Higher Education Students' European Election Programme 2024

Introduction

In the early 2020s, the European Union was shaped by major global phenomena that have intensified cooperation between the Member States and underlined the need to meet challenges as a united front. Brexit, the pandemic and Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine have increased the importance of safety and geopolitics in decision-making, affecting all EU activities. In this difficult world situation, the EU has been under pressure to have a more significant global impact and be closer to the citizens at local level. At the same time, climate change, digitalisation, changes in working life and the challenges of democracy are affecting the prospects of younger generations across Europe.

The challenges of the new era have contributed to education policy becoming an increasingly strategic policy area for the European Union. The EU has particularly sought to increase its role within the European Education Area by investing in, for example, the European Universities initiative. Student mobility has also played an important role, which has been reflected in an increase of the Erasmus+ budget. The EU objectives related to the green transition and digitalisation have impacted the entire area of education policy, which has been reflected in the priorities in the Commission's action plan.

For students, it is a positive development that the EU is investing in higher education and improving the opportunities for student mobility. However, at the same time, students have concerns about the degree of democracy of the new initiatives and students' opportunities to influence the rapid development. Will the changes affect everyone equally? Moreover, how will the EU respond to young people's concerns about the mental health crisis and climate change?

The joint programme of the National Union of University Students in Finland and the National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences – SAMOK for the European Parliament elections helps us build a better future for European higher education and young generations. We call for ambition, leadership and student-centred decisions in education policy. The EU should not only increase the funding and improve the accessibility of education and mobility, but also provide students with equal opportunities to participate in the decision-making concerning them. As a student movement, we require that the EU assume leadership in broader global issues, such as climate change, mental health crisis and immigration. In the end, it all boils down to how the important strategic issue of skills is turned into an asset for the EU.

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Education and skills

- **Objectives of education policy and competence.** The European Union should promote education and academic freedom as well as support, coordinate and complement cooperation between the Member States. In education policy, the Member States should retain the competence in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, and the Union's decision-making should be brought as close to young people and students as possible.

- **Involving young people and students in decision-making.** Young people and students should be provided with the opportunity to participate in EU-level decision-making and preparation. The current mechanisms for consulting young people, such as the EU Youth Dialogue, should be tied to political processes.

- **Responsibilities of the Commissioner in charge of education.** Vocational education should be reincorporated into Union-level education policy, so that it would no longer be under EU employment policy.

- **Members of the European Parliament**. Finnish Members of the Parliament should seek membership in the CULT Committee as well as other committees relevant to education and the lives of students.

- **Recognition of qualifications**. The recognition of qualifications should enable the transfer of students from one higher education institution to another across Finland and the rest of Europe, also while the student is still in the process of completing a qualification. The recognition of upper secondary qualifications should be harmonised across the EU. A European upper secondary qualification should suffice as proof of eligibility for higher education studies.

- **Accessibility of education**. Improving the accessibility of education is a shared European responsibility that should be promoted actively. The education of under-represented groups should be supported by making reasonable adjustments. Continuous learning should be made accessible throughout the European Union regardless of background or socio-economic status. EU Member States should provide local students with sufficient livelihood for the duration of their studies.

- **Funding of education.** In future multiannual financial frameworks, the EU should invest more in education, research and lifelong learning. Each EU country should invest at least 2% of their GDP in higher education.

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- **Unpaid internships**. The European Union should ban unpaid internships to make the opportunities for participation more equal. Students should be guaranteed access to high-quality internships involving feedback and continuous guidance to support learning.

- **Digitalisation.** The opportunities created by digitalisation should be seized in the European Union to increase the skills of students, provide guidance, improve the quality of teaching and guidance, transfer mobility-related information, enable studying in another higher education institution and develop the opportunities for continuous learning. The EU should invest more in the research and development of digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence throughout the EU.

- **International talent and immigration**. The EU should promote the ability for international talent to study and build a career and a life in Europe by breaking down bureaucratic and regulatory barriers. The EU should improve the coherence of its immigration policy, facilitate work- and study-based immigration and provide persons who have been granted asylum with the opportunity to get an education and have their competence recognised.

European Education Area (EEA)

- **Involving students in the decision-making process**. European education should be developed in a student-centred manner, ensuring that students are included in decision-making in the European Education Area both as experts and decision-makers.

- **European Student Card.** Existing national and local student card systems should be taken into account in the development of the European Student Card, and the existence of the European Student Card should not have a negative impact on the activities of local student organisations. The European Student Card should primarily promote student mobility, the transfer of students' information between higher education institutions in different countries and the recognition of qualifications in Europe.

- **Micro-credentials.** Micro-credentials should be supplementary and part of the continuous learning offering. Micro-credentials should be developed from the point of view of the learner, and higher education institutions should retain the right to issue qualifications.

- **Funding of European Universities alliances.** The European Universities alliances should be funded primarily from the EU budget. The funding of the European Universities alliances with the Erasmus+ programme should not reduce the relative share of the Erasmus+ budget allocated to student mobility.

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- **Student representatives in European Universities alliances.** In higher education institutes selected as members of the European Universities alliances, the student representatives should be elected democratically by elected local student bodies or student unions, and this should be included in the assessment criteria of the European Universities alliances.

- **Free education.** Higher education leading to a degree should remain free for Finnish students when they apply to study for a degree in the European Universities alliance via a Finnish higher education institution.

Student mobility and the Erasmus+ programme

- **Increasing student mobility**. To promote student mobility, the Member States should ensure that students have sufficient livelihoods. Higher education institutions should actively support incoming students to help them find housing and invest in the communication on financial resources related to the Erasmus+ programme in the higher education community.

- **Erasmus+ budget**. Increasing the Erasmus+ budget should be continued, and the budget should be doubled for the 2028–2034 funding period to meet the original Parliament requirement of tripling the budget for the current funding period and to increase the amount of individual Erasmus+ grants and the number of mobility periods.

- **Size of the Erasmus+ grants**. The size of individual Erasmus+ grants should be increased, and the size of the grants should be made more proportioned to the price level of the target country.

- **Developing Erasmus+ grants.** The grants should be developed to promote the inclusion of students with fewer opportunities and members of underrepresented groups in student mobility and to support eco-friendly methods of travel and sustainable development goals. The size of grants given to members of the above-mentioned groups, such as students with children, should be increased.

- **Erasmus+ project funding.** The process of applying for Erasmus+ project funding should be made easier so that more youth organisations could apply for and use the funding in their activities.

- **Erasmus+ Ambassadors**. New ways of increasing student mobility, such as implementing a pilot project of the Erasmus+ Ambassador programme, should be tried in the Erasmus+ programme.

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Human rights, democracy and sustainability

- **Role of the European Parliament**. The European Parliament should be given more decision-making power in relation to other EU institutions.

- **Students at Risk**. A Students at Risk grant system should be established in Europe to support students fleeing war, political persecution and violence. Every student should have the opportunity to continue their studies safely and complete a higher education degree.

- **EU funding and values.** EU funding should be tied to respecting human rights, the rule of law and the fundamental values of the European Union.

- **Student mental health.** The mental health problems of students should be addressed in EU-level decision-making concerning higher education. Solving the youth mental health crisis should be made a priority in the EU health programme. The EU should develop a more comprehensive mental health strategy in which students and young people are included as a separate group.

- **Development cooperation**. 0.7% of public funds should be allocated to development cooperation and 0.2% to the least developed countries in accordance with the objectives of the Agenda2030 programme. The EU's decisions, measures and budgeting should follow the sustainable development goals.

- **Environmental and climate policy**. Environmental policy and combating climate should be made an integral part of EU policies. Moreover, the EU needs more ambitious goals for combating climate change and biodiversity loss to be climate neutral by 2050. The security threats posed by the climate crisis should also be taken into account in the Union's foreign and security policy.

- **Ukraine**. The EU should keep providing humanitarian and military support to Ukraine for as long as Russia's military action in Ukraine continues. The EU should also support Ukraine on its path towards EU membership.

- **Youth, Peace and Security.** The EU should also create a Youth, Peace and Security agenda of its own and encourage all member countries to do the same.

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