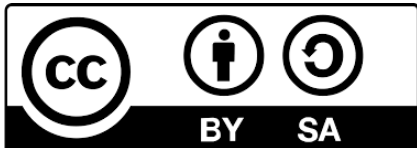


Booklet of recommendations in favour of student engagement and its recognition in Europe





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Abbreviations

European STEP: European Student Engagement Project

HEIs: High Education Institutions

IOs: Intellectual Outputs

EU: European Union



INTRODUCTION



How is student engagement recognized in European countries? Is it recognised and valued within academic curricula? If so, in what ways?

In order to better understand the daily lives of students engaged in extracurricular activities and to support them in identifying and promoting the skills acquired in those activities, Animafac and six partners launched in 2018 **the European Student Engagement Project (European STEP)**.

The **recommendations** you will find in this booklet are drawn from the results of European STEP. This booklet aims to advocate in favour of an enhanced recognition of student engagement in Europe, at different levels (Europe, Member States, higher education institutions).

About European STEP

European Student Engagement Project (European STEP) is a European Erasmus+ project that focuses on the recognition of student engagement. In the current European context where the active participation of young people in society is highlighted through the EU's Youth Strategy for 2019-2027¹ and mechanisms such as the European Solidarity Corps², the question of recognising young people's engagement arises. Therefore, it was launched to reflect upon the recognition of student engagement in European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

² https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en



From September 2018 to June 2021, the French student associations network, Animafac³, coordinated the Erasmus+ European Student Engagement Project (European STEP)⁴, in cooperation with six European partners: the European University Foundation (EUF) in Luxembourg⁵, the Office of Student Life of Dublin City University in Ireland⁶, the CY Cergy Paris University in France⁷, the University of Valladolid in Spain⁸, the University of Vienna in Austria⁹ and the Volunteer Centre of the University of Warsaw in Poland¹⁰.

Moreover, four associated partners were involved in the project to ensure the dissemination of the project and its results: the French “Conférence des Grandes Ecoles (CGE)”¹¹, the French Conference of University Presidents (CPU)¹², the Crous¹³ and the European University Association (EUA)¹⁴.

In order to have a good understanding of the recognition of student engagement, three studies were led. The first one consists of a map of the national frameworks for student engagement recognition¹⁵, the second one is a preliminary report based on a survey disseminated to European universities concerning the recognition measures and policies set in their institution¹⁶ and the third study consisted of gathering qualitative data. It was conducted on the basis of interviews with students, academic and administrative staff members on their perceptions of student engagement and its recognition and on the effect recognition can have on engagement paths.

³ <https://www.animafac.net/>

⁴ The European STEP project is an Erasmus+ co-funded strategic partnership project, for the period of September 2018 to June 2021.

⁵ <https://uni-foundation.eu/>

⁶ <https://www.dcu.ie/studentlife/office-of-student-life>

⁷ <https://www.u-cergy.fr/en/index.html>

⁸ <https://www.observal.es/es/>

⁹ <https://www.univie.ac.at/en/>

¹⁰ <https://wolontariat.uw.edu.pl/volunteers/>

¹¹ <https://www.cge.asso.fr/>

¹² <http://www.cpu.fr/presentation/presentation-of-the-cpu/>

¹³ <https://www.etudiant.gouv.fr/pid33797/cnous-crous.html>

¹⁴ <https://eua.eu/>

¹⁵ European Student Engagement Project (2019). Mapping of policy frameworks for student engagement recognition in Europe here:

<https://www.animafac.net/minisite/european-step/european-step-en/>

¹⁶ European Student Engagement Project (2019). *How European Higher Education Institutions Recognise Student Engagement. European STEP Survey Report* www.asso.li/stepsurveyreport



The results of the studies are available on the European STEP website¹⁷.

About this booklet of recommendations

What for?

In this booklet, you will find **10 recommendations** based on the results of the project.

Through this project we have discovered that there is not just one common practice for recognizing student engagement, but there are several different ways to do it in every European country. Thanks to this project, more people have increased their interest in the importance of student engagement recognition.

Students are increasingly considered by higher education institutions as a whole (living conditions, well-being, health, engagements, etc.), not just as learners. This evolution, which first emerged in the top European and world universities, contributes to academic success as well as to the attractiveness and inclusiveness of higher education wished for by the Bologna Process. Student engagement is more and more important in our societies. It brings students to acquire specific and transversal skills which can be complementary to their academic path. It is a source of personal enrichment and contributes to the development of a sense of belonging to the institution, and even to the territory. It is also more and more taken into consideration by HEIs.

Who for?

This booklet of recommendations is designed **for public authorities at a local, national and European levels** as they can support and help the recognition of student engagement by the HEIs. This booklet is divided into three parts as the recommendations are designed for each level.

¹⁷European STEP's website: <https://www.animafac.net/minisite/european-step/european-step-en/>



PART I

Recommendations for higher education institutions (HEIs)



Recommendation n° 1:

Support, encourage and facilitate student engagement in extracurricular activities.

Students who want to engage themselves in extracurricular activities should have the possibility to do it and be able to follow their curricula at the same time. For example, HEIs can offer courses within the curricula with "engagement" parts (such as service learning projects) or set up other types of engagement recognition's practices, such as the acquisition of ECTS¹⁸, to encourage student engagement.

Recommendation n° 2:

Make the recognition of student engagement accessible to a more diversified range of students.

The recognition of student engagement should be accessible to every student with different situations. This recommendation aims to allow students from all fields and levels of study to engage, as well as allow international students to engage while increasing their international experience from activities abroad, and finally to allow students with disabilities to engage.

Recommendation n° 3:

Recognise student engagement as a non-formal and informal way of learning and acquiring skills and competencies and support them in identifying and valuing them.

¹⁸ For more informations about the practices HEIs can set up :
<https://www.animafac.net/media/Guidebook-of-practices.pdf>



It happens that engagement is badly perceived, especially by the family environment of students. In that regard, if the HEIs recognize it, it will legitimize it and make a strong argument to justify this investment outside of the classes. Recognition thus encourages students to get involved (for the reason mentioned just before) but also because it allows, on a certain level, to make the possibilities of involvement more visible.

This recommendation aims to allow students and give them time for support and training opportunities to help them develop and structure their engagements depending on the professional career they are seeking.

Recommendation n° 4:

Include as many actors as it is possible to the process of recognition of the student engagement, and enhance the cooperation between all of the involved sites.

“Student engagement” is a very wide notion, so taking into account all of the perspectives ensures coherent and adequate means of recognition.

In order to recognize student engagement, a successful factor is to ensure cooperation between all of the actors who participate in the academic life¹⁹. HEIs can adopt a co-construction approach that involves all stakeholders (students, student organizations and associations, and all members of student associations) in the building of student engagement recognition strategies or measures. This method is particularly useful because it can help all the stakeholders to have clear information on what services HEIs propose. For example, HEIs can involve student representatives in the process of developing and/or evaluating student engagement recognition procedures and instruments and conduct accompanying studies to systematically take into account the student perspective.

The importance and value of the student engagement has to be understood by the academic and administrative staff as well as by the decision makers of the HEIs.

¹⁹ For more details :
<https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/138:an-institutional-perspective-on-the-recognition-of-student-engagement.html>



PART II

Recommendations for national / public policies



Recommendation n°5:

Recognise that students' organisations and student engagement are important in students' life for their social value.

HEIs are not only a space dedicated to theoretical learning and research, but also a place to train citizens in order to participate in the construction of a society of commitment. National institutions and public policies should encourage HEIs to take into account a social dimension.

Students involved in solidarity and volunteering activities improve their social skills as well as societal commitment such as willingness to actively participate in the solution of societal problems and willingness to take on social responsibility.

Their commitment, regardless of the form it takes, (social, political, student representation, sports, cultural, etc.) develops the valuable transversal competences, which are increasingly in demand by employers, such as teamwork or people management. This learning therefore improves the employability of the students. In addition to that, student engagement in volunteering, social and solidarity activities contributes to the development of the local communities and society in general as well as shaping responsible and civic attitudes among young people.

Recommendation n°6:

Legislate or regulate the recognition of student engagement to encourage student engagement's recognition.

National institutions and public policies can collect and provide good practice examples for recognition measures, procedures and tools and can support and help the recognition of



student engagement. A study has already been conducted, as part of European STEP project, on good practice examples for student engagement recognition measures in European HEIs²⁰.

National institutions and public policies can, as well, create an incentive framework to encourage students to engage and to encourage the academic staff to support and guide them in the engagement process as well as help HEIs to recognise student engagement. The national legislation and framework could also provide the basis for training on national recognition procedures and tools for HEI staff and academics²¹. This could also help to increase awareness, information and trust in (national) recognition procedures.

For example, the “Loi Egalité et Citoyenneté”, enacted on January 27, 2017, provides the legal framework in France for the recognition of student engagement. Indeed, with this law, French higher education institutions find themselves obliged to put in place certain measures to facilitate or recognize student engagement. This law marks a turning point in the way skills acquisition is approached. The advances made by the law are based on two fundamental principles: the validation of skills, knowledge and abilities acquired during an engagement experience, and the adjustment of schooling for student association leaders. Committed students have rights that they can exercise.

Recommendation n° 7:

Encourage institutions/countries to develop frameworks/resources to support recognition of acquired skills.

National institutions and public policies should take into account that the skills acquired during an engagement have an important place in a student’s life and they cannot be ignored.

For example, as mentioned above, the first part of the “Loi Egalité et Citoyenneté” is based on the validation of skills acquired during an engagement. This means that students can request that the skills acquired during their engagement experience be recognized by their institution of higher education. For example, a student in charge of communication for her association can ask to validate a teaching unit devoted to written communication, provided that she demonstrates that she has acquired the required skills.

²⁰ For more information: <https://www.animafac.net/media/Guidebook-of-practices.pdf>

²¹ For more information:
<https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/0037-Bologna-Publication-2021-WEB3.pdf>

Recommendation n° 8:

Support higher education institutions in recognising that competencies acquired during engagement and similar to academic diploma can be validated.

National support can help to form transparent, reliable and comparable procedures of student engagement recognition and validation as well as to provide a framework for validation agencies or help HEIs to build capacity for validation. National support could also include counselling for HEIs on recognition and validation issues.

For example, in France a specific status for students who hold responsibilities in associations was created. It has been carried out by Animafac, in order to recognise student engagement, to help them reconcile studies and student engagement. This status allows engaged students to study and be engaged at the same time, with the possibility to have an exemption of mid-term exams, to validate the engagement as an internship when coherent with the field of studies and to validate the experience of student engagement as a teaching unit. This example could take into account to encourage HEIs to develop specific status which may in turn encourage students to engage.



PART .III

Recommendations for European institutions



Recommendation n° 9:

Support and entice the recognition of student engagement.

Student engagement is a non-formal and informal way of learning and acquiring skills and competencies. European institutions can create standards and guidelines to follow and support local initiatives that are not necessarily at a national level. European institutions can also inspire a better recognition of student engagement.

A possibility could be to invite European countries to set up validation measures for non-formal and informal learnings, including solidarity and volunteering activities²².

Recommendation n° 10:

Disseminate and participate in a better knowledge of European tools identifying, recognising and valuing student engagement recognition.

Every student has the right to know about the student engagement recognition's practices that exist in their country, that's why it is necessary to disseminate European tools. In addition, this can encourage students to engage themselves in solidarity and volunteering activities as well as encourage the HEIs to improve and/or implement solidarity and volunteering activities for their students.

²² For more informations about the validation of non-formal and informal learning:
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf