

Memorandum.

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Student affairs and services run by students – possibility or Utopia

Currently in Latvia there are 34 higher education institutions (HEI) for students (these include 6 Universities) and 24 colleges. The student number in Latvia is about 100 000 students and the number is declining each year, so HEI compete more and more over the number of students they will get each year.

When looking for student social affairs and services they have to be looked upon in three levels – the governmental, the HEI and student level. In the governmental level the government provides three main aids for students:

- 1) Budget places for students (the government pays for about 34% of students). The government chooses its priorities each year and the grants financing for students to study in them. Currently the government is looking for alternative financing models.
- 2) Grants. About each 10th with a budget place also receives a monthly grant (about 100 Euros). These grants are received by those who score the highest marks in their studies.
- 3) The government is a voucher for student loans. This means, that when a student takes his study loan, one of the vouchers for his loans is the state. These loans have to be repaid after the studies.

In the HEI level the student affairs and services are dependent on the HEI itself. During the accreditation some basic principles are required – whether the students can live in dorms, there are possibilities of feeding and if the facilities are sufficient for the study process. The rest is up to the HEI. They can decide on accessibility, discounts on dorm and study fees for students with a social background, the amount of culture and sports events.

The Higher education law in Latvia states that each HEI must have its independent student representation body with three main goals: the welfare of academic, social and cultural environment for the students. As well as that they are granted 0.5% of the

budget of the HEI. Since this norm is quite new, there are a lot of issues currently with this. The first issue is with what finances what – for example, some HEI offer dorm discounts, that are administrated by student representatives, while the finances come from the HEI, or vice versa, students pay for sport or culture funding from their budget, but the HEI have unions that are responsible for it. The second issue is that HEI have already historically developed departments and unions for student affairs and services – carrier centres, departments for foreign student's etc.

Thus in order for student representative bodies to increase their scope of functions there has to be redistributions of functions in the HEI in order not to duplicate work. So each HEI has its own model and they are changing differently in each HEI of to what extent are students in charge of student affairs and services.

There are advantages and disadvantages if the students increase their extend of actions in the HEI and they depend on different factors – the leadership of the HEI, the age, type and size of the HEI. Yet in general students are granted more and more possibilities to participate in the HEI student affair and service part, so students in charge of these functions is one of the possible models in Latvia.