EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

LEARNING & TEACHING PAPER #24

Learning and teaching to empower students

Thematic Peer Group Report

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Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of stakeholders have started to call for higher education to ensure that graduates are equipped for a future marked by economic, societal and environmental challenges. At the same time, universities are already operating in increasingly disruptive environments, as technological advances, demographic changes, environmental crises and other phenomena demand that higher education institutions and their staff swiftly adapt.

From a learning and teaching perspective, this means that societal expectations are rising for higher education to help learners develop into engaged, responsible and resilient citizens of the world. Against this backdrop, the 2024 European University Association (EUA) Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Group "Learning and teaching to empower students" (hereafter "the group", see Annex for details) explored a crucial prerequisite for cultivating these qualities in graduates: an empowering learning and teaching environment.

The group, consisting of representatives from eight universities across Europe, investigated co-creative, student-centred approaches that foster learner agency. It also discussed questions of empowerment and power structures within institutions, looking into the roles of institutional leadership and staff members in creating a learning and teaching environment that encourages learner autonomy and supports students' growth and development. To ensure that the student perspective was adequately included in its conclusions, the group comprised staff members and student representatives from the participating institutions. In addition, members sought feedback from students at their institutions, in order to verify the student perspective on the group's findings.

This report summarises the group's findings by first specifying its understanding and use of the concept of student empowerment, as well as key considerations associated with the concept. The report proceeds by presenting the benefits of student empowerment and potential challenges hindering its implementation at present. Specific practice examples from each of the group members are spread across the report in order to help demonstrate how an institution may aim to work towards student empowerment. However, the group is aware that specific practices may not work everywhere and in all contexts. Readers are thus invited to use the contents of the report for inspiration, rather than seeing them as recommendations.

This report's primary target group is university leadership and other decision makers at the institutional level, but the group hopes that many other university staff members will find the presented ideas useful as well.

What is student empowerment?
Concept and key considerations

In defining what empowerment means, this report builds on research conducted by Catherine Broom,[1] whose use of the empowerment term covers both an academic and a student view. Broom's paper defines student empowerment as development of the students' agency to make decisions and effect change within their learning. Broom also links empowerment with that of self-efficacy, meaning "the belief that one controls one's life and that one can make positive changes in one's surrounding environment".[2] An institutional environment consists of various academic and social, physical and intangible aspects, all of which can be actively shaped by empowered students.

Building on this understanding of student empowerment, the group identified several key considerations that serve to explain the concept's many facets while at the same time highlighting the rationale behind it and contributing factors. The key considerations are best consolidated through the visual of a forest (Figure 1), which depicts the structure of elements that form student empowerment. The forest's joined roots consist of a sense of belonging and community, alongside equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The tree trunks forming the core of the visual consist of active stakeholder engagement, genuine purpose and rationale behind student empowerment, as well as commitment and communication. The final, overarching element – the tree canopy – is student growth as the ultimate, open-ended aim of student empowerment.

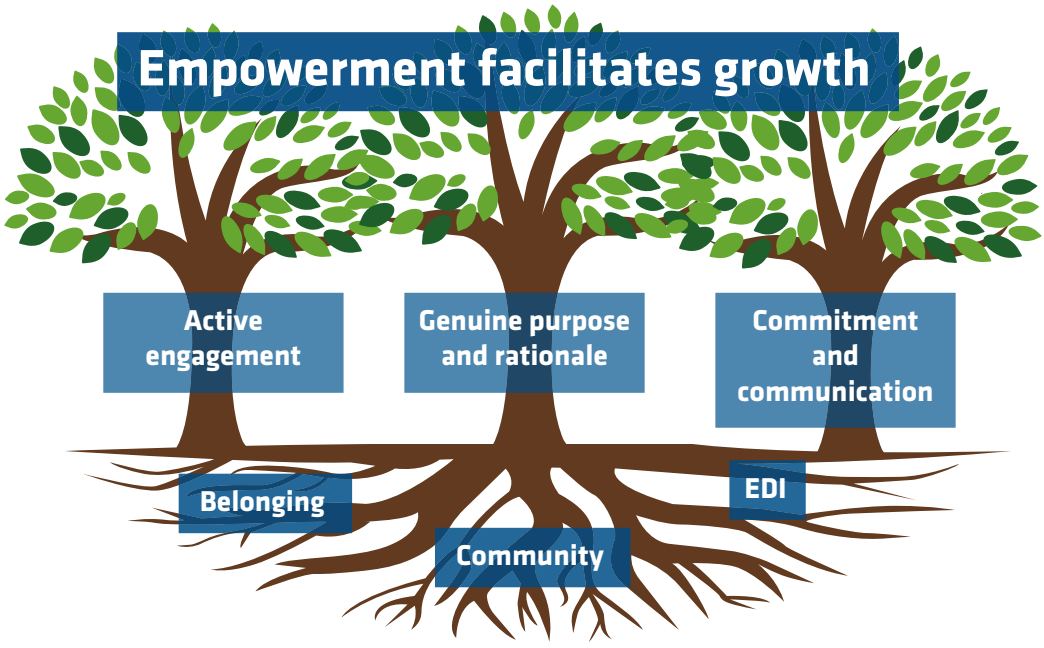

Figure 1: Consolidated key considerations

1 Broom, C., 2015, "Empowering students: Pedagogy that benefits educators and learners", *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 14(2), pp. 79–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/2047173415597142 (accessed 19/11/2024).

2 Ibid., p. 80.

COMMUNITY, A SENSE OF BELONGING AND EDI UNDERPIN EMPOWERMENT

Creating a sense of belonging channels empowerment. Therefore, it is vital for institutions to help ensure that students have a chance to see themselves as part of a community, while acknowledging and respecting that some may not yet be ready to become or have no vested interest in becoming active members of the community. Empowerment and engagement are not the same, as not every student needs to be engaged, but each of them should be empowered to become engaged, if they choose to.

Student cohorts are inherently diverse and will probably become even more so in the near future, with many universities wanting to attract previously underrepresented demographics. EDI measures, such as dedicated bodies, structures and training, are fundamental to facilitating belonging among those underrepresented groups. However, some group members found that their institutions were only at the earliest stages of embedding EDI, and acknowledged that this process will require enhanced and dedicated efforts in the foreseeable future. Discussions with students of the group member institutions revealed that in some universities, many students were themselves not aware of the diversity of the student population, with the effect that the challenges, needs and perspectives of students from underrepresented groups or with special needs often remain unknown. Universities' efforts in improving this situation will need to be underpinned by an openness to potentially uncomfortable discussions and realities on the side of all stakeholders, and universities embarking on this journey will need to ensure that these discussions are, indeed, clearly understood to be aimed at increasing the inclusivity of all student groups, not just the traditional ones (e.g. young, from an academic background, Caucasian).

Students are also diverse in terms of their study progress, which will have a considerable effect on what they expect from their experience at university. The group concluded from discussions with students that first-year students had much higher expectations and needs concerning their social life at university, whereas more mature students, including postgraduate and doctoral students, were more interested in research or career guidance than in social activities. For institutions, it is thus important to consider how to ensure a sense of belonging among all of these different groups. For first-year students, for example, for whom university typically means the start of an entirely new stage of their life, the first week or semester sets the tone for the rest of their studies. Hence, an accessible, inclusive and well-communicated induction period is key. Once this initial phase has passed, though, students might refocus on academic goals and lose touch with their community. Focusing on the so-called "hidden curriculum",[3] by which a university conveys its values and beliefs in an implicit way, might help to retain the feeling of connection and belonging among more senior students. All student groups, regardless of their progress, will need dedicated efforts to support their wellbeing,

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: CITIZEN SCIENCE DOCTORAL COLLEGE

The Citizen Science Doctoral College – CeiED at Lusófona University in Portugal is a forum for discussion and training that brings together doctoral candidates, supervisors and researchers around joint and interdisciplinary activities to support thesis research work. It provides support on methodological issues as well as workshops on transversal skills based on the interests of doctoral candidates, who are consulted annually on the topics that are essential for them as future researchers. The activities are free of charge and carried out online, assuring the time adaptation to working and international doctoral candidates.

3 The first use of the term "hidden curriculum" is attributed to Philip Jackson in his book *Life in Classrooms* (1968) and has been widely discussed ever since, including by Vettori, O., & Gover, A., 2020, *Curriculum design: Thematic Peer Group Report*. Brussels: EUA, p. 6. https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/curriculum-design.html (accessed 21/01/2025).

since community, belonging, wellbeing and empowerment are issues that are intricately linked.[4] Finally, student empowerment should not stop at the point of graduation. Alumni form a vital source of input for institutions and their students. A university looking to draw on their experiences may want to explore ways to stay in touch that are beneficial for the institution, current students and alumni. One common reason why students are hesitant to invest their time in contributing to the organisation of learning and teaching, for example by providing input on curricula or course content, may be that they do not see any direct benefit for themselves. An institution that proactively engages with its alumni to create a connection between former, current and future students might be able to entice more students to voice their views and support students in lifelong learning.

EMPOWERMENT REQUIRES ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Empowerment is a cross-cutting effort that depends on the concerted engagement of all stakeholders within an institution, including leadership, teachers, departments and student representatives. Even though senior management has a vital role to play in providing top-down commitment to student empowerment, it still needs to be student-led, whereas the role of the university is to support students in becoming informed and empowered contributors to their learning environment, including through adequate information, communication and preparation. The university exists for its students, not the other way around. In addition, the engagement of students needs to be adequately acknowledged and rewarded.

Nevertheless, embracing student empowerment on a broad scale may require a change of culture and strategic action, instead of sporadic, isolated measures.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: "GET TO KNOW YOUR LECTURER" PODCAST SERIES

In the School of Biosciences at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom, students were invited to take the lead on a series of "Get to know your lecturer" podcasts, whereby students interview their lecturers to discover more about their teachers and their stories. The aims of the podcasts were to reduce barriers to engagement between staff and students, improve the students' sense of community and give them the opportunity to take ownership of a school-wide project.

Students posed interview questions and voted for the most popular discussion points, which were then used in the interview. A combination of standard (e.g. education and career pathway) and more personalised questions (e.g. hobbies, special interests) were posed. Students volunteered to conduct and edit the interviews, and, after lecturer approval, the final podcasts were advertised on the Virtual Learning Environment and via email.

EMPOWERMENT NEEDS TO BE GENUINE

In order to ensure that student empowerment is not superficial or just a tick-box exercise, active listening to the voices of students is needed, as well as strategic and intentional follow-up plans. University leadership and other decision makers need to be open to change and have a growth mindset on how to run their institutions in a way that authentically includes students' perspectives on learning and teaching and that adequately addresses students' needs. A tokenistic partnership between university leadership and students can be more damaging to students' trust than not partnering with students at all. One important measure for ensuring that students are aware of the impact of their voice is to close

4 See Prescott, G., Sikström, P., & Peterbauer, H., 2023, *Needs and wellbeing of students and staff: Thematic Peer Group Report*. Brussels: EUA, p. 4. https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/needs-and-wellbeing-of-students-and-staff-thematic-peer-group-report.html (accessed 21/11/2024). This report identifies key aspects of wellbeing, including a "sense of institutional connection and belonging" under the broader aspect of "[c]ommunity and culture", as well as "[e]mpowerment (i.e., freedom to have a voice)".

the feedback loop, i.e. clearly communicate to students any developments that are a result of their engagement.

To allow for a genuine partnership towards student empowerment, leadership also needs to have trust in the value of students' input, allow for experimental approaches and accept the possibility, at least initially, of less-than-perfect outcomes.

Finally, teaching staff are the institutional representatives with whom students are in touch on a daily basis, so student empowerment can only be genuine if staff are on board too. Many may not be familiar with or convinced by methods or pedagogies that involve students as empowered partners in education; hence, adequate staff training should form a key part of this cultural change as well.[5]

EMPOWERMENT REQUIRES COMMITMENT AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Student empowerment is challenging to achieve, since not all staff – nor all students – are aware of what it means and requires, or convinced by its benefits. Against this backdrop, the challenge for institutions is how to engage those students that do not have a natural proclivity for voicing their opinions. The group concluded from discussions with students that many of them had not been exposed to an empowering, partnering relationship with their educators since their arrival at university. Thus, again, one key lever that institutions can use is how they shape activities in a student's first few weeks, since this time can be used to efficiently familiarise students with this – for them potentially new – understanding of education and the concept of "learning how to learn", rather than relying on more didactic teaching methods.

Beyond the first few weeks, institutions need to consider how they can best create physical, logistical and conceptual spaces where students' agency is welcome or even proactively invited. As outlined above, at least some activities that build on student engagement and foster an institutional community should be student-led (e.g. student unions or subgroups organising social events), while the institution's role would be to provide physical spaces for students to meet and organise their activities. In addition to student-led activities, more formal arrangements such as student-staff panels and regular feedback/evaluation cycles could be implemented by the institution. In order to widely spread awareness of the concept of student empowerment and ensure that all students are aware of how they can become engaged or how their representatives are cooperating with the university management, it is also vital for institutions to promote the existence of, for example, quality assurance or curricular committees involving students. Inviting student agency does not end at the point of acting (or choosing not to act) upon a student suggestion. Closing the feedback loop and communicating the outcome back to the students is key, and may facilitate a compromise to suit all.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: ACADEMIC MENTORS

The University of Ioannina in Greece runs an academic mentor programme to facilitate students' transition to and from university life. Each student is assigned a staff member as their mentor and point of reference, who may provide advice, guidance and recommendations regarding academic and more generic life issues during the student's journey. The mentor showcases institutional services and other sources of information as needed.

5 About the concept, benefits and practices in engaging students as partners in education, see Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K., 2014, *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education.* York: Higher Education Academy. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher (accessed 10/01/2025).

EMPOWERMENT FACILITATES GROWTH

Facilitating student growth is fundamental to the concept of student empowerment, since growth is the ultimate objective of empowerment. This growth is highly individual and may be academic or personal, depending on the individual student's goals at university, which may range from obtaining a degree that will get them a good job or developing specific professional, academic or social skills to becoming autonomous adults with 21st-century skills, such as adaptability and resilience. For students with special needs or from underrepresented groups, growth may simply mean finishing their degree without extraordinary difficulties. The task of the university is then to provide an adequate environment that nurtures this growth.

Student growth is at the top of the "forest" visual in Figure 1 because it is the overarching objective of student empowerment, but also because it is in itself an open concept and thus inclined towards expansion and evolution. Growth is entirely dependent on the individual student and may develop in different directions over time, both at the level of individual students as they progress through their studies and at the level of collective student cohorts as they change and become more diverse. Student growth is unlikely to be linear and consistent, it may flourish and wane, much like a deciduous tree in the changing seasons.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: RESILIENCE TRAINING

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland commissioned the University of Pennsylvania to train 40 staff members in teaching resilience. Through this training, staff learn how to equip their students with an optimistic mindset, managing anxiety and putting issues in perspective, responding appropriately to challenges, and relationship-building, among other things.

Institutions should remain keenly aware of the open nature of students' expectations and goals while aiming to strike an appropriate balance between proactively supporting and guiding students and providing students with space to grow autonomously. A key role of university is to support students' development during their learning journey, thus allowing them to focus their attention on achieving their study goals.

Building on the understanding of what makes student empowerment, as presented above, the group further identified various benefits of student empowerment, as well as common challenges preventing its (full) implementation across institutions. These benefits and challenges are presented in the next section.

Benefits and challenges associated with student empowerment

BENEFITS

While student empowerment is intended first and foremost to benefit students, the group is convinced that empowering students benefits everyone, including teaching staff, university leadership, employers and other societal stakeholders, such as labour market representatives, local communities and civil society. Indeed, in its discussions, the group identified several positive potential impacts of student empowerment. These are diverse and manifold, but they broadly coalesce into four main areas:

1) Students' personal development and wellbeing

One benefit with an immediate effect on how students perceive their time at university, and which underpins the other three benefits listed below, is that empowerment can foster students' personal development, wellbeing and mental health. This may include students developing confidence and agency (both in their learning progress and in many other aspects of daily life), as well as an open mindset and a motivation to keep learning. In addition, empowered students may find it easier to self-regulate their learning and to develop self-efficacy.

2) Preparation for future roles and challenges

Empowered students may be better prepared for their lives after and outside university, for example as future experts in and ambassadors for their discipline, but also informed, ethical and engaged citizens. They may also develop strategies to cope with an uncertain and rapidly changing future, or become shapers of the future themselves, with a great potential to positively impact society as a whole. Empowerment supports students in obtaining the skills and competencies they need to be effective independent learners, both within their discipline and in the context of society's growing need for lifelong learning. Besides discipline-specific knowledge and practical skills, a range of competencies may be positively affected by empowerment, including academic and assessment literacy, critical thinking, and skills in adapting to and leveraging new technologies.

3) Facilitating interactions and institutional community

Students learning in an empowering environment are likely to find it easier to engage in peer-to-peer interactions and develop learning networks with those peers. Similar considerations relate to students' interaction with teaching staff, as empowered students are more likely to become active agents and partners in their education, which helps to foster an institution-wide learning and teaching community.

4) Improving the learning environment and methodologies

At its best, student empowerment ultimately benefits the teaching staff, since it enables them to optimise the quality and impact of their teaching by recognising the diversity of learners and drawing on open, honest and respectful feedback from their students. The impact of such approaches may include more authentic, equitable and inclusive teaching activities and assessments and, ideally, improved student–staff relationships.

CHALLENGES

Despite the multiple benefits of student empowerment, there are inherent barriers and challenges that prevent students from becoming empowered members of the academic community. The underlying reasons for these barriers and challenges will probably differ from context to context. This may reflect the power dynamics within an institution or factors external to the institution, such as the regulatory and legislative context, which may restrict or disincentivise opportunities for inviting students to be partners in education and to make their voices heard. Typical barriers and challenges are of the following nature:

1) Logistical

Institutional communities may have limited appetite or agency to facilitate a move towards empowered students due to insufficient financial, human or other resources, with other issues taking precedence over investment in empowerment. University structures and policies may also be designed in a way that makes student empowerment inherently difficult and unwelcome. External influences may include, for example, national and/or professional regulations for curriculum design with a strong top-down approach, which may limit student empowerment.

2) Cultural

Power dynamics within institutions may vary greatly depending on the institutional culture, which has often been established over decades, if not centuries. Changing mindsets while simultaneously developing trust and creating a safe space for open exchange might be a daunting task. In this context, it should also be highlighted that empowerment (i.e. agency towards one's self) and power (i.e. agency towards others) are often misunderstood as entirely synonymous. The result is that both staff and students may oppose change towards more student empowerment, for example out of fear of what these new power dynamics might mean for their daily interactions and responsibilities. Another reason can be a lack of training among both staff and students on how to adequately provide and reflect on feedback.

3) Student-driven

Student engagement, in the sense of students being active partners shaping how education is being delivered, is an important lever of student empowerment, since it is a way both to visibly demonstrate and to further develop student empowerment. However, individual students may be prevented from being more engaged at their institution due to non-academic commitments, such as work or caring responsibilities. Such situations might prevent broad-scale student engagement and thus reduce student empowerment, for example by (involuntarily) signalling to the institution that students do not want to be engaged or empowered. Some students, meanwhile, may genuinely not be interested in taking up the institution's opportunities for engagement, and may demonstrate this by, for example, abstaining from activities that build an institutional community, or not providing feedback on the curriculum. In such instances, the challenge for the institution is then to ensure that such students' non-engagement is their own choice and not, for example, due to a lack of awareness of such opportunities' existence or their potential impact and perceived benefits.

4) Staff-driven

University staff play a vital role in student empowerment. Teaching staff in particular can support empowerment by actively inviting feedback on their courses, by adopting (more) inclusive teaching and assessment methods, and/or by engaging students in course development and delivery. Yet a potential challenge preventing staff from implementing empowering measures is a lack of staff training on how to approach this practically, as well as a lack of understanding of why they would want students to be empowered in the first place. Paradoxically, clear commitment by the university leadership to student empowerment may also signal to staff that there is no need for them personally to support students becoming empowered, whereas student empowerment should ideally be driven from all directions: top-down (i.e. by leadership), bottom-up (i.e. by students) and middle-out (i.e. by staff).

As deeply ingrained as some of these challenges may be, there are nevertheless many practical measures an institution can take to foster student empowerment. These will be presented in the next section.

Sharing practices

The group identified several practices that institutions can adopt to tackle the challenges listed above and reap the benefits of student empowerment.

As a basis from which to draw inspiration and reflect further, a four-part categorisation of practices that support student empowerment is presented in Figure 2. Each of the four parts represents one pathway or immediate objective behind institutional activities to empower students, depending on which perspective is taken on what student empowerment means and which benefits it brings.

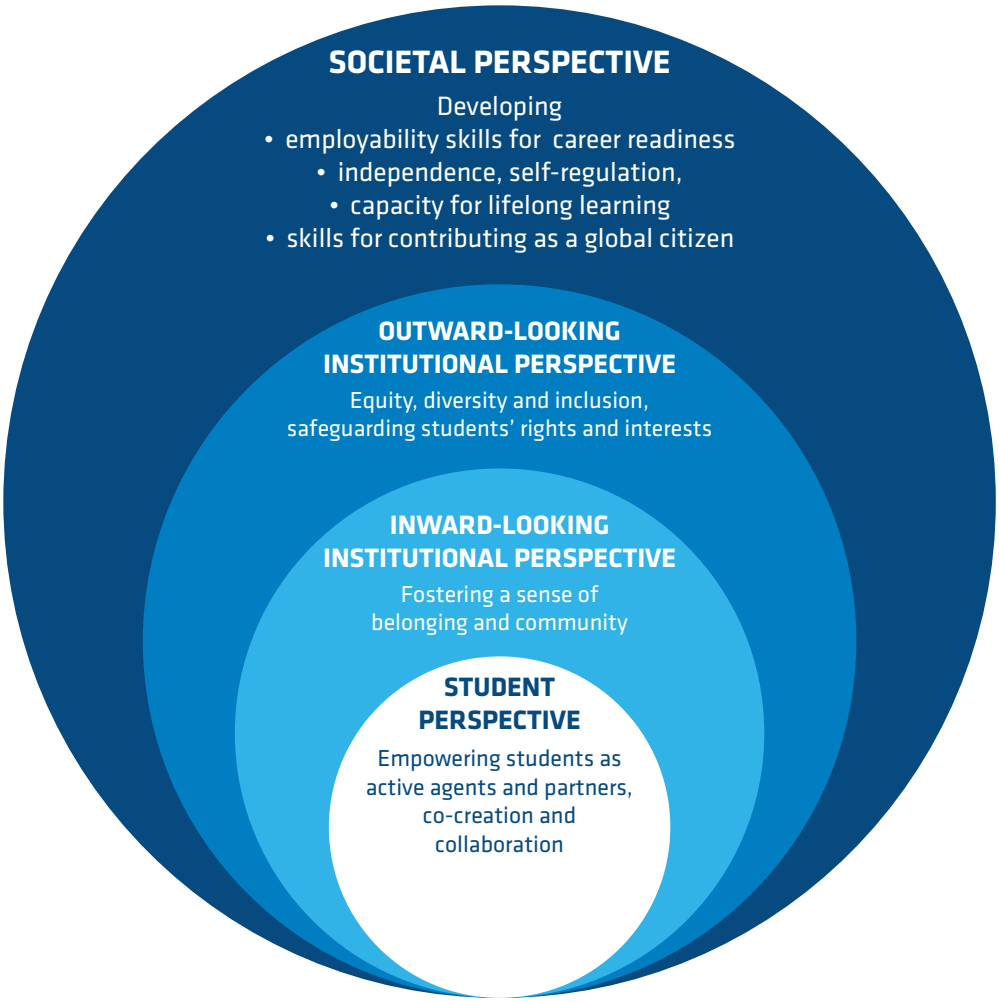

Figure 2: Perspectives of institutional practices in student empowerment

Moving from the centre of the figure towards its outer layers, institutions wishing to further empower their students may thus do so by pursuing one or more of the following immediate objectives.

1. Taking the **perspective of the individual student,** the immediate objective of student empowerment is to foster **co-creation and partnership in learning and teaching**, since empowerment requires clear and protected rights and opportunities for students to have a say in their own learning. In order to achieve this, institutions may seek to engage students as active agents and partners in their own learning, including through student-centred and active learning, flexible learning paths (including micro-credentials), or other measures that create a more open and two-directional relationship between staff and students, while still maintaining healthy boundaries between students and teaching staff.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

Through the nationally funded L@UCA project, the University of Côte d'Azur in France offers flexible multidisciplinary curricula at the bachelor's level to enable students to personalise their study paths. The project also supports the university's leadership and its departments and schools in their transition towards more flexible pathways based on the following approaches: multidisciplinarity, adjustment of the pace and duration of learning, modularity and support for pedagogical transformations, and pedagogical contracts.

2. Taking an **inward-looking institutional perspective**, the immediate objective of student empowerment is to foster a **sense of institutional community and belonging** throughout the entire student cycle, since only students who feel they belong in the institution are likely to have the motivation and confidence to become active agents in their learning. This may include various measures to support students' wellbeing, but also giving students the time and space to organise extra-curricular and social activities such as study groups, sporting events and celebrations, depending on the different interests, disciplines or cohorts of students.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: INFORMAL STUDENT–LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

Students at Linköping University in Sweden are regarded as active co-creators with a significant role in shaping and enhancing the education and study environment. Therefore, student representation is highly prioritised in all decision-making and preparatory bodies as well as in informal meetings, including monthly breakfast meetings with the vice-chancellor and the student unions.

3. Taking an **outward-looking institutional perspective**, the immediate objective of student empowerment is to view the existing institutional community and consider how to widen it by making it more **equitable, diverse and inclusive** and how to safeguard **students' rights and interests**. This may take the form of measures proactively countering bias, such as dedicated workshops for staff and students, or adequate support measures for learners with special needs, for example staff training in Universal Design for Learning[6] and unconscious bias training. For students with work or caring commitments, proactive measures to make sure that workloads do not exceed such students' capacities may also help to ensure they feel supported and can (continue to) pursue their education.

4. Taking a **societal perspective**, the immediate objective of student empowerment is to **foster life skills**, which is an umbrella term encompassing various skills that prepare students for life after university. To reach this objective, universities seek to convey to their students skills that are relevant to the labour market as well as more transversal skills such as self-regulated learning, which, in a more long-term perspective, prepares students for lifelong learning. Other relevant life skills include active citizenship and democratic engagement alongside societal responsibility.

There are many more practices supporting student empowerment in place at the group institutions, and this report offers only a selection. The group would like to highlight the importance of context sensitivity and that each institution adopts its own approach by keeping the benefits, purpose and key principles of empowerment front and centre.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AND TRAINING CENTER

At Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in Georgia, students with academic, emotional and psychological problems receive psychological counselling and assistance at a dedicated Psychological Counseling and Training Center. Trained psychological counselling specialists and psychotherapists serve students. The centre contributes to the mental health and wellbeing of students and the development of their potential. In addition, students in the master's and doctoral programmes at the Faculty of Medicine are trained in psychological counselling provided by the centre, thus strengthening its long-term sustainability.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROJECT COURSES

At Yaşar University in Türkiye, all undergraduate programmes include a social responsibility project course worth 1 ECTS credit. Participating students have regular meetings with a social responsibility project coordinator, who has worked with both national and international non-profit organisations. The students engage in a relatively long-term volunteering activity and write a reflective report at the end of the semester. The university also has a Social Entrepreneurship and Impact Center as well as an elective social entrepreneurship course. In the social responsibility course, students are invited to reflect on the importance of volunteering for a sustainable future, are presented with a variety of volunteering projects, or can suggest their own ideas.

6 For more information about the concept of Universal Design for Learning, see https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl (accessed 10/01/2025).

Conclusions

The findings outlined in this report summarise the consensus reached by a group of institutional representatives from eight diverse universities across Europe. However, these findings are certainly not meant as a one-size-fits-all answer to implementing student empowerment everywhere, since every institution and its student population has its own context and culture, to which the concept of empowerment needs to be individually adjusted. In addition, further work and research is needed on how to address and ensure student empowerment in its various facets, such as through curriculum design.

At its best, student empowerment should benefit everyone and, accordingly, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has made continuous efforts to support this empowerment and harmonise standards. The *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG),[7] for example, have helped to establish student-centred learning and the active involvement of students both in the learning process and in quality assurance itself as a norm. In the context of EDI, the EHEA has more recently adopted *Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA*,[8] which aim to make higher education more equitable, inclusive and, thus, reflective of the diversity of populations across Europe.

These developments point in the direction of student empowerment becoming more universal and attest to growing awareness of its benefits. In addition, there are many policies and practices to draw on, as this report has demonstrated. Readers of this report are thus invited to take inspiration and find their own approach to empowering students.

7 ENQA et al., 2015, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Brussels, Belgium. https://www.eua.eu/publications/policy-input/standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area-esg.html (accessed 22/11/2024).

8 EHEA, 2020, *Rome Ministerial Communiqué, Annex II: Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA*. https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf (accessed 22/11/2024).

Annex

EUA LEARNING & TEACHING THEMATIC PEER GROUPS

As part of its work on learning and teaching, EUA carries out activities with the aim of engaging with university communities in charge of learning and teaching. One of these activities is coordinating the work of a set of Thematic Peer Groups. The groups consist of universities selected through a call for participation to:

- discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing learning and teaching in European universities;
- contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching by identifying key considerations or recommendations on the selected theme.

The 2024 Thematic Peer Groups, active from March 2024 to February 2025, invited participating universities to undertake peer learning and exchange of experience, while at the same time they contributed to EUA's policy work as the voice of European universities in policy debates, such as the Bologna Process.

Each group was chaired by one university and supported by a coordinator from the EUA secretariat. Each group had three base meetings, either online or at a member university, to discuss 1) key challenges related to the theme, 2) how to address the challenges through innovative practices and approaches, and 3) what institutional policies and processes support the enhancement in learning and teaching. Outside the three meetings, the groups were free to meet online for shorter meetings or organise their work independently. Members of the groups also attended a final workshop, where they had the opportunity to meet and discuss the outcomes of other groups and address synergies. The workshop was hosted by University College Cork in Ireland on 26 February 2025 and was followed by the 2025 European Learning & Teaching Forum on 27–28 February, where focus groups based on the work of the Thematic Peer Groups were organised to obtain feedback on their results.

Composition of the Thematic Peer Group "Learning and teaching to empower students"
(starting with the group chair and by alphabetical order of the country name):

- **Cardiff University, United Kingdom**
  - Stephen Rutherford (Professor of Bioscience Education)
  - Nigel Francis (Senior Lecturer)
  - Connie Pritchard (doctoral candidate and Teaching Associate)
  - Jessica Haines (student)
- **University of Côte d'Azur, France**
  - Natalia Timuș (Manager of International Learning Experiences)
  - Fabiola Fick (student)

- **Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia**
  - Izabella Petriashvili (Associate Professor)
  - Rusudan Sanadze (Associate Professor)
  - Irma Grdzelidze (Associate Professor)
  - Mzia Tsereteli (Professor)
  - Ina Baratashvili (Lecturer)
- **University of Ioannina, Greece**
  - Jenny Pange (Professor and Dean of School of Education)
  - Zoi Nikiforidou (Associate Professor)
  - Evangelos Evangelou (Associate Professor)
  - Themistoklis Gogas (Associate Professor)
- **Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland**
  - Jan Illing (Professor and Director of Health Professions Education Centre)
  - Helen Kelly (Lecturer)
  - Catherine Bruen (Technology Enhanced Learning Manager)
- **University Lusófona, Portugal**
  - Lucimar Dantas (Executive Director of Doctoral College and Coordinator of the Research Group Learning & Innovation)
  - João Matos (Full Professor and Coordinator of the Research Group Learning & Innovation)
  - Isabel Babo (Vice-Rector for Internationalisation and Cooperation)
- **Linköping University, Sweden**
  - Gunvor Larsson Torstensdotter (Associate Professor and Head of Learning and Teaching Centre)
  - Teresia Svensson (Associate Professor and Deputy Head of Department of Thematic Studies)
  - Clara Björk (student)
  - Jessica Karolina Patchari Rönnberg (student)
- **Yaşar University, Türkiye**
  - Çağrı Özköse-Bıyık (Coordinator of Innovative Teaching and Learning Unit)
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