

Plan of Work 2024

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1. The position of students in the Finnish social security reforms

The Social Security Committee has entered the second half of its two-term mandate. The Orpo government's programme has set out the Social Security Committee's mandate to prepare social security reform on the basis of a single basic social security benefit model. A number of sub-reforms are also being prepared by the committee and under the auspices of different ministries, such as the overall reform of student financial aid and a study on separate housing support for students. The reforms under preparation will have a fundamental impact on students' livelihoods, which is why specific resources will need to be allocated during 2024 to contribute to shaping them.

Targets for 2024:

- Proposals by the National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) will be considered and clarified in the Social Security Committee and other related reform projects.
- Student benefits will be reformed as part of the social security reforms, and students will be recognised as a distinct population group in the social security reforms.
- The views of higher education students will be heard in the preparatory work, and SYL is a member or is otherwise involved in all preparations related to social security reform.
- Student housing must be kept within the scope of investment aid for specific groups. The investment aid must be sufficient for all student housing construction projects.

Measures for 2024:

- Implementing the long-term plan drawn up in 2023 for influencing social security reforms.
- Participating in the preparatory work on the reforms of student financial aid and student housing support, prioritising SYL's specialist and working resources. We will collaborate with other stakeholders to help shape the reforms.

- We will continue to vigorously highlight the issue of the growth of the student loan stock in advocacy and media work. We will promote solutions to curb student debt and improve student loan security.
- We will advocate to ensure that the granting power for investment aid for special groups is sufficient for all student housing construction projects for the 2023–2027 Finnish legislative period.

Long-term goals:

- The social benefits granted to students and their duration must be adequate and flexible. Students must have sufficient security of income, and must not be put in a situation where they are forced into debt.
- In the medium term, Finland must have a universal basic income system that takes individual needs into account and is free of charge, and in which students are included.
- Affordable student housing must be made the most common form of student accommodation, and the construction of student housing must be stepped up.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- We will complement and further clarify SYL's positions and expertise on social security matters.
- We will promote SYL's proposals through sustained public and direct advocacy, such as statements, position papers and disseminating information, so that they are effectively made known and are taken seriously as options.
- In advocacy on social security, we will highlight the link between housing and livelihoods. SYL's multi-year advocacy work on housing policy will continue.

2. High-quality, accessible education in a digitalising university environment

A new round of university audits will start in 2026. Audits can help to improve the quality systems of universities. New technologies have overturned the debate on digital pedagogy, and since the end of the coronavirus pandemic, remote teaching has been seeking out its natural role. In 2023, SYL has created a vision of student-centred digital

pedagogy. At the same time, the student admissions system has been developed in a national development project, resulting in the adoption in August 2023 of new scoring models for selection based on school certificates. In 2024, the development work will continue with the development of the entrance examination path to higher education and the preparation of a digital entrance examination.

Targets for 2024:

- SYL has clear objectives for the new auditing model for universities, and is a key stakeholder in the development of the model.
- Developments in digital pedagogy and learning analytics are in line with the vision, with an especial focus on accessibility and student participation in the development process.
- University information systems are being overhauled to take gender diversity into account.
- The project to improve student admissions will make the selection system more accessible for applicants. The status of Open University students will be improved to ensure equality with other applicants to institutes of higher education.

Measures for 2024:

- Establish objectives for a new auditing model for higher education based on the groundwork done in 2023, and seek a seat on the auditing model working group.
- SYL closely follows and participates in the debate on digital pedagogy, learning analytics and artificial intelligence, and supports the student unions' advocacy based on SYL's student-centred digital pedagogy vision.
- University information systems are being overhauled to take gender diversity into account.
- We will contribute to the development of student admissions and open university development based on SYL's vision of the open university and student admissions.

Long-term goals:

- Quality management in universities must provide relevant information, with a particular focus on the quality of education, wellbeing of the university community, realisation of equality and promotion of sustainable development.
- SYL's student-centred digital pedagogy vision will be realised.
- Registers of studies and degree qualifications will be developed to take better account of gender diversity.
- A pathway independent of academic performance in upper secondary education will be the preferred route for admissions to university. The open university pathway must be reasonable in terms of workload, and must be free of charge for applicants.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- Active and effective cooperation with the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC).
- We will monitor, participate and make new proposals related to digital pedagogy and learning analytics. We will participate in developing the Digivisio 2030 project so that SYL's goals are achieved.
- SYL works with stakeholders to promote the inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minorities in the registers of studies and degree qualifications.
- We will take action to help improve the accessibility of the student admissions system.
- We will identify the need and lobby for inclusiveness in student registers so that all genders are included and students have the option to add a name by which they prefer to be called without it having to be approved by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency.

3. Raising education levels sustainably

The Orpo government aims to raise educational attainment and is committed to increasing the number of starting places. As one measure, the government is implementing a package of measures to restrict the number of academic qualifications of the same level. The government also wants to improve the completion rate in education. In 2024, SYL will follow the preparation of the government programme documents and influence them through its own proposals.

Targets for 2024:

- Work under the government programme to reduce the number of graduates with more than one academic qualification of the same level will include identification of the impact of measures on changing field.
- Solutions to promote student wellbeing, improve degree completion rates and reduce drop-out rates will be introduced.
- The increase in starting places will be fully funded, allowing a sustainable increase in educational level.

Measures for 2024:

- We will follow up on the package of measures that have been included in the government programme to reduce the number of people studying for a second degree of the same level, and will work to influence these measures in line with SYL's policies.
- We will follow the government's work to improve the completion rate in education, and, based on SYL's solutions, contribute to improving the completion rate and reducing the drop-out rate.
- In collaboration with stakeholders, we will launch an advocacy campaign to increase university funding.

Long-term goals:

- We are aiming for the quota for first-time applicants to be abolished so as to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to study for more than one degree and thus to change career flexibly.

- A study will be launched on the causes of dropping out of higher education. Students are adequately supported in completing their studies, and the higher education drop-out rate is reduced.
- Funding for universities is increased. Funding is transparent, stable and encourages universities and other institutes of higher education to work together. Education levels will rise sustainably.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- We are lobbying for greater recognition of the value of education and qualifications in society. We are leading the debate on raising educational standards, emphasising respect for cultural rights.
- We build on SYL's solutions to help improve the completion rate and reduce the drop-out rate. We lead the debate on degree completion, with an emphasis on measures to increase support and guidance for students. It must be pointed out that the actual amount of work it takes to complete a degree and starting a career during studies are not compatible with the target period of five years.
- We influence the funding model to reduce the focus on results, and maintain the debate on adequate funding for universities.

4. Student wellbeing

Demand for mental health services from the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) has remained much higher than expected, even after the coronavirus pandemic abated. Resources have not kept pace with demand, so internal queues are long and affect student wellbeing. In 2023, a survey on the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) was conducted by SYL with the National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (SAMOK), and this will be used as the basis for SYL's own advocacy goals related to the FSHS in 2024.

Targets for 2024:

- Access to student health care and higher education services must be improved, and students must be provided with high-quality care without delay, by both the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) and providers of specialised care.

- The process of paying the health care fee is smoother and less burdensome for students.
- The co-operation between the FSHS, university, wellbeing services county and students must be smooth.

Measures for 2024:

- The data from the FSHS survey will be analysed in more detail.
- A meeting of community health and student community workers will be held. SYL also supports student unions in their efforts to influence the co-operation between the wellbeing services counties and FSHS by providing a common framework for the minimum requirements concerning the co-operation.
- Based on this analysis, we will draw up FSHS advocacy objectives and disseminate them to the student unions and key stakeholders. We will work to keep the issue of FSHS resources always present in our advocacy and media activities.

Long-term goals:

- Public healthcare services, FSHS services and university services supporting the health and wellbeing of students should be sufficient and meet the current need. Services must evolve to meet students' needs.
- The health system is based on a life-course approach, where students are considered as a specific population group in all national documents concerning health care and its development.
- We are advocating for the improvement of accessibility of FSHS services and communication.
- Exchange students coming to Finland must be provided with access to FSHS's services again.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- Advocating for a streamlined health care fee payment process and a more reasonable health care fee for university students. We will push for exchange students to once again be given access to the FSHS services.

- We will advocate vigorously for adequate resources and specialist services at FSHS.
- We are monitoring the accessibility of FSHS services and communication. The services and accessibility of communication will be improved on the basis of the monitoring.

5. Organisational development

5.1. Implementation of the updated SYL regulations

The SYL regulation working group continues to work on updating the regulations under the main regulation in 2023. The regulations have been updated in collaboration with the student unions.

Target for 2024:

The SYL office's operations will be revised to comply with the updated regulations.

Measures in 2024:

- The new SYL regulations will be put into practice in the office.
- Personnel will be trained to comply with the new regulations.
- We will monitor closely the implementation of the updated regulations.

5.2. Assessment of the overall reform of the policy paper

SYL has acknowledged the importance of assessing the resources for a comprehensive update of the policy paper. There has been a need for a comprehensive update for years. It is also necessary to assess SYL's policies in light of the changed political environment.

Targets for 2024:

- We have identified the needs for updating the policy paper and the resources required for doing so.

Measures for 2024:

- A study will be carried out on the need to update the policy paper.
- The resources available to start the overall updating will be identified.
- We will draw up a plan for the overall revision of the policy paper. Student unions must be encouraged to become more involved in the planning.

Long-term goals:

- SYL has a strategy
- The policy paper has been renewed. The policy paper is up to date, takes into account the political environment, and prepares SYL for its strategic work.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- Allocating sufficient resources to the overall updating of the policy paper extending over more than one year
- The policy paper is updated regularly

5.3. Equality and internationality in SYL's activities

Internationalism and the role of international students in society and in the student movement has become increasingly important in recent years. This is why in 2023, SYL has created a language policy to promote trilingualism in the office. SYL's internal activities must be developed and assessed from the point of view of internationality, linguistic accessibility and equality.

Targets for 2024:

- Students can participate in SYL's activities equally in Finnish, Swedish and English and in accordance with the language principles.
- SYL's efforts to promote equality are up to date.

Measures for 2024:

- We promote participation in SYL activities in line with the language principles.
- All materials must be made available on time in three languages in high quality.

- In accordance with the language principles, SYL's rules must be translated into Swedish and English, also starting the translation process of other documents guiding activities.
- SYL must carry out a study to assess the financial feasibility of recruiting a translator into Swedish and English for the office, for translating materials and acting as a trilingual contact person.
- One of the anti-harassment and equality officers must be a Swedish and English speaker.
- Seminars and events should have elements in all three languages, e.g. guest lecturers/speakers.
- We will create a plan for the participation of international students in SYL activities.
- The anti-racism training will be used as a basis for assessing the updating of the SYL office's equality plan.
- Anti-racism training must be offered to student union activists at SYL seminars.

Long-term goals:

- Participation in SYL's activities will be made easier for international students.
- In the development of its operations, SYL must take account of equality in the broad sense, with a particular focus on linguistic accessibility.
- SYL is a truly trilingual and egalitarian community.
- SYL's activities must be regionally accessible and available for participation regardless of geographical location. Events must also be available for participation either fully or partially online.
- There must always be at least one person at the SYL office with excellent Swedish skills and another with excellent English skills.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- We will identify ways to enable better participation of international students in SYL's activities.
- The realisation of SYL's equality plan must be monitored and reported on in a transparent manner.
- The language policy will be updated regularly.
- We are working with experts on international affairs and with international students.
- Events must be organised in a variety of locations and remote participation must be enabled at least as a secondary option.

6. SYL promotes sustainability

SYL is a bold and effective advocate for sustainable development. The future of present and coming generations must be secured by promoting ecological, social, economic and cultural sustainability. For decades, students have emphasised that Finland should be at the forefront of promoting global responsibility. Although Finland has committed to spending 0.7% of its gross domestic product on development cooperation, the country has still not taken steps to reach this target.

The climate network, made up of representatives of student unions, strengthens collaboration between the student movement and climate and environmental organisations. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has granted SYL funding for development cooperation projects in Ethiopia and Zambia, which are promoted and managed by SYL's Development Cooperation Advisory Board (KENKKU).

Targets for 2024:

- SYL's fundraising income from projects is increasing.
- Both as an organisation and in the social field, SYL is an exemplary, responsible and sustainable operator.

- Global justice and sustainable development are prominently promoted in SYL's activities and public debate through public communication, advocacy and development cooperation projects.

Measures for 2024:

- Fundraising for SYL's projects will be developed, and a plan will be made for it.
- We will advocate in a sustained way for sustainable development with the climate network.
- We are creating established practices for the continuous calculation of SYL's carbon footprint and reduction of emissions. SYL's carbon footprint calculation practices will be distributed to the student unions.
- Resources supporting sustainability must be increased within SYL's financial limits.

Long-term goals:

- SYL acts as an active and proactive voice for students, the science and arts community and future generations in helping to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- Finland must be carbon neutral by 2035 and biodiversity loss must be stopped by 2030.
- Finland's development cooperation funding will be increased to 0.7% of GDP. The aid provided to the least developed countries, as determined by the UN, must be increased to 0.2% of GDP.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- SYL will work with local partners to implement development cooperation projects to support university students with disabilities in Ethiopia and Zambia.
- We must work to increase public awareness of Finland's commitment to meeting the UN objective of contributing 0.7% of the country's GDP to actual development cooperation and a further 0.2% to support the least developed countries, as determined by the UN, with other organisations engaging in development cooperation.

- We will raise the issues and goals of sustainable development in public debate.
- SYL is active in development cooperation, mainly through external funding.

7. Integration and wellbeing of international students and international student mobility

The Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035 sets out the aim of tripling the number of international graduate students in Finland by 2030, and increasing their employment rate to 75% by then. In addition, the war in Ukraine has brought about a growing need in European universities to create alternative pathways to higher education and to offer university places to students fleeing war, conflict or persecution. In the future, a significant amount of mobility is expected to take place through European university networks.

Targets for 2024:

- International students' opportunities to integrate into Finnish society and the labour market are improved.
- The international mobility of students in higher education increases in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way. Universities are becoming more international, and the university community is open and multicultural.
- Tuition fees for degree students from outside the EU and EEA countries will not be increased, and permit processes for living in Finland will be simplified. Newly graduated international students must be guaranteed a residence permit on compassionate grounds.
- The Students at Risk Finland organisation is becoming more established, and students fleeing international crises are helped in Finland.

Measures for 2024:

- Our work must be anti-racist and inclusive.
- We must promote the entry of foreign students into Finland and their integration and employment with various stakeholders, in particular the international student community.

- We are promoting internationalisation and international mobility based on SYL's solutions, such as our vision for EU advocacy.
- We will work with Students at Risk Finland and support all students fleeing war, including Ukrainians.
- We will carry out a research project on the situation facing international students with the Research Foundation for Studies and Education (Otus).
- In collaboration with various stakeholders, we will advocate against tuition fee increases and for changes to the main permit processes for international students.

Long-term goals:

- Tuition fees for international students will be abolished, and international students who have completed a degree in Finland will receive a permanent residence permit.
- Every student in higher education must have a genuine opportunity to include study abroad as part of their studies. The number of student mobility periods must be restored to pre-2016 levels and then increased further.
- Finland must have a functioning Students at Risk scholarship scheme.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- We will work towards the abolition of tuition fees for non-EU and non-EEA degree students, and prevent increases in tuition fees and the introduction of new fee-paying pathways to higher education.
- We will promote structural changes in universities in Finland and the rest of Europe to promote student mobility.
- We will contribute to creating new complementary study-based pathways through which students in need of international protection or victims of human rights violations can obtain international protection and access to study at a Finnish institute of higher education.

8. Making students' voices heard throughout Europe through the upcoming European parliamentary elections

In recent years, higher education policy has become increasingly prominent on the EU agenda, as reflected in developments such as the ambitious targets set by the European Commission for the development of the European Education Area. The importance of these themes will become even more evident in the spring 2024 European Parliament elections, which will elect new members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for the period 2024–2029. Of the total number of MEPs, 14 will be elected from Finland. Preparations for the EU parliamentary elections will start in autumn 2023, and during the run-up to the elections SYL will aim to strengthen its position as an EU expert by highlighting the themes of the EU parliamentary election programme both in its own communications and through its stakeholders.

Targets for 2024:

- University students and the issues that matter to them must be reflected in the debates leading up to the EU parliamentary elections, and increased voter turnout must be ensured.
- SYL's objectives will be visible as part of the European Students' Union (ESU) European elections campaign.
- In the coming election period, the EU will start implementing the goals of SYL's election advocacy programme and the election advocacy campaigns of Finland's university students and the ESU.
- The Finnish EU commissioner and MEPs recognise the aims of the student movement.

Measures for 2024:

- A joint European parliamentary election advocacy campaign will be carried out with SAMOK and the student unions. We will promote the involvement of student unions in the campaign, for example in organising and holding EU-themed events and communication.
- SYL will participate and contribute to the ESU European election advocacy campaign.

- We will encourage Finnish members of the EU Parliament to work on education, science and culture issues in the next parliamentary term, and to apply for entry to the committees in the parliament that are relevant to education and skills acquisition.
- We will meet with newly elected MEPs and commissioners and establish close links with them.

Long-term goals:

- Finland will work to influence social, educational and environmental policy in the European Union.
- Issues of concern to students and relevant to education and the future will feature in the EU policy debate in the 2024–2029 parliamentary term.
- Decisions will be made in the European Union's education policy in the best interests of students and as close to students as possible. European collaboration will deepen, but the basic principles of the Finnish education system will not be compromised.

Measures that extend over more than one year:

- We will encourage university students to vote in elections, increasing student turnout.
- We are working to raise awareness among higher education students of current issues of relevance to students in the EU's decision-making process.
- SYL will influence the development of European university networks by promoting student democracy and free education.
- We are working to increase the participation of Finnish students in European university networks by bringing together student representatives and discussing policies with student unions.