

Policy Recommendations for an Integrated Approach to Student Ambassador Schemes

Mehmet Filiz, Amasya University

Ümit Çelen, Amasya University

İlker Kösterelioğlu, Amasya University

Ruxandra Folostina, University of Bucharest

Claudia Iuliana Iacob, University of Bucharest

Eric Mutabazi, Université catholique de l'Ouest

Albina Khasanzyanova, Université catholique de l'Ouest

Clare Gartland, University of Suffolk

Pere Ayling, University of Suffolk

Oana Alexandra Țînțar, ANOSR

Ioana Spoială, ANOSR

Victor - Constantin Vlăduț, PROEDUS

Irina - Elvira Matei, PROEDUS

Table of contents

- 1. Introduction..... 1
- 2. Current Landscape of Student Ambassador Schemes..... 2
 - 2.1. Overview of existing student ambassador schemes in the UK and France..... 2
 - 2.2. Lack of student ambassador schemes in Romania and Turkey 3
- 3. Current policy landscape 4
 - 3.1. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in the UK 5
 - 3.2. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in France 6
- 4. Key Components of an Inclusive Student Ambassador Scheme..... 12
 - 4.1. Recruitment and Training 12
 - 4.2. Representation and Diversity 13
 - 4.3. Support and Mentorship 13
 - 4.4. Outreach and Engagement Strategies 13
- 5. Policy Recommendations 14
 - 5.1. Policy recommendations for higher education institutions 14
 - 5.2. Policy recommendations for schools 16
 - 5.3. Policy recommendations for third sector, public bodies and NGOs..... 16
- 6. Conclusion..... 16
- References 18

1. Introduction

Equity in higher education access is critical to promoting social justice, economic prosperity, and individual opportunity. Despite the progress gained during the civil rights struggle, disparities persist, with low-income families, members of racial and ethnic minorities, and first-generation college students facing unique challenges. These populations experience low enrollment and completion rates, and they are frequently underrepresented. Their difficulties can be linked to a lack of finances, poor academic preparation, and insufficient support services. Comprehensive support programs, financial aid, and affirmative action can all help to improve financial assistance, employment diversity, and social cohesion. Ensuring equitable access is critical for global development, emphasizing the importance of inclusive education systems that provide opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Student ambassadors can help promote diversity in academic contexts. They act as representatives and role models for the student body's different origins and experiences. Student ambassadors can inspire and motivate their peers, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, by sharing personal stories and experiences. Their involvement in campus tours, outreach projects, and orientation programs helps to foster a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students. In addition, student ambassadors can assist institutional leaders in developing policies and activities that foster a more inclusive campus culture by providing insightful ideas and feedback. All students are encouraged to fully participate in academic and social activities by their presence and advocacy, which develops a sense of belonging and is essential to their overall success and well-being.

The Erasmus+ Diploma project aims to work with ambassadors and other stakeholders, including academics, to co-construct general relevant pedagogical approaches (for example in presentation skills, and effective questioning) as well as pedagogies specifically relevant to four broad subject areas: STEM, Health, Humanities and Social Sciences, Arts. Ambassadors will work collaboratively with academics and other stakeholders to research and develop locally relevant subject specific activities for pre-access students and identify and develop relevant training for ambassadors. The objectives of this projects are listed below.

- Identify strategies to promote social inclusion in higher education regarding academic access, retention and success of students from disadvantaged groups in European universities.
- Developing models that promote cross-sector social inclusion, including student ambassadors, to reach increasing numbers of diverse and disadvantaged young people.
- Developing training modules for student ambassadors and the cross-sector organizations that work with them to be shared locally, regionally, nationally and

- internationally
- Connecting and empowering young people by developing regional, national and international networks of student ambassadors

2. Current Landscape of Student Ambassador Schemes

In the Erasmus+ Diploma project, there are partners from four countries: the UK, France, Romania and Turkey. To date, there are student ambassador schemes in the UK and France. On the other hand, there are not specific student ambassador schemes in Romania and Turkey, but there are student employees and volunteers who undertake a range of activities for their institutions in these countries. In this regard, this section overviews existing student ambassador schemes in the UK and France as well as various titles which can be considered as students ambassadors in Romanian and Turkish universities.

2.1. Overview of existing student ambassador schemes in the UK and France

The landscape of Student Ambassadors schemes in England is quite varied as not only do universities operate different student ambassador model, Student Ambassadors (SAs) are also utilised in different ways by HE institutions. Despite the differences in how SAs are utilised, student ambassadorship is one of the most common Widening Participation (WP) schemes utilised by universities in England. One of the primary aims of Widening participation initiatives in England is raising the aspiration and attainment of young people from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds and SAs positioned as ‘aspirational role models’ (Gartland, 2015, p. 1193) play a central role in achieving this broad objective. In addition to inspiring and informing WP prospective students about the advantages of obtaining a university degree, SAs are also used by their universities to deliver ‘both one-off and sustained activities such as residential summer schools, school visits, [and] taster days’ (Ylonen, 2012, p. 801–811). SAs who are often from disadvantaged and/or under-represented backgrounds themselves also perform the role of mentoring of WP students on a one-to-one basis; providing ‘guidance in relation to future career goals [...] or help create a “sense of fit between participants and the university” (Crockford et al., 2017, p.63 in Sanderson and Spacey, 2021, p.4). It is worth noting, though, that in England, not all SAs act as student mentors and vice versa. Further, research has found that student ambassador schemes offers SAs ample opportunities to acquire important transferable and employability skills such as ‘communication skills, teaching skills, leadership skills, team working’ etc (Ylonen, 2012, p.807) which would be hugely beneficial to them on entering the labour market (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

In France, student ambassadors are predominantly recruited from undergraduate and postgraduate programmers. They are mostly recruited for general advertising campaigns, student fairs, university career services and information sessions during given in academic departments. Recruitment of ambassadors usually involves them making a written application and having an interview. So they students ambassadors represent their university and participation in different “promotion” events. The training is very informal and mostly focuses on communications skills. Moreover, « Ambassadeur Avenir et Réussite » is a national program for the students in order to participate in different events: subject tasters, campus visitors, « open gates’day », participation in salons, etc. A protocol of agreement to deploy 5,000 student ambassador missions within 3 years in universities and higher education institutions. The student ambassador is a civic service mission; this status is open to young people up to the age of 25, and even up to the age of 30 for young people with disabilities, who wish to commit themselves to education for all. This commitment is compatible with the pursuit of studies in higher education and constitutes a gap year, reinforced by the bill on the orientation and success of students. There is not much scientific work on the practices using student ambassadors. Often, each university decides its own strategy to employ and form the student ambassadors. Sometimes, this mission is recognized within EU credits.

2.2. Lack of student ambassador schemes in Romania and Turkey

Romanian universities are increasingly paying attention to the social aspects of tertiary education by implementing support mechanisms to overcome the considerable challenges faced by disadvantaged groups (people with disabilities, Roma, low-income, etc.). Equity and inclusion are essential aspects of ensuring the social dimension of higher education in Romania. The European Commission’s interest in building a higher education system based on fair inclusion and higher quality standards is reflected in the idea of an inclusive university, reflecting the diversity of a society, as a sign that all citizens have access to higher education and the objective that students graduate successfully despite the difficulties associated with social and/or economic inequalities. The Romanian higher education system has not been unaware of these provisions. While the concept of student ambassadors is prevalent in European universities, it is less common in Romanian universities, with student ambassador networks more prevalent in large university centers such as the University of Bucharest or the West University of Timisoara. Mentoring is among the most common widening participation (WP) programs used in Romanian universities. Peer tutoring and mentorship are two common examples of student-student collaboration. Supplemental instruction, sometimes known as peer tutoring, primarily involves a higher-level student assisting lower-level students in understanding course material (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Peer mentoring is a practice where a student who has more experience helps a student with less experience to enhance their academic performance (Falchikov, 2001). It also promotes personal growth for the mentors and offers guidance, support,

and information to the mentee. Both students and mentors concurred that a significant advantage of having or becoming a mentor was an improvement in academic performance. Thomas's (2000) study on student retention also provides evidence for this. He discovered students have higher academic performance and demonstrate greater perseverance in school when they have extensive, interconnected networks. This enables them to easily establish connections with others, thanks to the numerous pathways that extend to various areas of the total network. Student associations typically run mentoring programs for students who want to advance academically and professionally and who require a mentor to advise and guide them toward their individual goals. Another goal of the mentoring program is to create a support network for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who want to get a job or need assistance accessing certain study programs. Mentors are successful role models for young people who share their experience and offer suggestions, advice, and useful information. Usually, the three dimensions targeted in the mentoring program are: studies, career, and volunteering.

In Turkey, universities do not have formal student ambassador programs. However, university students can engage in activities similar to those of student ambassadors through two avenues: the community service practices course and student clubs, both overseen by the Ministry of National Education. For the community service practices course, student advisors begin by drafting a petition, including the training program and materials, which is then submitted to the dean's office. The dean's office forwards this petition, along with a cover letter, to the rectorate. The rectorate then sends the document to the provincial or district national education directorates. These directorates have weekly commission meetings to review such submissions. If the proposed training program and materials are approved, the relevant school principals are notified through an official letter, allowing the educational activities to proceed with the school administration's consent. Similarly, for student club activities, club advisors prepare a petition with the training program and materials attached and submit it to the university's department of health, culture, and sports. This department sends the petition, along with a cover letter, to the rectorate, which then forwards it to the provincial or district national education directorates. As with the community service practices course, the submission is reviewed by the directorates' commissions. If approved, school principals receive an official notification, and the activities can be conducted with the approval of the school administration.

3. Current policy landscape

This section briefly outlines current policies in promoting inclusion of students in the UK, France, Romania and Turkey.

3.1. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in the UK

Student ambassadors play a significant role in HE outreach activity in countries internationally. University outreach with school aged students has a relatively long history, dating back to the 19th Century. In late 20th and early 21st centuries as well as ambitions to promote equal opportunities, outreach activity is informed by national and institutional agendas driven by market ideology. This is particularly the case in England where university students are positioned as paying consumers facing high fees for HE courses (Gartland & Hayton, 2020). Three areas of focus broadly underpin university outreach activity: raising aspirations to encourage progression to HE; supporting younger students' academic attainment to support HE progression; and promoting civic engagement amongst university students (Gartland & Hayton, 2020). In England, student ambassadors play a lead role in much outreach activity. Aspiration raising activity, targeting groups of traditionally underrepresented students has been a focus in England since the late 1990s. However, this approach has been widely critiqued for its individualizing focus and lack of acknowledgement of structural barriers young people face (e.g. Harrison 2018). More recently the focus of outreach activity with school students has shifted to raising attainment (OfS Briefing, 2022) with many universities using ambassadors in tutoring programmes for targeted groups of underrepresented groups at Level 2. Again, this approach to outreach has been critiqued as HEIs do not have the expertise to effectively contribute to tutoring Level 2 curriculum subjects (Burtonshaw, Eyre, Simons & Whitehead, 2024). Another approach to ambassador outreach activity widely practiced in England focuses on recruitment of high achieving groups of underrepresented students to encourage progression to individual institutions (especially more elite universities). However, again this approach is problematic as it only moves students around the HE sector and fails to actually increase the number of underrepresented young people progressing to university (Harrison and Waller, 2017). Research also points to the fact that outreach activity needs to be more inclusive and targeted to much younger age groups if it is to effectively change existing patterns of underrepresentation (Harrison and Waller, 2017). Another critique made of the outreach activity is that because of the organization of activity within universities and funders' requirements for proof, it is too outcome focused and pedagogy and the learning processes of young people are neglected (Gartland, 2020).

In England, student ambassadors play a significant role in supporting students into HE and through their first year of study. They also have a range of other roles in universities, providing peer support and acting as facilitators of learning. Research points to the benefits to student ambassadors through working in these various roles (in outreach and retention and success activities). University students are now embedded in cycles of curriculum design at HEIs through student voice forums and other mechanisms. However, the potential for student ambassadors to work more collaboratively with academic staff in the co-creation of learning and teaching in HE

and in the development of outreach activity is underdeveloped in England. Research evidence points to a wide range of benefits to all when students are positioned more equally as partners in this process. Student ambassadors and particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds benefit from working collaboratively as partners with schoolteachers, lecturers, WP practitioners and others (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Corradini, 2012; Gartland, 2015). Ambassadors' involvement in co-creating learning and teaching activities for school students as well as for their peers in HE, has been found to promote a sense of belonging as well as support the development of academic and employability skills.

3.2. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in France

Even if young people from under-represented groups can enter higher education, inequalities appear in their previous educational trajectory (Vermandele et al., 2010). Poor students tend to choose the short and professional course while those from the upper class follow long studies. The studies of Duru-Bellat & Kieffer (2008) shows that the choice of elite courses in French higher education remains conditioned by the father's diploma and the type of baccalaureate obtained. Family background and previous career are therefore decisive in the choice of the most prestigious socially and professionally university courses. To help under-represented groups to integrate these schools called "grandes écoles" which are expensive, certain practices, in particular the policy of "segregative democratization" have been put in place and have allowed the opening of elite courses to students from priority education (van Zanten 2010; Dutercq and Masy, 2018; Pavie, Olympio and Hache, 2021). In general, the policy of "segregative democratization" or "positive segregation" consists of favouring ethnic or other minorities, perceived as different, disadvantaged and on the margins of the majority community

The 2017 Student Plan mentions the following (overlapping) policy goals: improve guidance and support for academic advising in secondary education such as high schools (e.g., appoint academic advisors; integrate academic advising 114 weeks into programs; integrate academic advising projects; stimulate dialogue between school and university rectors); create a more equitable and transparent admissions and selection process

French universities deploy different strategies and actions to support under-represented students. In particular, we can mention training programmes for student associations enabling them to contribute to the development of an inclusive student life, actions and training to raise the awareness of the university community to take disability into account, strategies facilitating accessibility to cultural activities and places (subscriptions taking into account student income), strategies supporting access to free health care for the poor and support adapted to the needs of the student. Tutoring programmes as well as work study programs ('alternance') can be also mentioned in order to support professional integration of students. Regarding financial

support, scholarships based on social criteria, housing aid, social and family allowances as well as tax deductions are granted to vulnerable students and their families.

- Introduction of positive segregative democratization in certain universities, allowing students from poor families who are judged to be deserving to enter elite programs.
- Opening of social services in universities, which can provide psychological and social assistance as well as financial support (scholarships) to vulnerable students.

3.3. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in Romania

Mentoring programs run by student associations in Romanian universities play an important role in supporting equal opportunities. Universities, under their obligation to ensure fair admission, participation, and study completion for all students, receive their support.

However, peer tutoring and mentorship activities are initiatives that have remained only at the level of student organizations, Romanian universities focusing on other activities that aim at supporting disadvantaged students.

- **Scholarships**

The aim of this scholarship is to provide financial assistance to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to cover their accommodation and other expenses. Furthermore, this aid has a significant influence on long-term outcomes as it reduces the risk of students dropping out of their courses. The student is granted a sum of around 210 euros (1050 RON) on the condition that they have fulfilled their obligations as a student by attending university classes. Social assistance scholarships are distributed according to the average monthly net income.

- **Excellency Scholarships**

The aim of this scholarship is to encourage students to engage in academic activities and actively participate in educational initiatives. Students who demonstrate regular participation in academic, research, professional, social, cultural, and organisational activities during their years in university are eligible for a scholarship of 240 euros. These scholarships had a beneficial effect on students, increasing their involvement in university events, fostering their maturity, and enhancing their motivation. The impact of this influence has been quantified by assessing the number of files that meet the specified criteria on each year. The selection criteria do not include any mention of race, age, or ethnicity.

- **Programs / Projects**

Access4All - Laboratory for Policies and Practices of Social Development in Higher Education project (Ref. 2015- 1- ES01- KA203- 015970) co-funded by the European Union (Erasmus+ Programme) . The aim of the project is to promote the educational and social inclusion of underrepresented groups as well as of non-traditional learners, thereby broadly satisfying one of the main priorities being called for (i.e. the improvement of the capacities of organisations active in the fields of education, training and youth, notably in the areas of strategic development, quality of learning provision, equity and inclusion, qualitative and targeted activities for specific groups) and addressing clearly one of the important features of the Erasmus+ programme: “promoting equity and inclusion by facilitating the access to learners with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers”.

Project e-Inclusion: Development and implementation of an ICT-based support program to increase access to higher education for people with disabilities. The project's goal is to promote inclusive education by developing and implementing a curriculum adaptation program, including the use of ICT, to expand learning opportunities for 250 students with disabilities. The project aims to develop an accessible curriculum centred on the educational needs of students with disabilities, which will contribute to the removal of barriers and restrictions in higher education faced by students with disabilities.

The project is addressed to 250 students with disabilities (mild, medium, severe and severe) and 200 academics involved in the process of adapting the university curriculum to the needs of people with disabilities.

Teaching staff is trained to understand the nature of disabilities and the educational needs of people with disabilities, to adopt an appropriate way of working with students with disabilities, and to adapt the theoretical and practical curricula to make them accessible to students with disabilities. An e-learning ICT platform will also facilitate this accessibility.

Romania Secondary Education (ROSE) is a project that aims to help reduce dropout rates in secondary and tertiary education and increase the baccalaureate exam pass rate.

Three components make up the project's structure, the first two of which aim to address the academic and social problems that contribute to poor student performance in upper secondary and early tertiary education.

The grant scheme for universities will prioritise areas of economic growth in Romania, such as agriculture, engineering, science, and medicine. The scheme will fund eligible activities such as tutoring, remedial programs, support services, counseling and guidance, coaching, job fair promotion, workshops in specific fields, and awareness-raising campaigns.

- **Centers and Laboratories**

An Assistive Technology Laboratory can be set up and implemented to encourage students with disabilities to pursue higher education programs and boost their chances of graduating. It also seeks to provide students with disabilities with equal access to study conditions as regular students through the use of equipment and assistive technologies.

- **University Learning Centers**

University Learning Centres are flexible learning spaces for pedagogical experimentation, tailored to the needs of students and the specifics of their learning activities. The approach allows for easy and flexible repositioning of learners, as well as support for collaborative and flipped learning. The learning activities aim to integrate new visions of university pedagogy, 21st-century skills, and technology-enhanced learning.

The Centre aims to provide complementary learning support services by organizing personal and professional development activities for students and teachers in the framework of (1) Coaching and Professional Development, (2) Career Counselling and Guidance, (3) Academic Writing laboratories.

3.4. Current policy in promoting inclusion of students in Turkey

Educational System in Turkey is very centralized. Ministry of Education controls all k12 education, develops curriculum, assigns teachers and regulates everything. Higher Education Council controls all higher educational institutions (universities). Student Selection and Placement Center (SSPC) is a centralized system to regulate an entire education system and organizes national exams such as high school placement exam and university placement exam.

- **Constitution states: (Item 10)**

- All individuals are equal in law regardless of their language, color, race, gender, political view, belief, religion, religious sect.
- Women and men have equal rights. The state is responsible for making this equality real.
- Children, elder, disabled, and veterans are not exempt from the equality rule.
- No individual, no family, no social group is privileged, on any basis.

- **Regulations in official higher education law**

I – Generality and equality

Item 4 – Educational institutions are open to any one regardless of their language, race, gender, disability, and religion. In term of accessing to education, no individual, no family, no social group, is privileged.

II – Needs of the individual and the society:

Item 5 – National educational services are designed to meet the needs of the Turkish society with the desire and skillset of Turkish citizens.

III – Orientation:

Item 6 – Individuals are advised to attend programs and schools based on their own interests, abilities, and talents.

V – Equal opportunity:

Item 8 – In education, all individuals, men and women, are provided with equal opportunities. Students who both successful and lack economic resources to attend a school are offered several options such as dorm, scholarship, and study loans. Special units are designed to protect children with special needs.

IV – Non-free higher education:

Item 38 – Higher education is not free. However, students who show success or talent in an area are supported with several options such as registration fees, course fees, exam costs, scholarships, or free housing.

The groups defined as disadvantaged are students with special needs, students who live in rural or underdeveloped regions, students who live in poor neighborhoods, Gypsy students, students who are exposed to any sort of violence, students whose first language is not Turkish, international immigrants. Recently, families who either work as seasonal laborers or live as nomadic – migrant people are also classified as disadvantaged, and their children were give the rights to complement their education with extra support.

Higher Education Institutions disabled consultancy and coordination regulations unit is in the higher education institution that generates regulations for making the higher education easier for the students with special needs.

• Examples for inclusive practices

- “Come on Girls, Let's Go to School”: Intended for the poor regions (especially the southeast where the girl participation in primary education was way lower than boys.) (Duration: 2000-2010) (Yazan, 2014)
- Student ambassadors project in a university: In order to make renovations on methods of teaching, and study materials for the largest distance education university (Anadolu University) in Turkey; student ambassadors were asked for their opinions and ideas. Changes in teaching and curricular material were accomplished with such a contribution by the student ambassadors.
- 2021 classifications for university efforts to address handling student with disabilities:
 - Orange Flag accessibility of physical areas (52 of 197 applicant universities received this flag for 129 topics),
 - Green Flag accessibility on educational resources (21 universities applied for this category, 14 universities received this flag),

- Blue Flag accessibility on socio-cultural activities (6 universities out of 24 applicant universities received this flag) (Council of Higher Education, 2021)
- Quota regulations: Some regulations, in favor of students with disabilities, were developed such as reserving 10% of the programs only for them. The programs entitled under this regulation are the ones who select students based on some form of talent such as music, painting etc. (Council of Higher Education, 2018)
- Special student housing regulations for higher education dorms:
 - Ramps: Whenever stairs exist at the entrance of buildings, there have to be ramps and/or elevators.
 - Bedrooms: At least one bedroom in any dorm is accessible by disabled students with conditions determined in terms of size and other standards.
 - Restrooms: There has to be at least one level of a dorms is specially designed for the students with special needs (Council of Higher Education, 2020).
- Support for the integration of Syrian children: Syrian kids attending school: 938k; Syrian kids not attending school: 432k; universities host 50k Syrian students. Total Syrians 3.8M. A program called “The integration of Syrian children to the Turkish educational system” has started in 2016. Outputs of this project are:
 - increasing the access of the Syrian children to the education,
 - enhancing the capacity of the institutions and the educational work force in helping Syrian children,
 - increasing the educational quality of the Syrian children (Arik Akyuz, Aksoy, Madra and Polat, 2018).
- Educational rights of the people in prison: Prisoners continue to have all the rights except for what they were imprisoned for. Prisoners are allowed to take exams designed by the Student Selection and Placement Institution (SSPI) of Turkey. Under the supervision of a security official, prisoners can take their regular educational tests (Turkish Ministry of Justice, 2007).
- Exam support service examples:
 - Visually disabled candidates: Student Selection and Placement Centre (SSPC) publishes all the voiced digital documents. For these students, too complicated questions, that are hard to deliver by voice, are not asked. Students can request larger font sizes.
 - Hearing impaired candidates: SSPC exam documents are published with sign language. Students can request that they need a hearing device for the exam. (All electronic devices are prohibited during regular exams)
 - Candidates with diabetes: Candidates who have a record of diabetes can request to have their medication and medication related devices (insulin pump, food, sugar tests etc) into the exam site (SSPC, 2008).
- Removing cost of education from the students with disabilities: Students with 40% or over disability are discounted for any and at any amount of educational costs based on their disability level (Mugla Guidance and Research Center, 2018).
- Course exemption for students with disabilities: Students who cannot meet the requirements of a course at a college, by the approval of the instructor and the university, can take the course by some eliminations or modifications. If the

students still cannot meet the needs of that course, that student can take another equivalent course (Council of Higher Education, 2009).

- Cost regulations for the students with disabilities: Individuals who lost their ability to work at %60 or more level, which is certified by a report from a group of doctors, are no longer need to pay their higher education study loans (General Directorate of Loans and Dorms, 2017).
- Dorms for the students with disabilities: According to the regulations of the Institution for the Loans and Dorms; students with more than %40 disability can stay at a dorm which is nearest to their most comfortable location (Mugla Guidance and Research Center, 2018).

4. Key Components of an Inclusive Student Ambassador Scheme

When we reviewed current landscape of student ambassador schemes and current policy landscape in promoting inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and enhancing collaboration in the UK, France, Romania and Turkey, we mainly found lack of rigorous training for student ambassadors regarding the inclusion of all vulnerable students (disabled, poor, immigrant, etc.) as well as lack of academic recognition (not a certificate or diploma) justifying their involvement in supporting vulnerable students. To address these issues, we establish an integrated approach to student ambassador schemes

This approach includes several basic elements. Firstly, it is aimed to establish guidelines regarding the recruitment and selection processes and to implement comprehensive training programs for ambassadors. This approach also aims to promote diversity and inclusion in student ambassador teams; In this context, it is important to increase representation from diverse backgrounds and create inclusive spaces and support networks for ambassadors. While it is planned to contribute to the professional and personal development of ambassadors through support and mentoring programs, social assistance and participation strategies also constitute an important part of this approach.

4.1. Recruitment and Training

This element determines how student ambassadors will be selected and identified. The recruitment process should be based on an inclusive and transparent structure, ensuring that ambassadors who embody a variety of talents and perspectives are selected. Part of the training aims to provide the ambassadors with the necessary skills. This training may cover topics such as communication, leadership, problem-solving and culturally, and should help ambassadors deliver effectively.

4.2. Representation and Diversity

This element aims to ensure that student ambassador teams reflect the diversity of the community and that students from all walks of life are represented. Students from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and socioeconomic status should be encouraged to serve as ambassadors. This creates an inclusive environment on campus and allows diverse voices to be heard.

4.3. Support and Mentorship

This element includes providing ongoing support for student ambassadors. This support includes mentoring programs, psychological and academic counseling services to help ambassadors overcome the challenges they face. Additionally, resources should be provided to support the personal and professional development of ambassadors.

4.4. Outreach and Engagement Strategies

This element determines how student ambassadors will be involved in outreach and engagement activities on and off campus. Ambassadors are encouraged to engage with the university community and surrounding society. This can be achieved through volunteering, community projects and events. The aim is to enable students to contribute to society and enrich their university experience. Common outreach strategies are listed below.

- Academic instruction/tutoring
- Curriculum developments (e.g., activities embedded in school curriculum)
- Taster days/Conferences/Workshops/Masterclasses
- Open days or evenings
- Counselling
- IAG /Career development/ career workshops
- Information on financial support
- Guidance through HE application process
- Mentoring/ peer mentoring
- Study skills assistance
- Summer schools/Weekend programmes/Residential visits
- Campus visits/ campus tours
- Enrichment activities
- Ambassador programmes/ Role models
- Collaborative partnerships (community groups, universities, schools)

5. Policy Recommendations

In the Erasmus+ Diploma project, we have organized several online and onsite conferences/seminars in the participated countries. In these events, we have informed the participants about student ambassador programmes and received their thoughts about how these programmes can be implemented successfully. Based on the discussion sessions in these events, we classify policy recommendation for implementing the integrated approach to student ambassador schemes into higher education institutions, schools, third sector and public bodies.

5.1. Policy recommendations for higher education institutions

- HE institutions should utilise SAs more as ‘inspirational role models’ to promote both vocational and academic post-16 choices and less as marketers of their universities, with an exclusive focus on entry to university.
- Universities should develop a sharper focus on outreach in relation to the Social Responsibility of HEIS and their Civic mission as anchor institutions, with a focus on genuinely contributing to the needs of local communities through long term collaboration with schools that cater for high numbers of students entitled to free school meals (FSM).
- Universities should provide SAs training on co-creation and experiential learning. Besides being shown as a more effective learning model particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the ability to co-create outreach activities with other ‘experts’ in their subject area would empower ambassadors, build their sense of belonging in HE and promote their civic engagement.
- Universities should partner and work collaboratively with external organisations such as local authorities and charities, who work in specific subject areas or with young people from specific groups such as Looked after children / children in care and refugees.
- SAs should be given training in how to develop and implement experiential pedagogies in learning situations that support curriculum learning, embed careers education and build self-efficacy in subject disciplines.
- The Office for Students (OfS) should encourage collegiality whereby stakeholders such universities, Further Education colleges, schools and third sector organisations work collaboratively on outreach programme rather than compete with each other.
- The Office for Students (OfS) should encourage the development of sustained rather than one off outreach activity that works with whole year groups at level 1.
- Better recognize and value voluntary ambassador work.
- Support learning and teaching and careers education, information, advice and guidance.

- Define a special funding method for higher education institutions in order to address the social needs of students and to foster inclusion of underrepresented groups, especially groups from disadvantaged backgrounds, funding that could be redirected to the development of student ambassadors schemes.
- Collect data about the socio-economic status and educational background of students (before and after entering higher education), in order to identify potential risk of dropout and of socio-economic and academic difficulties they could encounter.
- Collecting data about the socio-economic status and educational background of their students, in order to identify potential risk of dropout and of socio-economic and academic difficulties.
- Identification of the most suitable students to become ambassadors and to support younger students or future students in their first year of university by organising meetings and offering insights about their own experiences in the first year of university.
- Defining the main responsibilities and activities of an ambassador, as well as including more details about the functioning of such a scheme (objectives of a student ambassador scheme, expectations from the ambassadors, activities they should have in this role, benefits for the student ambassadors etc.) by implementing a methodology for student ambassador schemes.
- Effective monitoring of the activity of student ambassadors and effective forms of evaluation of the impact of such scheme on the academic performance, social inclusion and risk of dropout for the students involved in this programme.
- Offering different training opportunities for the students involved in a student ambassador programme, in order to prepare them for the activities they will undertake as part of the programme.

The training opportunities could include mentoring, coaching, formation of communities of practice (and other forms of peer-learning activities, where each ambassador can share their experiences, difficulties and solutions to different problems they encountered).

- Establishing different types of support groups of ambassadors and students (both of ambassadors and students with the same background, for deeper sharing of experiences and solutions to problems encountered, as well as of ambassadors and students with different backgrounds, for broadening perspectives and offering innovative solutions and views on matters concerning the activity of ambassadors, as well as on matters concerning the experience at university).
- Forming strong partnerships with different stakeholders (central institutions, schools, public bodies, NGOs, third sector etc.) and involving them in the creation and adjusting processes of the student ambassador schemes, in order to offer a diverse range of activities to the students involved in the student ambassador schemes.

5.2. Policy recommendations for schools

- Develop partnerships between schools from “rich” and vulnerable neighborhoods to facilitate exchanges, develop a spirit of openness and help students discover other ways of life.
- Develop partnerships between schools and universities, so that university students can accompany young people from primary and secondary schools.
- Forming strong partnerships with higher education institutions in the same city or in the same region.
- Collecting data about their students in order to identify potential risk of dropout and of exclusion and recommend measures to decrease these risks.
- Actively get involved in the process of defining the student ambassadors programme, by communicating the needs identified in their students and by promoting this opportunity to their students.

5.3. Policy recommendations for third sector, public bodies and NGOs

- Better cooperation with schools and universities through common events and activities.
- Co-construct general relevant pedagogical approaches in training of ambassadors with universities.
- Set up awareness-raising campaigns on themes related to the fragility of students (in schools, universities and throughout society).
- Provide training and financial support for student ambassadors involved in supporting vulnerable students.
- Offer expertise regarding appropriate measures to train student ambassadors and to keep them engaged in the programme and motivated throughout the entire duration of the programme.
- Offer expertise regarding the potential barriers students might encounter in their transition to higher education and how these could be addressed and diminished through a student ambassador programme.
- Participate in the establishment of the student ambassadors programme in their university and offer students’ perspectives.
- Organise consultations among students in order to identify their perceptions regarding the inclusion rates in the university, the issues and barriers they encounter in their university and their recommendations for student ambassadors programmes.

6. Conclusion

Student ambassador programs are of great importance to increase inclusion in higher education. These programs build bridges between students from different

backgrounds, allowing underrepresented groups to have their voices heard. Student ambassadors serve as role models who reflect diversity and contribute to creating an inclusive campus environment. Additionally, the mentoring and support provided through student ambassadors helps especially marginalized students better adapt to university life and increase their success. Thus, student ambassador programs ensure that all students benefit equally from the educational process and feel valued within the community. In this regard, we establish an integrated approach to student ambassador schemes (see Table 1) and pose policy recommendations for all stakeholders on how to implement this integrated approach more effectively.

Table 1. An integrated approach to student ambassador schemes in action

Elements	Actions
Recruitment and Training	In one of our project meetings, we had 36 student ambassadors and student ambassador candidates from four partner countries. To train the candidates, we used the experiential learning approach. We asked student ambassadors to share why they were selected and their experiences as student ambassadors. Afterwards, we classified student ambassadors and student ambassador candidates into four groups based on their interests. Student ambassadors in the groups helped student ambassador candidates develop activities.
Representation and Diversity	We made sure that ambassadors and student ambassador candidates were from underrepresented groups in our countries.
Support and Mentorship	After the meeting, we often provided feedback on the activities which student ambassador candidates began to develop in the meeting. After several revisions, the activities became ready to be implemented in elementary schools.
Outreach and Engagement Strategies	Student ambassador candidates visited elementary schools to carry out their activities. they took some notes and revised their activities accordingly.

Our policy recommendations for all stakeholders focus on facilitating knowledge exchange between institutions and countries as well as leveraging EU initiatives and funding for student ambassador programs. We strongly urge them to adopt and implement these policy recommendations. It is vital for higher education institutions, schools, third sector organizations and public institutions to take steps in line with these recommendations to create a more inclusive and effective student ambassador program. Implementing these policies will allow creating a sustainable structure that supports student development and contributes to society. In this context, we invite our

stakeholders to implement these recommendations with determination and contribute to the success of future generations.

References

- Access4All - Laboratory for Policies and Practices of Social Development in Higher Education project (Ref. 2015-1-ES01-KA203-015970) co-funded by the European Union (Erasmus+ Programme): <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2015-1-ES01-KA203-015970>.
- Arık Akyuz, B. M., Aksoy, D., Madra, A., & Polat, E. (2018). Evolution of national policy in Turkey on the integration of Syrian children into the national education system. (Background paper for Global Education Monitoring Report 2019). Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002660/266069e.pdf>
- Burtonshaw, S., Eyre, R., Simons, J., & Whitehead, P. (2024). A review of collaborative support for improving equality of opportunity in access to higher education Final Report February 2024.
- Colvin, J. W., & Ashman, M. (2010). Roles, risks, and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring & tutoring: partnership in learning*, 18(2), 121-134.
- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: a guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Corradini, E. (2012) Routes into Languages Student Ambassadors Case Studies: England. https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/358457/1/Case%2520studies_eng_FINAL-1.pdf
- Council of Higher Education. (2009, October). Course exemption for students with disabilities. https://engelsiz.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Kararlar/engelli_ogrenci_ders_muafiyeti.pdf
- Council of Higher Education. (2018, February). Good News of Quota for Disabled Students from Council of Higher Education. <https://engelsiz.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/kontenjan-mujdesi.aspx>
- Council of Higher Education. (2020, July). Higher Education Private Housing Services Regulations. <https://gsb.gov.tr/dosyalar/Yuksekgorenim%20Ozel%20Bar%C4%B1nma%20Hizmetleri%20Yonergesi.pdf>
- Council of Higher Education. (2021, May). Winners of 2021 Barrier-free University Awards Announced. <https://www.yok.gov.tr/en/Sayfalar/news/2021/barrier-free-university-awards-ceremony.aspx>
- Duru-Bellat, M. et Kieffer, A. (2008). Du baccalauréat à l'enseignement supérieur en France : déplacement et recomposition des inégalités. *Population*, 63(1), 123-158.
- Dutercq, Y. et Masy, J. (2018). Les classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles : Comment concilier compétitivité internationale et proximité démocratique. *Éducation et Sociétés*, 41, 27-42.
- e-Inclusion: Development and implementation of an ICT-based support program to increase access to higher education for people with disabilities: <https://e-incluziune.ro/>
- Falchikov, N. (2003). *Learning together: Peer tutoring in higher education*. Routledge.

- Gannon, S., Tracey, D, and Ullman, J. (2018) Bolstering graduates' success through working as student ambassadors in university widening participation programs. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37:4, 715-729, DOI: [10.1080/07294360.2018.1455643](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1455643)
- Gartland, C. (2020). *Outreach*. Sage.
- Gartland, C. (2015) Student Ambassadors and STEM Outreach: A study of practices in the USA.
https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/Gartland_C_Report_2015_Final.pdf
- Gartland, C. (2015) Student ambassadors: 'role models', learning practices and identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 36, No. 8, 1192–1211, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2014.886940>
- Gartland, C. (2020). UK and USA university outreach practices: the need to develop STEM learning pedagogies for student ambassador activity. In *STEM in Science Education and S in STEM* (pp. 269-295). Brill.
- General Directorate of Loans and Dorms. (2017). The regulation of higher education credit and dormitories institution study loan
<https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/File/GeneratePdf?mevzuatNo=5095&mevzuatTur=KurumVeKurulusYonetmeligi&mevzuatTertip=5>
- Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2017). Success and impact in widening participation policy: What works and how do we know? *Higher Education Policy*, 30, 141-160.
- Harrison, N., (2018) Using the lens of 'possible selves' to explore access to higher education: A new conceptual model for practice, policy, and research. *Social Sciences*, 7(10), p.209.
- Mugla Guidance and Research Center. (2018, July). Rights for disabled people.
https://muglaram.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/engeliler-icin-saglanan-haklar_12774466.html
- Pavie, A., Olympio, N. et Hache, C. (2021). La justice sociale en éducation prioritaire : Conceptions et opérationnalisations dans le cadre d'un dispositif de promotion de l'excellence. *Éducation et Sociétés*, 46(2), 111-127.
- Romania Secondary Education (ROSE): <https://www.rose-edu.ro/>
- Sanderson, R. and Spacey, R. (2021) Widening access to higher education for BAME students and students from lower socio-economic groups: A review of literature. *IMPact University of Lincoln* Volume 4(1)2
- SSPC. (2008). Exam Applications for Candidates with Disability/Health Problems or Special Conditions.
<http://dokuman.osym.gov.tr/pdfdokuman/2018/GENEL/Engelliadayraporu09042018.pdf>
- Succi, C. and Canovi, M. (2020) Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: comparing students and employers' perceptions, *Studies in Higher Education*, vol 45 (9) p. 1834-1847, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1585420
- Thomas, S. L. (2000). Ties That Bind: A Social Network Approach to Understanding Student Integration and Persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 591–615. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2000.11778854>
- Turkish Ministry of Justice. (2007). The Legislation of Young and Adult Convicts and Detainees in Penitentiary Institutions on Training and Improvement Activities.
https://cte.adalet.gov.tr/Resimler/Dokuman/198201911532446_1.pdf

- Van Zanten, A. (2010). L'ouverture sociale des grandes écoles : diversification des élites ou renouveau des politiques publiques d'éducation ?. *Sociétés Contemporaines*, 79(3), 69-95.
- Vermandele, C., Plaigin, C., Dupriez, V., Maroy, C., Van Campenhoudt, M. & Lafontaine, D. (2010). Profil des étudiants entamant des études universitaires et analyse des choix d'études. *Cahiers de recherche en éducation et formation*, 78, 3-58.
- Yazan B. (2014). 'Come on girls, let's go to school': an effort towards gender educational equity in Turkey, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18(8), 836-856, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2013.841774
- Ylonen, A. (2012) Student ambassador experience in higher education: skills and competencies for the future? *British Educational Research Journal* Vol. 38, (5) p. 801–811



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the ANPCDEFP. Neither the European Union nor the ANPCDEFP can be held responsible for them