

## Case study for the EEB Final competition

### Standardisation of higher education

Diversity seems to be at the top of the agenda in various industries. Today, diversity in the business world is more about having employees with different religious and political beliefs, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, cultures, disabilities, or even age groups/generations. This type of employee stratification is most often not formally mandated, but often voluntary. Hiring with diversity in mind ensures the business is more aware of developments in society, which not only reduces operational risks, but also improves the business model. Businesses have realised that they gain advantages by enforcing diversity in their employee structure, that this is smart business.

However, there are usually already formal restrictions on student enrolment in universities. The number of applicants that a university can accept is usually limited by local authorities, especially with regard to the national or even regional origin of the applicants. Quotas in higher education are quite common and not always based on diversity principles. The students who have the formal right to be admitted to university are not necessarily a very diverse population. To enhance the educational experience and competencies of students, universities seek to create a diverse study environment in terms of nationality, gender, cultural and social background, etc. In this regard, it makes sense for universities to follow the same policy in admitting students as businesses do in hiring employees.

Still, there is also another angle if we consider that there is an obvious interest in restructuring/standardising the composition of the student body in universities in Europe, not only in terms of nationality, but also in terms of students' social background and gender diversity. There are also obvious efforts to enforce a certain kind of diversity depending on the field of study - e.g. more women in STEM<sup>1</sup> and more diversity in terms of social background in political science and public administration, etc.)

#### **Please, address these dilemmas:**

- Is it ethical to shape the future of business and society at large by forcing diversity and inclusion through standardisation at the university level?
- To promote exchange and ensure smooth operations, universities have standardised assessment systems, programmes, and degree structures. Is there a risk to cultural integrity and local identity here?
- Are we standardising/harmonising diversity and thus weakening its existence as such?
- How fair are we with in this respect in providing an equal opportunity to study to those that are most capable and motivated?

Source:

'Reimagining our Futures Together: A new social contract for education',  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707.locale=en>

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<sup>1</sup> STEM education is a curriculum that focuses heavily on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.