitation opportunities.
As the Work Plan defines the thematic annual priorities per cluster, but not particular formats through which implementation of each topic will be done, every year the Board will propose an **Annual Implementation Plan**, outlining a clear strategy on how to approach particular topic. Possible formats of implementation are listed in the following section of this work plan - they are based on previous practice of OBESSU. The Implementation Plan will be sent to the Membership pre-COMEM of the year preceding the implementation year (i.e. pre COMEM 2017 for activities in 2018). It will be open for amendments in the usual procedure (see Statutes of OBESSU).

This approach will facilitate a more realistic planning of activities implementation in priority areas, as it will allow OBESSU to:

- align easier with funding opportunities;
- plan for long-term projects and initiatives;
- build joint initiatives with other stakeholders.

**Possible formats of implementation**

The work plan priorities can be implemented annually through diverse means. Depending on the agreed purpose and target audience, as well expected results, following formats will be used.

**Capacity building**

- Training course - an event, usually between 3-6 days of duration, gathering school student representatives, with clear learning objectives and focused on developing participants competences in certain area / topic.
- Study session - international youth event lasting between 4 and 8 days which bring together members of youth organisations or networks and experts for discussions on a
specific subject leading to conclusions relevant to the priorities and programmes of the Council of Europe Youth sector; they are organised in co-operation with youth organisations and networks, and are hosted by one of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest.

- Summer school - an event, usually of approx. 1 week of duration, organised during the summer, exploring a particular topic with a variety of active methods.
- Online activities - diverse capacity building activities that can be delivered with the use of ICT (i.e. webinars, e-learning courses etc).

Advocacy

- Own advocacy and policy development - includes gathering input from OBESSU membership (through surveys or dedicated events), formulating policy statements and using them through advocacy campaigns, as well as External Representations.
- Participation in external structures and events - working in cooperation with relevant stakeholder in the sector (i.e. European Youth Forum, Lifelong Learning Platform, other organisations with similar agendas), to benefit from possible synergies. This format can include membership in working groups, joint statements, campaigns or participation in one-off events.

Campaigns

- Advocacy campaign - targeting mainly policy and decision makers, with a purpose of achieving a concrete policy claim of OBESSU.
- Awareness raising campaign - targeting a broader audience, with a purpose of making an issue visible and gathering public support for it.

Projects (ad hoc) - complex, long term initiatives, that use diverse formats of activities, and build towards a general objective.

Policy Events

- Convention - a gathering of school students representatives aiming to explore a particular topic from European school students perspective, and formulate a set of policy recommendations that can be used in OBESSU advocacy work. Ideally, a convention has elements of so called “structured dialogue”, with presence of decision or policy makers, and an open debate.
- Seminar - a gathering of school students (and other participants) with expertise in particular topic, aimed at exchanging good practices and using them to build policy recommendations.

Research - including both desk research, as well as gathering evidence through surveys and interviews with OBESSU Membership and individual school students.

Internal / structural formats

- General Assembly
- Council of Members
- Working Groups
• Study visits
• Other membership services