



KSU's Recommendations for the Education Act Review

Foreword

KSU is the main student representative body in Malta and one of the council's firmest goals is that of the betterment and increased quality of further and higher education. The students' council does appreciate that an improvement in all levels of education will have a positive domino-effect on higher education with special regards to the University of Malta (UoM).

The Ministry of Education and Employment (MEE) has announced a consultation process for the review of the Education Act - Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta. KSU will contribute to this review by proposing recommendation for the Ministry's working group to effectively consider. This contribution ensures that KSU remains active in its purpose towards education for students, and also, society at large.

Recommendations

The *Consultation Document on Reforms to the Education Act*, issued by the MEE, clearly established issues of interest which require attention in this review. KSU heeded this call and opened up its channels of communication with the student body through student representatives of various Faculties, Institutes, centres and schools at UoM.

KSU managed to map some of the issues referenced above with its own purposes and functions. In this manner, the areas in which KSU's contribution can be more effective, were highlighted. The following are a set of recommendations which KSU is putting forward:





Student's Rights and Student Involvement

The Ministry and Directorate of Education should look into the feasibility introduction of student councils amongst state schools from levels of primary education. These entities should establish and maintain a mechanism of monitoring of the performance of such student councils. The students involved should be mentored and guided on principles of good practice throughout their activity in the council, and this is especially required in primary and secondary levels. This mechanism should also be able to assist student councils with organisation (and financial aid if required) of relevant activities for the benefit of the community of fellow students. At secondary education, student councils should be established in every school, as at the stage students are more mature.

The purpose of these student councils should be to instil further social awareness of active citizenship amongst students at a relatively early age. Such skills will eventually assist the students in further levels of education and complement with skills required for other commitments in life. Taking this action at an early stage of education will further mitigate the possibility of having future citizens who lack interest in contributing towards general society.

A positive effect which KSU envisages will eventually emerge out of the above is that a larger portion of the student body at UoM becomes more aware of the importance of active involvement and social awareness. Student apathy at UoM is an existing problem, and therefore with implementation of the above, the problem of student apathy will be tackled at its roots; early education. This measure would be a preventive, which is more appealing than firefighting measures to defeat student apathy at tertiary education. Nevertheless, KSU never stops in its mission to appeal to the student population to participate more in student life and politics.



KSU would also welcome any form of increase of student representatives on the different University bodies such as faculty board, Senate and Council. Following up from KSU's reactions towards the education act amendments in



2012, the present executive raises again the proposal that KSU is allowed a seat and vote on the University Senate. This seat will be additional to the current student representatives and directly devoted to a representative of the University Students Council. This vote will signify that University recognizes KSU as the official student council and official spokesperson to the student body. This seat on Senate will allow KSU to voice its ideas and projects to University and can also allow ease of communication to follow-up on such ideas and projects.

Employability

It is an appreciated reality that nowadays employers seek an array of academic, social and organisational skills. Therefore, students must be made more aware that excelling in academia does not make you automatically appealing for employment. Issues of active citizenship and student involvement discussed above, are exemplary methods of how an individuals may achieve skills contributing to employability. Active citizenship allows one to achieve indispensable soft skills which would be an asset in the work environment. This is an area which the education act should reflect, that education is not simply academic, but one which provides holistic skills.

An aspect favourable to employability and complementary to academic learning is practical work experience. This is an area which still needs to be improved upon at UoM where many graduates engage industry with academic certification alone. KSU is positive that MEE is committed in working with the concerned parties so that students are given more work practice opportunities in the form of placements, internships and so on.

The MEE should assist the implementation, running and maintenance of an office within University of Malta which will be responsible of identifying recruitment opportunities for students which would complement academic learning with practical work experience. This could be done in collaboration with other external entities such as the social partners, the ETC or Agenzija Zghazagh.





The above commitment from the MEE in collaboration with relevant entities, will be a proper action towards increase of employability amongst the student population. This entity will be properly focused on assisting students in engaging themselves in such experiences. One of the functions of this entity may be the raising of awareness on the importance of seeking such opportunities while studying and the promotion skills required for job mobility.

Reduction of Early School Leavers - A cooperation between stakeholders

The state should put an onus on itself to implement measures which minimise early school leavers. The current early school leavers strategy is already a positive step in the proposal of holistic preventive measures to minimise dropouts from secondary and post-secondary education.

There should be cooperation between Education entities and other stakeholders in order to provide multiple pathways of education and training which are suited for students with different skills, abilities and mind-sets. There should be an attentive mechanism which gauges the abilities of students, and does not undermine the potential of students which do not excel academically. Other pathways of education may include trades and vocational work.

Unfortunately, it may be the case that the number of dropouts remain significant because students with academic difficulties are not made aware and empowered enough to engage in a rewarding pathway of education.

Therefore, KSU suggests that the ministry establishes an outreach mechanism, in different secondary institutions, in order to promote the available pathways of education. This mechanism may also make higher education institutions more tangible to secondary students. At secondary level, some students may feel that reaching tertiary education is close to impossible. A proper campaign will help diminish such perceptions





Digital Education

The act should encourage responsibility on providers of education (teachers, academics, learning support assistants etc.) to make use of technology in their educational methods. This mind-set should be applied across all levels of education; from primary to tertiary, where present technology can be an effective tool to facilitate communication and learning in education.

KSU takes example from the use of e-learning tools at UoM such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Digital platforms such as these can be implemented in various stages of education for the benefit of students. KSU is committed to ensure these are made available more across-the-board at UoM. This commitment by appealing that such attitude towards digital/online educational tools become part and parcel of Malta's vision for education.

Reduction of bureaucracy and inefficiency

There should be a commitment of making efficient use of IT infrastructure in order to convert any paper-based administrative process into a digital counterpart. The former tend to be a source of excessive bureaucracy and therefore by making use of technology, an administrative process can become much more efficient. The use of the internet can be an extremely useful facilitating administrative processes. Implementation of a centralised system to deal with most of the administrative processes in the education sector would be a strong contribution.

The Higher Education Sector

The higher education sector should be a focal point of the Ministry responsible for education and also relevant entities. One of these important entities is the National Commission of Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). KSU believes that NCFHE can be also of support to the principal customers of higher education; students. NCFHE should be an effective promoter and reviewer of quality assurance in the local higher education sector, working in collaboration with entities at UoM to ensure the approach is consistent and in line with international and EU standards.





The commission may develop methods for academic professionals to contribute to the quality assurance in Higher Education. Such methods may include regular training to keep updated with international standards in the regime of pedagogical science with respect to higher education systems. This will ensure that teaching methods and tools are relevant to the modern age i.e. the use of visual media over antiquate dictated education.

The commission should play an important role in safeguarding quality in the ever-competitive higher education market. The tertiary education qualifications offered by different institutions should be reviewed in order to distinguish whether there exist discrepancy in level in the qualifications offered. A suitable example would be an assessment whether a tertiary qualification meets the requirements of professional warrants as per the respective legal provisions of the said professions. Such professions typically call for a higher education degree from UoM as the long established tertiary education hub in Malta. This assessment can only be successful by the execution of programme reviews and quality assurance practices.

Conclusions

The above recommendations should be effectively reviewed so that the appropriate material can be transposed to legal provisions in the Education Act. Consequently, this commitment will lead to the realization of some of the initiative suggested above.

KSU will remain open for communication with relevant stakeholders in the education sector and looks forward to contribute further in the name of the student body the council represents.

